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**Land agents and urban aristocratic estates
in nineteenth century Staffordshire: a
comparison of Longton and Walsall**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of the social and economic policies of two aristocratic landowners on the development of Staffordshire towns. The integral role of land agents is demonstrated by comparing the earl of Bradford's Walsall estate with the duke of Sutherland's land near Longton, in the Potteries.

While agents' importance to the management of rural estates is recognised, and the contribution of aristocrats to the development of towns is similarly established, the role of agents on aristocratic urban estates is largely overlooked. This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by readdressing this imbalance using considerable volumes of agent's correspondence, many of which remained uncatalogued until 2013. These letters represent an invaluable, and underused, source for analysing the physical, social and political development of urban landscapes.

Land agents, from diverse social and professional backgrounds, are demonstrated to play an instrumental role in the management and development of urban estates, to a far greater extent than the often-disinterested landowners. Yet the professionalisation of the agent's role is shown to be a staccato affair with old systems of patronage often continuing.

Three chronological chapters chart the physical growth of Longton and Walsall throughout the nineteenth century, demonstrating the influence and autonomy of agents over all aspects of urban developments. This analysis is supplemented by two thematic chapters exploring the estates' impact on the social development of the towns. The provision or restriction of recreation spaces and attempts to shape political developments in the formative decades following the Great Reform Act, demonstrate sometimes unwelcomed attempts at continued social control in the new urban environment. Agents forged the link, or often the buffer, between the landowner and his tenants. They addressed their employees' conflicting desires for the maintenance of paternalism, and for profit maximisation, and directed the transition from a rural to urban society.

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In memory of my father, Niall Hugh Rogers.

1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH AIMS AND THEMES

This thesis examines the social and economic policies of two Staffordshire landowners and the impact they had on the development of nineteenth century towns. The study focuses on the earl of Bradford's Walsall estate and the duke of Sutherland's land in the vicinity of the Potteries town of Longton. It emphasises the integral role that the agents of the two landowners played in the management of the estates and the development of their urban land. Through the medium of agents' correspondence the role, duties and networks of these agents will be examined and their significant impact upon urbanisation will be analysed.

This thesis is the result of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA). The nature of this award directed the focus on the social and economic policies of the dukes of Sutherland and the earls of Bradford and prescribed the focus on the towns of Longton and Walsall.

However, while the selection of these towns was dictated, they have proved revealing and instructive of important facets of the role of aristocratic estates to the growth of nineteenth century British towns. While the case studies are grounded in the county of Staffordshire and its industrial conurbations, the findings of the thesis have a far wider significance for our understanding of the physical, economic and social growth of towns in the tumultuous transition of Britain from a rural to urban society. The thesis examines the relationships between the traditional leaders of society and the rest of the population, who were increasingly concentrated in urban, heavily industrialised, centres. The aristocracy profited vastly from the forces of urbanisation and industrialisation yet simultaneously feared such changes would herald the demise of their entrenched hegemony. These transitions were directed and managed to a considerable extent by agents, themselves members of the professionalising middle class.

The concentration of a considerable number of aristocratic landowners and the prevalence of industry in the county renders Staffordshire, and specifically the expanding conurbations of the

Potteries and the Black Country, ideally located to examine the relationship between the aristocracy and the towns in a rapidly changing social and economic context.

An examination of the Sutherland and Bradford estates further enhances the significance of the contribution to existing scholarship. The juxtaposition between the Sutherland estate, the largest, wealthiest and most notorious estate in the country, with the more modest, lesser known yet arguably more typical, Bradford estate, provides invaluable insight into the nature of aristocratic involvement in urban development.

The participation of aristocrats in industrial pursuits, and their involvement in the social and political life of the region, has seen the Black Country identified as an 'excellent locale' for analysing the nineteenth century aristocracy.¹ Yet existing studies of the Black Country afford scant attention to the important town of Walsall, due in part no doubt to the uncatalogued nature of the Bradford estate archival collection. Similar social and economic conditions existed in the Potteries, where the duke of Sutherland was the region's largest landowner. Yet despite the vast wealth and national notoriety of this family, there has been little investigation into their role in urban development, presenting a significant omission from our knowledge nineteenth century urbanisation.

Thus, the recent efforts to catalogue the Bradford estate archival collection, towards which this AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award contributed a small part, as well as the detailed study of the Sutherland papers throughout the nineteenth century, allow the present thesis to readdress the fragmentary knowledge of Staffordshire's urban growth. The case studies presented in the thesis make a valuable contribution to existing knowledge of aristocrats and urban development in nineteenth century Britain.

This thesis achieves these goals in several important ways. Firstly, it adds to the modest body of existing scholarship concerning the important role played by agents in the management of the

¹ R. Trainor, 'Peers on an Industrial Frontier: The earls of Dartmouth and of Dudley in the Black Country, c.1810 to 1914', in D. Cannadine (Ed.), *Patricians, Power and Politics in Nineteenth Century Towns*, (Leicester, 1882), pp.71-2.

estates which comprised large swathes of nineteenth century Britain. It is contended that these men, to a much greater extent than the landowner, contributed to the nature of the estates' policies and acted as the fundamental link between the landowner and his tenants. The growing professionalisation of the agent's role, and the continuance of systems of aristocratic patronage, will form a significant part of the analysis.

Secondly, the thesis emphasises the importance of individuals to the management of estates and to the growth of towns. Notwithstanding a handful of celebrated examples, very little is known about individual agents, their social and professional background and their duties. By a detailed examination of the agents of two estates, the thesis furthers our understanding of the personalities, priorities and preoccupations of the men charged with the design and implementation of estate policies that impacted on the lives of the thousands of tenants inhabiting them. How these men viewed their own position in society, and the extent to which they absorbed the aristocratic values of their employers, will be examined.

Thirdly, while the importance of agents to aristocratic estates is recognised by rural historians, as is the importance of landowners to nineteenth-century urbanisation, there are few studies of the land agent in the urban setting. The integral role of agents in planning urban developments, arranging and securing leases, negotiating with builders and contractors and managing the urban tenants, are demonstrated in this thesis. How the traditional links of deference between landowner and tenant, so strong in the rural setting, were replicated in the urban context, will be examined, and the integral role of the estate agent as the link between these classes will be highlighted. Agents were often guardians of social control, and the manner in which this control was exercised and adapted is revealing of the transformation of Britain from a rural to an urban society. The continuance of notions of paternalism in the face of vast potentials for profits offered by urban development are explored.

Finally, while historians such as Thompson, Spring, Beckett and Mingay have examined aristocratic estates, they have not focused in depth on individual estates over a protracted period of

time. The detailed focus given by the present study to two estates over some 70 years identifies developments, changes and continuities in patterns of estate management and in the professionalisation of the agents' role. The manner in which agents were recruited, and the transfer of the role upon the retirement, removal or death of the incumbent, can be identified only through such a study of several decades, as can the continuance or decline of systems of patronage and paternalism.

The majority of sources used in this thesis have not previously been utilised in a scholarly context. Although estate correspondence has supplemented historians' analysis of estate management, seldom have they represented the main source set to examine an estates activities, management structures and the role of agents. The papers of the earl of Bradford's London solicitors, the Bailey, Shaw and Gillett collection, has been catalogued by the author as a component of the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award, and thus represent an entirely unused source set previously unavailable to the public.

This collection comprised over 3,000 documents, mainly draft leases, deeds and correspondence. A hierarchical structure was created by the author, aiming to emulate the original order in which the solicitors kept the documents. Archival standard descriptions were added to the items relating to the Walsall estate and the Preston Hospital Charity administered by the Bradford family. These two sections of the collection are now available for use by researchers and are fully searchable in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service's online catalogue. In return for this time commitment 'privileged access' was granted to the archive collections held at Staffordshire Record Office, including much uncatalogued material from the Bradford collection which has been used at length in this thesis.

The earls of Bradford held considerable estates in several counties. Perhaps due to the uncatalogued nature of much of the estate's extensive archival collection until very recently, the family and their papers have not previously been utilised by historians to any notable extent. Indeed, in Richard Trainor's study of Black Country elites, the Bridgeman family are mentioned

only in passing as attendees at parties hosted by the earl of Dudley.² By focusing on this lesser known, but important aristocratic family, the thesis contributes to existing knowledge of the British aristocracy.

The few existing academic histories of Walsall do not examine the Bradford family in any detail despite their recognised importance as one of the two landed estates in the town. Through the detailed analysis of previously unutilised archival sources, the extensive involvement of this family and their agents in the urbanisation of Walsall, and in its modern social and economic development, becomes apparent.

Conversely, the dukes of Sutherland are amongst the most studied and most notorious aristocratic families. Their name remains synonymous with the Highland Clearances of the early nineteenth century, while few discussions of the British aristocracy neglect the staggering wealth of the Leveson Gowers and their extravagant expenditure. The Sutherland Collection, in stark contrast to the Bradford Collection, represents one of the best known archival collections of a British landowning family due in no small part to the well-publicised bid to save the collection from private sale in 2006. Although the collection has been regularly utilised by historians, this thesis examines the agent's correspondence to an extent not previously undertaken.

While the national successes of chief agent James Loch are recognised by historians, most notably by Eric Richards, much less is known of the subagents who enacted the day-to-day policies of the estate at a local level. Similarly, while most accounts of the Sutherland family focus on their grand, national, policies including the advent of canals and railways, the Highland Clearances and Scottish 'improvements', little focus has been directed towards the estates impact on the growth of communities and the development of their important North Staffordshire estate. The few accounts that have addressed this estate tend to focus on the 'home' estate of Trentham, examining the social control wielded over the tenants and workers in that village. No extensive scholarly research has

² R. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialised Area*, (Oxford, 1993), p. 88.

been conducted into the Sutherlands' forays into urban and suburban development of their land in the vicinity of Longton, despite its close geographical proximity to Trentham and its wider significance for examining the impact of the highest rank of aristocratic landowners on the development of nineteenth century towns.

Moreover, accounts of the North Staffordshire estate have tended to focus on the first half of the nineteenth century, and the management of the estate after the death of James Loch in 1855 has been largely overlooked by historians. Annie Tindley addressed this imbalance in 2010 by examining the management of the family's Scottish estates from 1850 to 1900. The present thesis explores this neglected time period on the North Staffordshire estate.

Neither Longton nor Walsall has been treated to a comprehensive historical survey, Longton often being overlooked in the piecemeal analysis of the Potteries conurbation. There is no comparable example of a nineteenth-century building development by one proprietor in the Potteries of the size of the duke of Sutherland's suburban developments. This thesis therefore provides important aspects of social history that are absent from the valuable, yet somewhat dry, treatment Longton and Walsall received in the *Staffordshire Victoria County History* volumes in 1963 and 1976 respectively.

The thesis identifies several themes evidenced in the agents' correspondence which will be expanded and analysed. These include the emerging professionalism of the agent's role, which competed alongside the continuance of traditional systems of patronage. The diverse roles, expectations and autonomy of agents and the varied patterns of estate management are fundamental areas of analysis. Landowners' aspirations of social control, of paternalism or of pure commercialisation will be explored and the divergence in attitudes towards the rural and urban tenantry become clear. Conversely, the attitudes of agents towards their own role in society and the extent to which some absorbed aristocratic values will be examined.

Variables such as the relative size and wealth of estates, the personalities of individual landowners and agents involved, and their religious and political priorities all impacted upon the management

of the estate and the development of towns. The relative involvement of the landowner, and his enthusiasm, reluctance or fear, of urban developments posed challenges for agents. Change over time as new landowners and agents emerged is a central theme, and how these structures and measures of control changed over generations will be addressed.

The professionalisation of the agency occupation will be analysed. It is contended that this process was not a linear progression; rather the professionalisation of estate management was a staccato affair, incorporating many tangential steps in its development. The conflicting and overlapping roles and duties of the 'agent' become apparent, as does their extensive professional network which incorporated surveyors, solicitors, mining experts and gardeners.

The thesis addresses how far the local environment, economic, social, political and physical, drove landowners' and agents' decisions, rather than the aristocrat being an autonomous catalyst for local change. It focuses on two Staffordshire towns which were different in many ways, not least in their size and history, yet faced similar problems and opportunities in the nineteenth century due to population growth and the associated national trends of urbanisation and industrialisation.

OVERVIEW OF THESIS

The present introductory chapter outlines the existing scholarship concerning agents on aristocratic estates. The wealth of historiographical studies addressing urbanisation, as well as those examining aristocratic estates and agents, are characterised, before outlining the relative gaps in existing knowledge, namely the role of agents in the development of urban estates. Existing literature of professionalisation, as well as the on patterns of estate management, will be discussed. The sources and methodology utilised in the thesis are outlined, before a brief description of the Bradford and Sutherland estates. A summary of the development of the towns of Longton and Walsall provides important context for the subsequent discussions.

The thesis comprises five substantive research chapters. The first three are chronologically themed and demonstrate agents' impact on urbanisation and the management of the estates' tenants. The first chronological chapter addresses the period 1830-1843, incorporating the initial stage of the

development of Lord Bradford's Walsall estate as directed by chief agent Peter Potter. The duke of Sutherland's North Staffordshire estate oversaw extensive agricultural 'improvements' but did not witness substantial urban development of the duke's land around Longton. These developments are framed alongside the emerging dynamic between the landowner and his agents on the one hand and the tenantry on the other. This initial research chapter further serves as a baseline against which later developments in agency structure and patterns of estate management are contrasted, facilitating the charting of continuities and changes.

The second chronological chapter examines the years 1855-1869. This period witnessed the continuation of Peter Potter's developments of Walsall by his son, Peter Potter the younger, who capitalised upon the rapid increase in the town's population in the 1850s by leasing land to developers and manufacturers. The Sutherland estate embarked upon the initial stages of suburban development of their land around Longton, with evident hesitancy and trepidation.

The final chronological chapter addresses the later nineteenth century, namely the years 1878-1900. This period witnessed an acceleration in the growth of the duke of Sutherland's suburban estates which had hitherto developed slowly. The death of the Sutherland chief agent resulted in an estate restructuring and considerably more autonomy for the Trentham agent George Menzies. However, in 1893, parts of the duke's Longton estate were sold, and the aristocratic family began to withdraw from Staffordshire. In Walsall, George Gybbon Potter replaced his late father as Lord Bradford's agent, but was notably less instrumental to the estate's management than his predecessors. Nevertheless, the 1890s witnessed renewed phases of building on Lord Bradford's land.

These chronological chapters are followed by two thematic chapters which chart social developments throughout the nineteenth century, supplementing the analysis of the towns' physical growth. The first of these, chapter five of the thesis, examines the role of the two aristocratic families in providing space and facilities for recreation on their developing urban estates, charting attitudes towards leisure throughout the period 1830-1900. It highlights the attitudes of estates towards different forms of recreation and their attempts at implementing measures of social control

over their tenants. The role of agents in the availability, or lack thereof, of leisure facilities in these growing towns is shown to be integral.

The final substantive chapter examines the involvement of the two aristocratic estates in national and local politics throughout the nineteenth century. It concentrates primarily on the period 1830-1850, one of considerable political and social tension in which anti-aristocratic sentiment was widespread. The passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832, and the creation of the parliamentary boroughs of Walsall and Stoke-upon-Trent, were accompanied by riots and unrest. Agents are demonstrated to be instrumental in influencing the votes of tenants and promoting the desired candidates of the landowner. The attitude of landowners towards the political representation of urban areas reveals fundamental changes in the relationship between aristocrats and the towns. Bruised by these earlier encounters, aristocratic involvement in local politics notably declined in the second half of the century.

Conclusions are then reached concerning the integral role of agents in the management and development of urban estates, as well as in influencing social and political control over the tenantry and the inhabitants of developing towns. The professionalisation of the role of agents throughout the nineteenth century is considered, and the judgement reached that, while recognising the increased efficiency and competence brought by nineteenth-century agents, most notably in the development of urban estates, the recruitment practices of these agents problematise the fundamentals of professionalism as defined by sociologists and historians. The extent to which notions of aristocratic paternalism and sense of duty continued as the estate expanded into the urban environment will be considered, and the precedence that the potential for profit making was given over such paternalistic notions will be highlighted. Finally, the importance of individuals is identified as a significant influence on the nature of these developments and changing patterns of estate management are highlighted.

In the analysis of the urban development of estates and the importance and relative professionalism of the estates agents, the use of chronological chapters proves particularly fruitful. The structure of

these chapters allows continuities and changes in the development of urban estates to be identified and analysed. While the chronological chapters chart the physical development of towns and the management of the tenantry, the thematic chapters address the responses of the estate to abstract ideas.

The themes of recreation and politics are afforded special attention in the thesis as it is contended that these two areas represent vital aspects of the social development of the modern town.

Historians, notably Hugh Cunningham, have recognised that aside from their work commitments, the enjoyment of recreation, in its broadest definition, was integral to the life in the nineteenth century, for all classes in society. Indeed, as Joseph Strutt wrote in 1801, 'in order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the sports and pastimes... prevalent amongst them'.³ Establishment as a parliamentary borough was considered a significant external indicator of a town's importance and maturity. All sections of society are demonstrated to be politically engaged throughout the century, most notably in the period 1830-1850, despite many still being denied the franchise. Throughout these important areas of nineteenth-century urban life, the influence of agents is shown to have been considerable.

These social and political themes are revealing of how landowners and their agents perceived their responsibilities in the development of the towns. The enthusiastic building of houses, but a reluctance to provide recreation facilities for tenants, suggests that profits alone were the motivator for urban development. The delegation of estate land for the enjoyment of tenants and townsfolk implies a degree of paternalism and sense of duty towards the inhabitants of estates, as well as an ideological investment in the town.

A desire to shape and influence the national and local politics of a town could indicate an engagement with that locality, albeit often for personal benefit. Conversely, the absence of interest in the politics of the town where much land and property was owned, or the active opposition to the

³ J. Strutt, *The Sports and Pastime of the People of England*, cited in H. Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture' in F. Thompson (Ed.), *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, vol. 2: People and their environment, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 337.

granting of parliamentary representation, implies that the interests of a landowner were primarily financial.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis addresses several interrelated themes concerning the growth of towns on aristocratic estates. Many of these themes each have their own field of historiography, and this thesis contributes to their development. An analysis of the existing academic literature must first address the wealth of studies of urbanisation before focusing on the existing studies of the role of landowners in this urban development. To analyse the development of these estates, the focus will then turn to accounts of the role of land agents in the management of aristocratic estates, which primarily focusses on their role in a rural setting. The limited examples of agents in urban developments will then be considered, which is often tangential to the authors primary focus, highlighting the expediency of the further examination provided in the present thesis. It is contended that the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the agent's role in urban developments warrants a re-examination of the process of urban development.

The professionalisation of the land agent's role, a persistent theme throughout the thesis, demands the consideration of existing analysis of the rise of professionalisation from historians and sociologists. Finally, the thesis contributes significantly to furthering understanding of patterns of estate management on aristocratic estate, rendering a discussion of existing studies of such administrative structures, invariably adopting a rural focus, pertinent to the present study.

URBANISATION

The process of urbanisation has received much attention from historians, advancing our understanding of the transformation from a rural to urban society. Early accounts of nineteenth-century urbanisation, such as those by Lewis Mumford, tended to highlight the squalor, chaos and barbarity of the Victorian city.⁴ However, Asa Briggs in his 1963 *Victorian Cities* was among the first to re-evaluate these interpretations and highlight cities positives and achievements, as well as their deficiencies.

⁴ L. Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*, (London, 1961), p. 509.

By examining the development of several Victorian cities, Briggs demonstrated how contemporary observers were both horrified and fascinated by these large, industrial cities, and the changes they brought to society.⁵ Briggs contrasted the squalor, social segregation and ‘riot propensities’ of early Victorian Manchester with the burgeoning civic pride and reforming vision that characterised Birmingham’s development by the 1870s. Manchester was simultaneously a cradle of social disorder and of new, formative social values. The vast size of the city, its squalor, social segregation and lack of existing bonds of deference contributed to a highly stratified and volatile society, with high propensities for riot and revolution.⁶

Conversely, Briggs identified civic pride as the prominent characteristic of Birmingham’s development. While Manchester was the leading city in the early Victorian era, by the early 1880s Birmingham held an international reputation as ‘the best governed city in the world.’⁷ A higher degree of social mobility existed in Birmingham on account of the diversity of occupation, the organisation of work into smaller workshops rather than large factories, and the high proportion of ‘skilled’ labour force. Closer bonds existed between ‘masters and men’ than in Manchester, where large factories and the dominance of the cotton industry exacerbated the stratification of society between wealthy industrialists and masses of unskilled factory workers with little prospect of social mobility.⁸

Whilst Briggs’ accounts are invaluable for understanding the impact of nineteenth-century urbanisation, and his approaches and conclusions can fruitfully be applied to other urban centres, the choice of an overarching theme for each of his chapters warrants caution. One sometimes feels that the evidence was moulded to fit the author’s narrative for each city, and conflicting evidence may have been downplayed.

Morris and Rodger re-evaluated processes of nineteenth-century urbanisation and argued that between 1820 and 1914 British society and economy became more complex, stratified and

⁵ A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, (London, 1963), p. 12, p. 49.

⁶ Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 91.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-7.

regulated than it had ever been before. People became concentrated in large, dense and complex settlements, and gained an acute awareness of their social interactions. The period witnessed fundamental changes within and between towns, as well changes in the relationships between urban places and society, as the scale and complexities of cities increased many times.⁹

Using C.M. Law's definition of an urban place as those containing a population of over 2,500, with a density of more than one person per acre, and with buildings clustered together in a recognisable nucleated centre, by 1911 nearly 80% of the population of England and Scotland was living in urban places. Towns became closely integrated, with improved transport, finance and information networks. This increased the specialisation of towns, between the producer cities, the ports, resorts and market towns. Ultimately, urban space became the site where specific and local social economic processes interacted with national and international developments.¹⁰

Since the publication of these general accounts, the field of urban history has fragmented considerably. Since the 1970s there has been notably less focus on towns and cities themselves and the people and forces at work within them became the focus of social history, including gender and nationalism, followed by a much closer specialisation into the 1990s and the twenty-first century.

Subsequent studies have tested the theories of urbanisation at a local level, or with regards to specific subsets of society. These have included studies of community and social geography, the creation of urban identities and cultural space and environmental issues. Others have studied specific sections of society in individual localities, such as Hannah Barker's focus on northern industrial towns, or Nick Hayes' study of housing, lifestyle and status in the provincial English city.¹¹

⁹ R. Morris and R. Rodger, *The Victorian City: A Reader In British Urban History, 1820-1914*, (London, 1993), p.1, p. 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2, p. 39.

¹¹ See for example, R. Dennis & S. Daniels, "'Community' and the Social Geography of Victorian Cities" in M. Drake (Ed.), *Time, Family and Community* (Oxford, 1994), J. Stobart, 'Building an urban identity. Cultural space and civic boosterism in a "New" industrial town: Burslem, 1760-1911', *Social History*, vol. 29, (2004), pp. 485-498, S. Frioux, 'At a green crossroads: recent theses in urban environmental history in Europe and North America', *Urban History*, Vol. 39, no. 3,(August 2012), pp. 529-39, N. Hayes, "'Calculating class': Housing, lifestyle and status in the provincial English city, 1900-1950", *Urban History*,

LANDOWNERS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In the 1970s and 1980s some historians, recognising that landownership was important for the nature of urban development, explored more closely the links between aristocracy and industrial and urban activities, often utilising the increased availability of family and estate papers.¹² J.T. Ward and R.G. Wilson examined the reaction of British and Irish landowners to the challenges and opportunities presented by the industrial revolution. They noted the widespread perception of a dichotomy between land and industry as demonstrated by literary accounts and political rhetoric. They presented a collection of localised studies highlighting the more complex reality. These studies demonstrated that, while mineral royalties and urban rents were ‘unearned accretions to estate revenues’ for some aristocratic families, many others fulfilled ‘often vital entrepreneurial roles’ as promoters of turnpikes, canals, ports, markets and urban developments.¹³

Although cautioning against generalisations, Ward and Wilson cited an emerging body of studies which suggested that landowners’ role in industrial development was of equal significance to that they played in agricultural change.¹⁴ While many landowners were not directly concerned with the development of industry, they often condoned and encouraged important changes. It was this ‘fusion of interest’, Ward and Wilson argued, that created the ideal environment for economic change and for which landowners should be seen to play a ‘decisive role in the pattern and timing of British industrialisation.’¹⁵

David Spring made three significant observations concerning the aristocracy’s role in industrialisation and urbanisation. Firstly, while relatively small in number, Spring demonstrated that by 1870, ‘a landed aristocracy consisting of about 2,250 persons own together nearly half of the enclosed land in England and Wales.’ As such, Spring argued, whatever the economic

vol. 36, no. 1, (May 2009), pp. 113-40, H. Barker, ‘“Smoke cities”: Northern industrial towns in late Georgian England’, *Urban History*, vol. 31, no.2, (August 2004), pp. 175-90.

¹² J.T. Ward and R.G. Wilson, (Eds.), *Land and Industry: The Landed Estate and the Industrial Revolution*, (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

enterprise launched on English land, and however remote it may have been from the cultivation of wheat and barley, it touched on the affairs of the landed aristocracy.¹⁶

Secondly, Spring highlighted how English landowners benefited from the law concerning mineral property rights, namely that minerals belonged to the owner of the surface. Thus, unlike their European counterparts, English aristocrats became large owners of sub-surface minerals in an island ‘richly endowed with mineral resources.’

Finally, Spring considered English landowners to be ‘disposed as to make the most of their advantages’, and were prepared to embrace opportunities for wealth, regardless of what form this wealth took. While the involvement of the landed aristocracy in non –agricultural enterprise saw a marked increase in the nineteenth century, landowners’ involvement in these activities had ample precedent in the preceding centuries.¹⁷

Spring analysed the involvement of landowners in a range of industrial activities and found that while the majority of landowners should be classified predominantly as ‘rent receivers’, a smaller proportion should be considered entrepreneurs, active in mining, railway building or urban development. While he speculated that these landed entrepreneurs became fewer over the course of the nineteenth century, many estates acquired a non-agricultural income due to the development of inland coal and iron-ore fields and the growth of provincial towns and suburban London.¹⁸

As Ward and Wilson had lamented, patterns of landownership had too often been traced from the archives of the wealthiest families, noting correctly that ‘the great estates... were not typical of the pattern’.¹⁹ To address this imbalance, R.W. Sturgess provided a valuable examination of the relationship between landowners and industry in Staffordshire, a county of both aristocratic estates and heavily industrialised regions.

¹⁶ D. Spring, ‘English Landowners and Nineteenth Century Industrialism’, in Ward and Wilson, *Land and Industry*, pp. 16-7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38, 45, 51-2.

¹⁹ Ward and Wilson, *Land and Industry*, p. 12.

Sturgess demonstrated the 'strong influence' agricultural income and rural matters played in the development Staffordshire towns through the exploitation of minerals and building developments. He further examined why landowners turned to industrial and urban pursuits and how they viewed these large industrial receipts.²⁰

Sturgess based his examination primarily on the estates of Lords Dudley and Dartmouth in the Black Country, Lord Hatherton in Cannock Chase and the Sneyd family on the western edge of the Potteries.²¹ While there is much to be commended in this contribution to the study of aristocratic estates, Sturgess' choice of estates, particularly his choice of the Sneyd family to represent the Potteries, is problematic. The Sneyd estate was primarily in the mining villages surrounding the market town of Newcastle-under-Lyme and their involvement in the Potteries towns was negligible.

Sturgess demonstrates that while enthusiasm for income from industry and urban developments was often delayed by fears of the destruction of the rural character of an estate, by the mid-nineteenth century considerable interest in urban development had emerged. Market forces are demonstrated to have been significant in the success of aristocrats' forays into industrial pursuits as revenue from mining fluctuated considerably depending on the location of the estate on Staffordshire's three coal fields. Sturgess found that, due to rising interest repayments on debts, even in a country as richly endowed with coal as Staffordshire the increased receipts from industry served primarily to permit landowners to maintain their personal spending at a higher level than they could otherwise have done.²²

Sturgess highlighted the prevalence of aristocratic debt as providing the impetus for urban development.²³ Lord Hatherton became dependent on mining revenue to reduce debts caused by his own personal extravagance, while in 1848 Ralph Sneyd realised the extent of debts incurred by

²⁰ R.W. Sturgess, 'Landownership, Mining and Urban Development in Nineteenth Century Staffordshire', in Ward and Wilson, *Land and Industry*, p173.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 175-6, p. 201.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

‘own indolence [and] negligence’ and was persuaded to lease out his mines. Later in the century, Sneyd’s grandson was encouraged to return the estate’s attention to mining and building to reduce debts accrued through horse-breeding and renovations to Keele Hall. Nevertheless, Sturgess considered landowners to be at the forefront of urban development and housebuilding in expanding industrial towns, from which they ‘reaped financial rewards.’²⁴

While bemoaning the ‘flimsiness of evidence for other estates’ Sturgess tentatively observed that, despite the rapidly expanding population in both the Black Country and the Potteries in the first half of the century, planned housing development by large estates occurred in an ‘organised and forceful way’ only from the mid-century.²⁵

In Walsall, Sturgess observed a peak in the granting of leases on the Bradford and Hatherton estates in the 1850s. He speculated that the failure of both estates to accelerate building to accommodate the population influx in the 1830s was due to the estates not being in the expanding part of the town or ‘because a policy of development had not yet been adopted’.²⁶ The analysis of Walsall in the present work refines this observation and demonstrates that an active building policy had been undertaken by the Bradford estate under the direction of the agent Peter Potter from the mid -1820s. Indeed, Sturgess recognised that, at the time of his writing, ‘nothing is known about building policy on the Bradford estate’.²⁷

While historians such as Ward, Wilson and Spring had established a *prima facie* case for landowners’ significant involvement in urban development, David Cannadine’s 1980 *Lords and Landlords* must be considered the seminal account in this field. Cannadine demonstrated how, in most towns, aristocratic families owned large tracts of land on which the town grew. He sought to establish how far the aristocracy could mould and create the urban environment.²⁸

²⁴ Sturgess, *Landownership, Mining and Urban Development*, p. 184, 189-91

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁸ D. Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords: The Aristocracy and the Towns, 1774-1967*, (Leicester, 1980) p. 391.

Cannadine convincingly argued that, while levels of influence varied considerably, landowners could have only limited influence in moulding the development of towns.²⁹ Factors and forces outside of the landowner's control, notably market forces and topography, were the key determinants on the nature and composition of urbanisation, much more so than the enthusiasm, effort and intentions of an individual landowner. These forces benefited some landowners and defeated others, yet crucially, Cannadine contended, 'none was powerful enough to influence it profoundly.' A favourably positioned estate could flourish with little effort from the landowner, while a well-organised and determined aristocrat could achieve little if the market and topographic forces aligned against him.³⁰ This argument challenged previous understandings of the fundamental role of aristocratic influence over urban developments.

Among the strengths of Cannadine's account is his mastery and synopsis of existing studies of urban development. He described how contemporaries such as Broadhurst and Reid had argued in 1885 that through covenants in leases, a landowner could control the development of a town to their exact desires and could 'cause the inhabitants to emigrate *en masse*, or to carry their trade according to his pleasure.'³¹ Into the 1970s historians continued to emphasise the fundamental impact of landowners. Harold Perkin argued that 'someone had to plan the new streets and thoroughfares... and sell or lease off the building plots... who could do this but the large local landowner?'³² John Kellett went further, arguing that 'the ground plan formed by property titles' was fundamental to explaining the 'whole course of development' of urban areas and the emergence of residential and industrial zones.³³

Similarly, Donald Olsen's 1976 study of London observed that land to the north and the west of the city was predominantly aristocratic in ownership and exclusive in residence. Conversely land to the south and east was divided into fragmented landholdings, and became the home of industry, the

²⁹ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, pp. 41-3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 396-8.

³¹ Broadhurst and Reid, *Leasehold Enfranchisement*, cited in Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 393.

³² H. Perkin, cited in Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 391.

³³ J. Kellett, cited in Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 391.

docks and the working class communities. Olsen concluded that the larger the estate and the richer the landlord, the more likely it was to be comprehensively planned from the outset.³⁴

However, as Cannadine noted, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the consensus of aristocratic influence began to be challenged. Martin Daunton contended that the aristocracy's capacity to influence urban development was constrained by factors beyond their control. Olsen re-evaluated his argument and conceded that while landlords theoretically had great powers to dictate the nature of their estates, in reality they had to 'co-operat[e] with the realities of the market.'³⁵

Cannadine's research developed these arguments further through detailed case studies of two landed estates; the Calthorpes in the Birmingham suburb of Edgbaston, and the dukes of Devonshire in the seaside town of Eastbourne. He argued that while the intentions and policies of landowners were integral to explaining why certain parts of a town were developed at a specific time, why a particular type of housing was characteristic of a locality, or why streets were named as they were, the policies of grandee landowners were not of vast importance to the 'overall pattern of spatial evolution' in an urban location.³⁶ He tentatively proposed a model of six phases in the relationship between landowners and the towns, phases of 'power then conflict, influence then confrontation, ornamental impotence then territorial abdication'.³⁷

In 1982 a collection of localised case studies sought to test the conclusions made in *Lords and Landlords*. In introducing this collection, Cannadine observed that the participation of landed elites in non-agricultural ventures had received little study with regards to local affairs. The sinking of a mine, construction of a harbour or the development of a building estate all created 'new spheres of patrician influence... in the towns of industrialising Britain', increasing scope for rural, partisan influence on most aspects of urban, industrial life.³⁸

³⁴ D. Olsen, cited in Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 394.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 395.

³⁷ Cannadine, *Patricians, Power and Politics*, p. 4.

³⁸ Cannadine, *Patricians, Power and Politics*, pp. 3-4

John Davies' examination of the Marquesses of Bute in the development of town and industry in Cardiff, John Liddle's study of two Lancashire gentry families and land reform politics in Southport, Richard Trainor's study of the earls of Dartmouth and Dudley in the industrialising Black Country and Richard Roberts' examination of the mosaic of smaller landowners, leaseholders and local government in the growth of Bournemouth each presented evidence which largely reinforced Cannadine's model of six phases of encounter between landlords and towns.³⁹

These studies demonstrated that aristocratic landowners enjoyed periods of considerable power, control and deference, most notably in towns where they represented the largest or only landowner, such as Cardiff or Dudley. In the first half of the nineteenth century landowners dominated many aspects of towns' social, economic and political development, often in the face of a weak, divided middle-class elite, with limited resources and opportunities.⁴⁰ However, aristocrats increasingly faced challenges to their power from emerging self-assured institutions of local government as well as over their response to contentious issues such as Church Rates and the Reform of Parliament.

Mid-century periods of influence through matters such as philanthropy, representations on local boards and parliamentary seats were punctuated with renewed phases of confrontation as local authorities sought to challenge aristocratic hegemony.⁴¹ Cordial relations were re-established towards the end of the century as the landowners and the towns considered themselves mutually dependent on the good will of the other. Patrician mayoralties in Cardiff, Dudley and Southport are indicative of this ceremonial rapprochement, but the balance of power and initiative had, to varying degrees, shifted to the local councils.⁴² Invariably, landowners gradually withdrew from the towns, and severed all ties with their urban estates.

These case studies, Cannadine surmised, while highlighting important complexities of individual towns, collectively illuminated the overall pattern of fluctuating landowner involvement in towns.

³⁹ Cannadine, *Patricians, Power and Politics*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴¹ J. Davies, 'Aristocratic town-makers and the coal metropolis; the marquesses of Bute Cardiff, 1776 to 1947', in Cannadine (Ed.), *Patricians, Power and Politics*, p. 54.

⁴² Cannadine, *Patricians, Power and Politics*, p. 5.

A spectrum of landowner involvement in urbanisation was now possible to discern with those with little involvement in political and economic life such as the Calthorpes in Edgbaston at one end the Bute's dominance of Cardiff's social development at the extreme opposite.⁴³ Landowners had ample opportunity to wield real social and economic power if they chose to, especially in towns where they had a close territorial link and which had divided urban elites lacking an established sense of corporate civic pride. However, from the 1880s, the combination of agricultural depression, extension of the franchise, introduction of industrialists into the peerage and the Liberal split weakened and fragmented the old landed order.⁴⁴

Richard Trainor's comparative analysis of two Black Country aristocratic families, later expanded in his 1993 monograph *Black Country Elites*, is particularly pertinent to the present study and warrants more detailed consideration. Building on the preliminary investigations by Sturgess a decade earlier, Trainor examined the earls of Dartmouth in West Bromwich and the earls of Dudley in their titular town, seeking to explore their changing social and political role in the region.

Both families were prominent landowners in the Black Country, with the earls of Dudley being the region's greatest proprietor. The Dartmouth family's estate was comparatively more scattered and their Black Country holdings did not dominate their income to the same extent that it did the earl of Dudley's estate.⁴⁵ Both landowners became economic forces in their home parishes, with Dudley in particular wielding considerable influence as a diversified producer, a large employer and a key supplier to others. Dartmouth undertook mining and building developments in Sandwell and West Bromwich while Dudley developed a diverse portfolio including mining, agriculture and bricks, while never undertaking a systematic building policy. However, neither possessed a monopoly and faced rivals amongst other landowners and the upper middle classes.⁴⁶

Trainor charts the fluctuating relationship between the aristocratic families and their Black Country estates, identifying three chronological phases before the aristocrats finally withdrew socially and

⁴³ Cannadine, *Patricians, Power and Politics*, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.

⁴⁵ Trainor, *Peers on an Industrial Frontier*, pp. 75-77.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-8.

economically from their urban estates. These phases broadly aligned to Cannadine's model of conflicts and compromises.

The period 1810 to 1835 was one of aristocratic dominance as landownership, early industrial activities and social prestige gave the aristocrats considerable influence in their respective localities. While the urban middle-classes were expanding rapidly, their institutions were, as yet, poorly developed. However, vulnerability in the aristocrats' position was identified, not least in their vehement opposition to parliamentary reform in which Dartmouth was among only 22 peers who resisted the Reform Bill to the end.⁴⁷

This vulnerability was further exacerbated in the subsequent period, from 1835 until 1860, when the landowners suffered diminution, though by no means destruction, of their local influence. The aristocrats' 'confident, ambitious paternalism... had been swamped by rising middle-class confidence, working-class assertion and adverse political and sectarian trends.'⁴⁸ Yet while Dartmouth found himself isolated from both the poor and rich, he remained the single most prominent person in West Bromwich. Similarly, despite increased challenges, the earls of Dudley remained economically and socially predominate.⁴⁹

Finally, Trainor identified a period from the 1860s until the outbreak of the Great War in which the aristocrats' position developed from 'frustrated autocrats to celebrated celebrities'. While there remained areas of intermittent conflict, increased cooperation and significantly improved relations with respective local governments was appreciated and reciprocated.⁵⁰ This was accompanied by roles of ceremonial importance as witnessed in many towns in the late nineteenth century.⁵¹

Trainor concluded that while earlier dominance was abandoned, landowners' ceremonial status afforded them some economic leverage, as well as considerable, if diminished, social and political

⁴⁷ Trainor, *Peers on an Industrial Frontier*, pp. 79-82, p. 85.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89, p. 103, p. 108.

⁵¹ Trainor, *Peers on an Industrial Frontier*, pp.113-4.

impact. The earl of Dudley in particular continued to hold some sway over local government, but he could neither dictate policies nor override opposition without making concessions.⁵²

The evidence gleaned from recently catalogued archival material allows the present thesis to build on Trainor's work and further our understanding of the role of the aristocracy in the development of Black Country town. Moreover, the present work further tests Cannadine's model of the relationship between the aristocracy and their urban estates nationally, highlighting important divergences from the findings of his influential study.

AGENTS ON ARISTOCRATIC ESTATES

Having established that landowners played an important role in the development of towns, either in their physical development, or in social and economic matters, we must consider how this influence was wielded and how the landowners' policies were enacted in practice on their urban estates.

Much of the existing research into aristocratic estates by historians has focused on rural estates. As such, the majority of our knowledge of the agents of these estates centres primarily on their role in agricultural matters, often in implementing improvements to farming practices, crop rotations and animal husbandry.

Despite their 'acknowledged importance', John Beckett recognised that relatively little is known about the individual stewards and agents that managed landed estates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵³ Landed society and the role of agents was the subject of scholarly interest in the early 1960s, with George Mingay, F.M.L. Thompson and David Spring amongst those researching the agent's role, qualities and social background.

In his 1963 study *English Landed Society*, Thompson contended that the function of the agent was to act as the permanent representative of the landowner on his estates. However, he observed that there was no universally adopted structure of estate management. The 'ideal' model consisted of one full-time agent wholly responsible for the administration of economic affairs, with clearly

⁵² Trainor, *Peers on an Industrial Frontier*, pp. 114-5.

⁵³ J. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914*, (Oxford, 1986), p. 56.

defined authority over a number of subordinates. Yet he identified many variants to this.⁵⁴ The typical structure, Thompson believed, was one where the chief-agent managed the principal estate and supervised the accounts of the sub-agents for the detached estates.⁵⁵ It was not uncommon that the principal agent himself did not reside on the estate; rather he delegated the daily routine running of the estate to his subordinates.⁵⁶

Where this 'ideal' model was not adopted, it was common for estates to be administered with divided responsibility. Often a rent-collector or bailiff worked in parallel with a series of district agents, each directly responsible to the owner, and not subordinate to a 'steward-overlord'.⁵⁷ At the end of the eighteenth century, it was uncommon for a landlord to offer a fixed and adequate salary in return for the undivided attention of a qualified man. Instead, agents often worked on commission for several clients or undertook agent responsibilities as part-payment for their tenancy.⁵⁸ This is indicative, as David Spring also argued, that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, land agency was yet to become a profession.⁵⁹

However, efficiency in administration and management of resources became increasingly attractive and less avoidable for landowners, creating careers for expert land agents.⁶⁰ Between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the 1840s, the prevalence of 'stewards' diminished. The term 'steward' came to refer to the subordinate estate officials, whereas 'agents' came to describe their superiors, who moved in similar circles to the gentry and had considerable financial and administrative responsibilities.⁶¹ This interpretation was later challenged by Sarah Webster who, in her examination of the Egremont estates, argued that successive agents continued to describe themselves as 'stewards' throughout the nineteenth century, even though the term 'legal agent'

⁵⁴ F. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1963), p. 152.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁵⁶ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 164.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵⁹ D. Spring, *The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century: Its Administration*, (Baltimore, 1963), p. 97.

⁶⁰ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 156.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

better described their work.⁶² Webster contends that the definition of ‘agent’ was not stable or strictly defined, and was often used concurrently with ‘steward’ to describe many different occupations.⁶³

This rising status of agents in the early nineteenth century was matched by an increase in the salary they could command. Although cautioning against generalisations, Thompson suggested that a steward in the 1780s typically received £150-£300 a year; whereas an agent by 1815 was likely to command £750-£1000.⁶⁴ Agents were often paid additional expenses, these varying considerably on different estates. Some, for example, were given an additional allowance for rent, whereas others were expected to purchase their own riding horse out of their salary.⁶⁵

In his 1963 account, *The English Landed Estate*, David Spring concurred with many of Thompson’s observations and argued that the agglomeration of estates, the ‘revolution in agriculture’ and the growth in mineral output all contributed to increase the attention afforded by aristocrats to the management of their estates by the nineteenth century. Spring believed that the replacement of the title of land ‘stewards’ for land ‘agents’ to be an indicator that the occupation of land management was developing into a profession.⁶⁶

Spring attempted to identify the social background and education of land agents. He concludes that most agents were respectable men drawn predominantly from the provincial middle classes, noting that many with the highest reputations came from Scotland. Agents were often the sons of ‘practical men’, such as tenant farmers or yeomen, and were already well acquainted with the varied business of land management.⁶⁷

⁶² S. Webster, ‘Estate Improvement and the Professionalisation of Land Agents on the Egremont Estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770-1835’, *Rural History*, 18:1, (April, 2007) p. 61.

⁶³ Webster, *Agents and Professionalisation*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 162.

⁶⁵ Spring, *English Landed Estate*, p. 132, Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 162.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

Spring found that agents usually had little formal education, an assessment endorsed by Thompson who argued that ‘the school of experience was the main source of land agents’.⁶⁸ The nineteenth-century agent acquired practical and theoretical knowledge from a life working with the land and with little formal instruction.⁶⁹ As Webster points out, there was no form of official training for agents until 1845, with the opening of the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester.⁷⁰

The diverse duties expected of land agents in the running of estates made the role a demanding one. Spring identifies three key attributes the agent must possess.⁷¹ The first is that of ‘incessant industry’. It was not uncommon for aristocratic estates to be widely scattered and agents often completed a remarkable amount of travelling between estates. Spring cites examples such as Grey of Dilston who regularly journeyed between Carlisle, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Berwick-on-Tweed in his management of the Greenwich Hospital Estates.⁷²

Versatility was considered an integral quality for the agent. Spring quotes John Beasley, agent to Earl Spenser, who believed that the good agent must be a competent builder, an engineer, understand drainage and be something of a chemist and a geologist.⁷³ With the variety of duties the agent was responsible for overseeing, it was imperative he possessed a diverse range of skills. Moreover, with many landowners having non-agricultural assets, including mineral exploitation, it became increasingly necessary for their agents to become knowledgeable in these specialised fields.

The third fundamental attribute for an agent, highlighting Spring’s rural focus, is skill in farming and the management of the tenantry. The nineteenth-century agent, much more so than his predecessor, paid great attention to the nature and efficiency of his tenants’ farming practices. Spring identifies the constant need of agents to induce the farmers to improve their cultivation.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 157.

⁶⁹ Spring, *English Landed Estate*, p. 102.

⁷⁰ Webster, *Agents and Professionalisation*, p. 29.

⁷¹ Spring, *English Landed Estate*, pp. 105-7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁷³ Beasley to Earl Spenser, 6 Oct 1864, cited in Spring, *English Landed Estate*, p. 106.

⁷⁴ Spring, *English Landed Estate*, p. 107.

Thompson concurs, and writes of the ‘spirit of improvements’ on aristocratic estates and an emphasis on greater efficiency by the tenantry.⁷⁵

In 1986 John Beckett’s *The Aristocracy in England* devoted a small section to the role of land agents, tangential to his main areas of enquiry. Beckett considered changing patterns of estate management, arguing that the employment of a full-time agent increasingly became accepted practice on larger estates. However, for the majority of estates, the employment of a part-time steward, who combined the job with other activities, or the employment of a land agency firm, were more common.⁷⁶ While acknowledging that landowners increasingly recognised the advantages of professional management of their estates, Beckett emphasised the continuing importance of the role of landowners themselves. Employing a good manager, Beckett argued, ‘did not mean that the owner divested himself of the responsibility for the estate.’⁷⁷ English aristocrats, Beckett concluded, ‘were vitally involved in the running of their estates’.⁷⁸

Indeed, Beckett contended that the failure of an aristocrat to actively manage his estates ‘permitted stewards and agents a degree of latitude which could prove highly embarrassing to landlords.’⁷⁹ Such is the supposed incompetence of many agents, Beckett contended that ‘Landlords had to look after their estates whether they liked it or not... employing a competent steward or agent might relieve some of the pressure, but it was never sufficient on its own.’⁸⁰ The agents studied in depth in the present study, on two separate aristocratic estates, suggests that Beckett’s analysis of the balance of duties between agents and landlords warrants further consideration.

More recently, several PhD theses have examined the role of agents in the management of estates. These accounts are notably more appreciative of the importance of agents than earlier studies. As with the historiography on agents generally, these studies invariably focus on the management of agricultural estates. Sarah Webster sought to address the relative stagnation of research by

⁷⁵ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 154.

⁷⁶ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, pp. 146-7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁸⁰ Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England*, p. 155.

examining the role of the agents on the Egremont Estates in Essex and Yorkshire. Webster's 2010 study explored the relationship between various 'agents' in the widest sense of the term, that influenced the management of estates. This approach, she contended, contrasted with traditional focus on the aristocratic owner as an improver, citing David Brown's examination of the fifth duke of Bedford as an exemplar of this.⁸¹ Webster's study highlighted diverse patterns of estate management and hierarchies of agents, and concluded that the agents she studied were largely dependent on their employer and had 'little autonomy or liberty over estate management.'⁸²

In 2015, Carol Beardmore examined 'the rural community through the eyes of the land agent' on the marquess of Anglesey's Dorset and Somerset estates. Beardmore utilised the correspondence of the marquess' agents extensively, as well as rental accounts and estates vouchers, and, in contrast to Webster's findings, highlighted the pivotal role agents played in the complex management of estates and rural communities. She investigated the 'tripartite relationship between landowner, agent and tenant' and assessed the ways and means by which large estates exerted 'social control' through the creation of a deferential community, education and the accruing of rental arrears.⁸³ Beardmore highlighted the pivotal nature of the agent as mediator between the landowner and the tenantry, which extended beyond agriculture to encompass all aspects of local economic and political life. Furthermore, the economic difficulties in agriculture, prevalent until the mid-1830s, meant that agents impacted significantly on the survival of estates, surpassing their role as merely the guardian of the estates finances.⁸⁴

Alannah Tomkins' examination of Jeramiah Ginders, land agent for Earl Talbot on his rural Staffordshire estate from 1806, provides an example of the close personal and professional relationships that could emerge between landowners and their agents, as well as the important role agents played in the management of estates. Ginders' employment by Talbot's proved mutually

⁸¹ S. Webster, 'Agents and Professionalisation: Improvement on the Egremont Estates, c.1770 to c.1860,' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2011), p. 24.

⁸² Webster, 'Agents and Professionalisation', p. 224.

⁸³ C. Beardmore, 'The Rural Community through the Eyes of the Land Agent on the Marquis of Anglesey's Dorset and Somerset Estate: William Castleman and His Sons c1812-1854', (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2015), pp. 202-3,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

beneficial. The agent implemented schemes of agricultural improvement on the estate, while the position aided Ginders' desires for upward social mobility, both for himself and most notably for his decedents, through Talbot's patronage. Regrettably, the limitations of the sources prevent Tomkins from further understanding of aspects of Ginders' agency, such as the nature of his appointment, the style of his agency, his relationships with tenant farmers or his attitude to the work.⁸⁵

The social control aristocratic estates exercised over rural tenantry has been identified by historians, most notably John Rule, and Beardmore's doctoral research is valuable in identifying the agent's role in implementing this control. The maintenance of this dominance, once tenants migrated from the rural to the urban environment, is less well documented, although Rule suggests that such ties were much harder to replicate.⁸⁶ The role of the land agent in the implementation of forms of social control in the urban (and suburban) environment is analysed throughout this thesis.

AGENTS ON URBAN ESTATES

While the majority of studies of agents have focused on the rural context, some examinations of urban aristocratic estates can provide insights into the role agents played in the management of these estates. Such insights, evident in the work of Cannadine, Trainor and Sturgess, are tangential to the authors primary focus, but prove valuable for the present investigation.

In his case studies of the Calthorpes in Birmingham and the Devonshires in Eastbourne, Cannadine considered the 'superintendence' of these urban developments. Whilst he highlights the 'unified administrative structure' as a factor in the successful development of the Calthorpe's Edgbaston estate, this is included alongside other factors such as the concentrated patterns of landownership, and the stringent building covenants which were enforced.⁸⁷ Ultimately, Cannadine emphasised the

⁸⁵ A. Tomkins, 'Fragility and Resilience in a middle-class family: Jeremiah Ginders (1777-1845) and his kin', *Staffordshire Studies*, Vol. 13, (2001), p. 85, p. 107.

⁸⁶ J. Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England*, (London, 1986), pp. 160-2.

⁸⁷ Cannadine, *Lord and Landlords*, p. 109.

importance of ‘countervailing market forces’ in the success, or otherwise, of aristocratic urban developments.⁸⁸

Cannadine cited the ‘impressively consistent... estate administration’ in enforcing the strict building covenants, and keeping industry, the working classes and speculative builders away from the development. He outlined specific policies that were implemented, such as the ‘zoning’ of different socio-economic tenants, yet the manner in which these policies were enforced, and the individuals who had such a responsibility, are not discussed.⁸⁹

Cannadine considered in some depth the importance of the Calthorpes’ individual agents to the general management of the estate, highlighting their varied activities in day-to-day affairs, as well as their role as the Calthorpes’ ‘chief financial advisors – suggesting long term policy and advising on major decisions.’⁹⁰ However, although the role of the agents is highlighted, it is explicitly presented as a partnership with the landowners, with both parties playing an active role.⁹¹

On the Devonshire estate, as is common with many accounts of the aristocracy, the individual aristocrats are demonstrated to have played an important role in the implementation of estate policy, to a much greater extent than their agents, who are mentioned only in passing.⁹² On the estates studied in the present thesis the aristocrats themselves had very little involvement in urban development. This responsibility was devolved to the land agents.

When the role of the agents is highlighted, their significance is appended with caveats. While recognising that for the maintenance of Edgebaston’s ‘high social tone’ Calthrope’s estate office ‘deserve much of the credit’, he added that these men could not maintain a watchful eye on all of the estate, instead emphasising the role of the residents themselves. ‘Very often’ Cannadine contended, ‘the estate office was little more than a mediator... the estate only acted because other

⁸⁸ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords.*, p. 110.

⁸⁹ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, pp. 112-4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 321-333.

tenants brought [infringements] to the agent's notice'.⁹³ This is far removed from the active and rigorous management demonstrated by many of the agents examined in the present thesis and supports the argument that the Potters of Walsall were involved in the practicalities of urban development to a greater extent that was normally undertaken by land agents.

In Trainor's account of the earls of Dudley and Dartmouth, while not being the primary focus of his analysis, the agents of each estate were heavily involved in the development of the urban estates.

The 'implementation and to a large degree the making of policy' devolved on the Dartmouth's agents, Messers Thynne of London, operating through correspondence, periodic visits and resident sub-ordinates to secure enhanced returns from the Sandwell estate.⁹⁴

While the earls of Dudley were reportedly 'exceptional amongst great landowners in their continued direct entrepreneurship in estates' the aristocrats were largely uninvolved in the daily administration of estate business. Instead, estate matters were overseen by a 'well-developed bureaucracy' headed by a mineral agent. For 19 years this agent was Richard Smith who Trainor notes took much responsibility for estate affairs, acting as a 'surrogate peer' and becoming a 'figure of economic and social importance in his own right.'⁹⁵

Trainor argued that the presence of agents allowed the landlords to intervene in business affairs if they wished, but kept their days free from humdrum estate operations. Subordinates handled routine matters without reference to the aristocrats, but peers consent remained crucial for major initiatives.⁹⁶

Sturgess' survey of Staffordshire landowners indirectly presents a strong case for the importance of the agents and their influence over estate policy. Their advice was often cautionary, warning of the need to reduce expenditure and often recommending an increase of industrial or urban development to mitigate debt. The agents on the Sneyd and Dartmouth estates in particular are shown to have

⁹³ Cannadine, *Lord and Landlords*, pp. 120-1.

⁹⁴ Trainor, *Peers on an Industrial Frontier*, p. 78.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

influenced policies of urban development.⁹⁷ These fleeting insights demonstrate that a detailed examination of the role of agents in the development of towns requires further analysis and investigation.

PROFESSIONALISM AND PATRONAGE

Having discussed the existing literature concerning aristocratic involvement in urban development, and the role of agents on landed estates, it is important to consider the professionalisation of land agents. How and when this process occurred is the subject of debate amongst historians. To contribute to this debate, it is necessary to consider existing scholarship concerning professionalisation. Penelope Corfield defines a profession as a skilled occupation organised around specialist knowledge with both a theoretical and practical bearing.⁹⁸ This general definition certainly applies to the work of land agents from the late eighteenth century. Paul Brassley defines ‘professionalisation’ as an increased dominance and autonomy in a profession, while the ‘professional’ is characterised as one who holds exclusive knowledge of a specialised activity, possibly acquired through training. The professional, Brassley argues, is selected on merit, rather than wealth or inheritance, and belongs to a formal qualifying association.⁹⁹

As Sarah Webster identified, not all of these stipulations apply to the nineteenth-century land agent. Very few agents acquired their specialised knowledge through training, since the majority instead learned through practical experience. Indeed, formal training was not offered until the establishment of the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester in 1845.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, there were still some agents who inherited their position, as is shown to be common on the Bradford estates in the present thesis. Finally, the land agent’s occupation was not recognised with institutional status until 1902 with the Chartered Land Agent’s Society.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Sturgess, *Landownership, Mining and Urban Development*, p. 184.

⁹⁸ P. Corfield, *Power and the professions in Britain 1700-1850*, (London, 1995), p. 25.

⁹⁹ Brassley, cited in S. Webster, ‘Estate Improvement and the Professionalisation of Land Agents on the Egremont Estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770-1835’, *Rural History*, 18:1, (April, 2007), p. 49.

¹⁰⁰ S. Webster, *Agents and Professionalisation*, (PhD thesis), p. 29.

¹⁰¹ Webster, ‘Estate Improvement’, p. 50.

Although it may not meet all these requirements, it is evident that the occupation of land agency increased in professionalism. Mingay observed that from the eighteenth century, estate management gradually became standardised and centralised.¹⁰² Mingay believed that professionalisation of the agency occupation in the eighteenth century was a product of the increasing complexity of the economy, the resultant demands for expert services and the ‘extension of capitalist criteria of performance’ to estate management.¹⁰³

Thompson and Beckett challenge Mingay’s chronology of professionalism and contend that land management became a profession later in the nineteenth century, the process witnessing an acceleration in the 1840s and reaching completion by the 1870s.¹⁰⁴ Thompson argued that only by the 1840s or 1850s should land agency be regarded as a distinct profession.¹⁰⁵

Thompson demonstrated that early nineteenth-century agents often had other careers and only later came to realise, as did their employers, that the effective performance of their duties required ‘full-time concentration’ on management.¹⁰⁶ Mingay’s suggestion that estate management became standardised in the eighteenth century appears erroneous as Thompson is able to demonstrate wide variations of agency structure in the mid-nineteenth century.

There were, however, individual agents who operated in a manner befitting of professionals at an early date. These agents, such as Francis Blaikie, the earl of Leicester’s agent in the early nineteenth century, endowed the practice of land agency with the principles and standing of a profession.¹⁰⁷

The traditional counter-weight to professionalism can be considered the continuance of systems of patronage. Phillip Elliott and Penelope Corfield each identify the early nineteenth century as the period when the old systems of patronage became widely challenged and an ethos of meritocracy

¹⁰² Webster, ‘Estate Improvement’, p. 49.

¹⁰³ G. Mingay, discussed in Webster, ‘Estate Improvement’, p. 49.

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

became prevalent. Elliott charts the rise of ‘occupational professionalism’, based on specialisation of knowledge and task. This coincided, he argued, with other processes of social change such as industrial development and nineteenth-century urban growth.

In pre-industrial society, when only the church, law and medicine were considered professions, professionalism was a means of defining status and an appropriate lifestyle for gentlemen, rather than serving as an identifier of specialist knowledge or skills. Occupations later identified as professions were fulfilled by those with lower social status than gentlemen, and as such were not yet considered professions. These occupations, including attorneys, surgeons and apothecaries, were more specialised in their skills and tasks and had more rigorous training and recruitment procedures.¹⁰⁸

Elliott identified a large element of patronage in eighteenth-century professional organisations where appointments were in the hands of members of the nobility, gentry or old established institutions such as universities. In the middle of the nineteenth century, these forms of patronage came under general attack, not least due to the lack of education, training or expert knowledge required for entry.¹⁰⁹ Pressure to introduce teaching, and eventually examinations, is shown to have increased, in order to ensure some degree of meritocracy in lower branches of the legal profession and other occupations. These were organised by newly created professional associations.¹¹⁰

The speed at which professionalisation increased, and patronage diminished, is demonstrated to have varied amongst occupations. Elliott contended that the development of professionalism in the nineteenth century had ‘paradoxically ambiguous consequences’ for the status of different types of practitioner. This ambiguity, Elliott believes, resulted from a meeting between ‘the old tradition of status professionalism’ namely systems of patronage, and the ‘new tendency towards occupational specialisation.’¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ P. Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions*, (London, 1972), pp. 14-5, p. 22, p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-6, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.40-2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Penelope Corfield similarly identifies the prevalence of patronage in eighteenth-century recruitment to the professions. However, she challenges Elliott's arguments about the extent of the dependence of pre-industrial professions on aristocratic patronage, arguing that by the eighteenth century 'there were simply too many specialists at work to all be employed by the tiny elite of aristocrats and the very rich.' Corfield identifies the expansion of the services of architects, doctors and solicitors into the middle-class and mass markets which encouraged 'impersonal and official validation rather than personal and *ad hoc* vetting.' Silently and decisively, Corfield argues, the 'patron' had turned into the 'client'.¹¹²

Similarly to Elliott, Corfield identified increasing public and political criticisms of patronage. By 1830, Corfield asserts, 'the old system was on the defensive. Middle-class stress on the importance of individual ability became more widely voiced.'¹¹³ Patronage became seen as incongruent with the principle of merit which professions were increasingly seen to represent by the nineteenth century. Their authority was vested in the strength of their ability rather than on their 'inherited position or ancient family.'¹¹⁴

This change, Corfield cautions, was a process of gradual progress, rather than an abrupt revolution. Meritocracy was promoted 'within the interstices of the old world of patronage.' In practice, advancement could be slow and difficult for people without wealth or social connections.¹¹⁵

Corfield identified 'many diversities in the process' and concluded that 'patterns of professionalisation were very far from uniform.'¹¹⁶ The trend to professional meritocracy was, Corfield concludes, 'initially slow moving and sometimes circuitous... but its meritocratic ethos was increasingly triumphant.'¹¹⁷

The final area to which this thesis seeks to make a contribution relates to existing understanding of patterns of estate management prevalent in the nineteenth century. A useful, yet flawed,

¹¹² Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, p. 184.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-2.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183, p. 213.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183, p. 194.

contemporary analysis is writer and journalist T.H.S. Escott's model in 1879. Escott identified four prevalent structures of estate management which he argued were indicative of English aristocratic estates. In the first structure, the chief agent was in sole control of a geographically-concentrated estate, such as the duke of Cleveland's estate. In the second model, the chief agent managed an estate assisted by regional managers subordinate to him, as was the pattern on the duke of Northumberland's estates. In the third model, the landowner acted as co-coordinator over a number of equally ranked agents who managed dispersed estates, in the mould of the duke of Devonshire. Finally, the fourth model saw agents who managed several, often smaller, estates belonging to different landowners.¹¹⁸ In her 2010 study Sarah Webster found that the agents on the Egremont estates represented all of Escott's final three models, albeit to varying degrees.¹¹⁹ Escott's contemporary model will be tested in the present thesis, and conclusions drawn on its validity, with regards to Bradford and Sutherland estates. Although fitting for the management of rural estates, Escott's categories are shown to bear little semblance to the management structures witnessed on aristocratic estates incorporating areas of urban development.

¹¹⁸ T.H.S Escott, cited in S. Webster, 'Agents and Professionalism', p. 267.

¹¹⁹ Webster, 'Agents and Professionalism', p. 267.

1.3 SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

This thesis is based primarily on archival material from the Bradford and Sutherland estate collections, both held at Staffordshire Record Office. The Sutherland collection is arguably the best known and largest estate archive held in Britain and has been utilised by several historians to examine various aspects of family and estate history. The Bradford collection is the second largest estate collection held by Staffordshire Record Office. However, sections of this collection remain uncatalogued. Unlike the Sutherland collection, the Bradford archives have not been utilised extensively by academics. A significant number of the letters of the Bradford agents are held at Walsall Local History Centre. The letters of the agents on both estates with their respective landowners, tenants and sub-gents, are the main source set utilised in the present thesis.¹²⁰

The nature of these letters, and the manner in which they have been preserved and organised, varied considerably between writers. On the Sutherland estate William Lewis' correspondence is organised into bundles of 'in' and 'out' letters, arranged chronologically, rather than by the recipient. This rendered the reconstitution of conversations additionally time consuming. Lewis' correspondence with chief agent James Loch are kept in separate bundles from those with other correspondents. George Fleming's letters are organised alphabetically by recipient in monthly files. George Menzies' letters were initially largely unorganised following his appointment in 1865, but gradually became more methodically arranged. By 1878 these were organised by recipient, which allowed conversations with individuals to be constructed more easily. George Loch compiled his letter books with an index of correspondents, considerably aiding research.

As is common with nineteenth-century letters, the handwriting and condition of the surviving papers is extremely variable. The received letters are often the clearest and many are the original

¹²⁰ A significant number of the letters of the Potters, agents for the earls of Bradford, have been transcribed by volunteer June Ellis, who very kindly permitted use of these transcriptions. Samples of these transcriptions have been verified against the originals by the present author and have been found to be exceptionally accurate.

copy. In some cases, the 'out' letters sent by agents were copied out in full by a clerk in neatly organised letter books. More commonly, sent letters were copied onto thin tracing paper. Large numbers of Menzies' out letters have been rendered unreadable, such was the poor quality of the copies made, coupled with the fading and running of ink.

The quality and accessibility of the source material varied greatly between agents, and, indeed, between separate bundles and years. In the majority of cases, the general subject matter of the letters was not indicated either by the writer through a subject heading or filing system, or by contemporary archival annotation. This necessitated the perusal of a vast amount of routine, irrelevant and mundane material. However, this contributed to a greater understanding of the mechanics of estate management, and the changing dynamics between agents, which are charted and analysed in the present thesis.

This methodology was a very time-consuming process, owing to the volume of letters read, the barely legible handwriting of many of the authors, and the necessity of manually transcribing many letters in their entirety during the archival stage of the research to ensure accuracy when these notes were later used to write thesis chapters. It is conservatively estimated that over 1,200 letters were read in the process. Notes were compiled by the author on 899 letters, while many more letters read but were not considered of sufficient historical value to transcribe.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LETTERS AS AN HISTORICAL SOURCE

Letters are a valuable source for the historian. They provide an unrivalled insight into the professional and personal life of individuals, which is, in essence, the basis of this thesis through the examination of several agents over a period of some 70 years.

James Daybell argues that letters provide a 'privy source, unrivalled as immediate records of family, social and gender relations'. Indeed, he purports that 'no single medium is as potentially illuminating as letters'.¹²¹ While recognising that letters are considered a valuable and illuminating

¹²¹ J. Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, (Oxford, 2006), pp. 5-6.

source for social history, Daybell contended that previous studies have tended to concentrate either on individual families, or individual letter-writers. This focus, he argues, has ‘precluded the study of letters as a single source, in the way that diaries have been approached as a genre.’¹²²

Daybell characterised letters as immensely complex documents requiring layered interpretations, and warned that they should not be ‘treated simply as repositories of historical fact or transparent carriers of feeling and emotion.’ He argued that the overriding purpose of letter-writing was pragmatic, and the motivations reactive. Letters were written largely for practical reasons and were reflective of particular events, crises, and emotional states. They were often not a ‘product of abundant leisure time’, rather they are characterised by an ‘unpolished immediacy’ due to constraints of time and responsibilities. Finally, Daybell recognised that individual letters merely recorded a single snapshot at a particular moment, being static and unrepresentative of historical change over time.¹²³

It is this complexity, ambiguity and unpolished immediacy, which renders letters such a valuable source for understanding the processes and negotiations of urban development. The synthesis of the letters of numerous individual agents, on two large estate, and over a period of some seventy years, allows the charting of developments over time through the consideration of hundreds of single snapshots in the development of urban estates.

It is important to recognise that letters are problematic as a source if utilised without due caution. A letter does not represent the truth. Rather, it is a version of the truth, and a version of the truth at one particular time according to the writer. The author may change his or her opinion as new information is gleaned, or as the processes in question develop. The influence of other people, of external factors, or indeed of the author’s own mood, can subsequently change their understanding and interpretation. The historian is privy to this information. A letter therefore represents a

¹²² Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, p. 8.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 265-6.

permanent record of what an individual believes to be the truth at a particular moment, or, more accurately, what they want the recipient to believe. Such is their value as an historical source.

Letters are, by their nature, very personal, and as such have intrinsic filters of class, gender, place and time. This renders letters invaluable when discussing individuals and their role in the wider processes of urbanisation and professionalisation. By the nineteenth century, due to increases in literacy rates and the increased availability of paper, the writing of letters became a medium available to a wider portion of society. However, there are notable gaps in the use of letters as the principle source for historical studies.

The letters of the social and political elite in nineteenth-century society have regularly been used by historians. One such example of this is the letters of the prominent abolitionist, William Wilberforce. The voluminous collection of his letters has been recently catalogued and explored by historians such as Mark Smith.¹²⁴ Similarly, due to revisionist trends in historiography and the growth of ‘history from below’, as coined by E.P. Thompson in 1966, the letters of the poorest in society, notably pauper letters, have increasingly been utilised by historians.¹²⁵

However, between the use of the correspondence of elites and paupers, there is a relative absence of attention on the letters of those in the middle of society. This is demonstrated when one examines the sources utilised by the historians writing about the ‘middling sort’. None have used correspondence as their main source to ascertain the personal and professional lives of this section of society. In Shani D’Cruze’s study of the middling sort in eighteenth century Colchester, she outlines an exhaustive list of the types of sources consulted, with the use of correspondence being notably absent from this.¹²⁶ Moreover, while Margaret Hunt cites the use of correspondence,

¹²⁴ M. Smith, ‘William Wilberforce’, in A. Atherstone (ed.), *The Heart of Faith*, (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 71-80.

¹²⁵ For example, see S. King, ‘Pauper Letters as a Source’, *Family & Community History*, vol. 10, no. 2, (2007), pp. 167-170.

¹²⁶ In her footnotes, D’Cruze details the ‘types of sources used to compile data on middling individuals include local newspapers, wills, administration of personal estates, parish rates and land tax accounts, the corporation assembly book, borough quarter sessions and petty sessions, free burgess admissions, borough poll books, parish registers and so on.’ S. D’Cruze, ‘The Middling Sort’, p. 265.

amongst a vast amount of other source sets informing her research into the *Middle Sort*, she confesses that her consultation of these was sporadic.¹²⁷

Tomkins' study of Jeremiah Ginders, land agent to Earl Talbot from 1806, utilises the letters written to the agent during a short period of time, through 1829 and the first six months of 1830, when he appears to have retained all his incoming correspondence.¹²⁸ These letters, supplemented by other Talbot estate papers, wills and parish registers, allow Tomkins to examine an emergent middle-class family and their attempts to secure social advancement in the early nineteenth century. Ginders' correspondence primary focus is on the practical demands placed on a man by his family commitments and his management of relationships with friends, employers and colleagues. The case study ultimately provides an illustration of the importance of family relationships and networks in the fulfilment of duty, and demonstrate the value and potential of utilising personal and professional correspondence as a source for historical investigation.¹²⁹

The extensive use of correspondence undertaken in the present thesis has allowed a valuable insight into subjects of urban development and the importance of land agents. The correspondence of individual agents with tenants, other estate officials and with aristocrats, has proven invaluable for discerning estates' contribution to the development of society in growing towns and suburbs. Rather than detailing a definitive outcome, such as the termination of a tenantry, as sources such as rent rolls or agents' log books may allow, the correspondence show the process of negotiations, as well as the attitudes, priorities and assumptions of the agent and the landowner.

This approach is revealing for understanding the mechanisms of urban development. Rather than merely detailing the rent paid for a plot of land, the negotiations behind this are revealed. Letters can be used by the historian in a manner that no other source set allows. Discussions on price, the developers' autonomy in dictating the type and character of developments, discussions concerning

¹²⁷ M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680-1780*, (California, 1996), p. 10. Hunt claims to have attempted to 'synthesise a fairly large and scattered body of primary material... samplings rather than systematic coverage were the rule'.

¹²⁸ Tomkins, 'Fragility and Resilience in a middle-class family', p. 81.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2, pp. 106-7.

what was permitted and forbidden on the estate, and the criterion for selecting and defining 'desirable' tenants, are some of the multitude of issues letters can reveal. Ultimately, sources of authority and power are revealed as it becomes evident who made key policy decisions and whose authority was necessary to commence, halt and alter developments. No other source provides such an insight into the process of urbanisation.

CHANGE-OVER PERIODS

This thesis focuses on what may be defined as 'changeover periods' throughout the nineteenth century. The years in which an agent retired, was removed, or died, and was subsequently replaced by a successor, are the most revealing of the attitudes of the estate towards its property and the role it desired its agents to fulfil. The manner in which the role was explained, and interpreted by the new agent, reveals how landowners and chief agents often took the advent of a new agent as an opportunity to modify the management of the estate. Comparing the conduct of an agent to his predecessor reveals the importance of individual employees to the continuity or change of urban development.

Similarly, the inheritance of an aristocratic estate by an heir reveals much about estate management. Individual aristocrats sometimes revelled in their new position of authority and quickly sought to influence developments and appropriate funds for new ventures, neglecting those which their fathers had prioritised. In other instances, a newly incumbent landowner could prove himself ill prepared, improperly trained, or simply uninterested in his new responsibilities. In each instance, the estates' agents sought to guide and instruct their inexperienced employers, whilst recognising that if landowners' ill-advised whims could not be dissuaded from, they must be adopted in a manner least harmful to the estate.

As such, certain key 'change-over' years and periods receive a detailed focus in this thesis. The second earl of Bradford succeeded in September 1825 and quickly sanctioned Peter Potter's schemes for the building of new roads on the Walsall estate. January 1833 saw the creation of the dukedom of Sutherland for the Leveson Gower family, while in July of that year the first duke

died, to be replaced by his eldest son. In Walsall, Peter Potter died in 1843 and was succeeded by this eldest son, who had long been trained for the role.

The early 1860s witnessed the death of both the duke of Sutherland and the earl of Bradford, while 1864 and 1865 saw protracted negotiations to remove the Trentham agent and train his successor. This short period, more than any other, highlights the importance of the agent's personality to the management of estates and coincided with the initial developments of the duke's estate around Longton. The year 1877 witnessed the death of Trentham chief agent George Loch, and a restructuring of the estate management which coincided with the increase in prioritisation of suburban developments at Florence and Normacot.

Peter Potter the younger died in 1881, and was replaced by his second son George Gybbon Potter, whose personality and enthusiasm for the role were starkly different to that of his father and grandfather. Finally, both the duke of Sutherland and the earl of Bradford died in the 1890s. Their respective heirs had contrasting interpretations of the importance of their landed estates, which impacted greatly upon their tenantry in Longton and Walsall respectively.

These change-over periods were used alongside a sampling technique of relevant years to investigate in depth. This was required to systematically utilise the available primary sources to form the narrative. Using census returns to determine key periods of population examination in the towns, alongside information of when streets were laid-out as detailed in the Victoria County History of Staffordshire volumes, resulted in the periods of the 1830s, the 1850s-60s and 1878-1900 being identified for close treatment.

A sample of years in the middle of an agent's tenure was also taken, to demonstrate the management structure once stability had resumed. The year 1856, 13 years into Peter Potter the younger's career as chief agent, is one such example of this. An unusually voluminous amount of the agent's letters survives from this year, held at Walsall Local History Centre. On the Sutherland estate, the year 1878 is studied in some depth, 13 years into Menzies tenure. This year witnessed an increase in the intensity of suburban developments.

COMPARATIVE APPROACH

This thesis is a comparative study. Champions of a comparative approach to history believe 'it is impossible to derive a sociological generalisation from a single event'¹³⁰ Comparative history allows the study of 'patterns of social and political behaviour which transcend geographical and chronological boundaries, in a manner that narrative history... do[es] not allow.'¹³¹

Comparative studies have an established tradition in studies of urban history and the study of two or three localities has resulted in several important accounts. Cannadine's *Lord's and Landlords* contrasted case studies of the Calthorpe family's Birmingham suburb of Edgbaston with the duke of Devonshire's development of the seaside town of Eastbourne. Cannadine's conclusions through these comparisons provide a valuable explanation of the integral and differing role the aristocracy had on the growth of British towns.

Richard Trainor's 1993 study *Black Country Elites* focuses largely on the three towns of West Bromwich, Dudley and Bilston. As Trainor argues, the Black Country as a whole is too large and complex an area to allow the detailed examination of all towns and localities, so focused study of three specific towns allowed the identification of common themes and important differences, allowing conclusions about the nature of elites in urban areas.¹³²

The present thesis examines two aristocratic estates and the development of their urban estates in Staffordshire, separated by some 30 miles. The towns of Longton and Walsall developed at different times in the nineteenth century and at different rates. Yet while the two estates are studied in isolation, they faced similar challenges, expectations and opportunities. The responses to these external influences contribute to our wider understanding of the growth of British towns.

¹³⁰ M.M. Postan, quoted in G. Barraclough, *Main Trends in History*, (New York, 1991), p. 170.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

¹³² Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, p. 3.

The significance of these findings becomes apparent through a comparative study as important similarities and differences between the actions of the two estates, their agents and the townspeople are revealed.

1.4 STAFFORDSHIRE ARISTOCRACY

The background to the two aristocratic families considered in this thesis require brief outline, following a note on the use of names. Although the family did not assume the surname ‘Sutherland’ until the 2nd duke’s accession in 1833, the Leveson Gower estates are commonly referred to by historians as the ‘Sutherland Estate’, and will be described as such throughout this thesis. The terms North Staffordshire estate and Trentham estate are used interchangeably. The estates owned by the Bridgeman family are referred to as the ‘Bradford Estate’ throughout this thesis. The terms ‘Bridgeman family’ and ‘Bradford family’ are utilised interchangeably throughout, as are ‘Leveson Gower family’ and ‘Sutherland family.’

DUKES OF SUTHERLAND

The Sutherland family’s history has been detailed at length by Eric Richards. The Leveson family were established in South Staffordshire by the thirteenth century and purchased land through profits from farming and wool dealing. Upon the dissolution of the monasteries, the lands of Trentham Priory and Lilleshall Abbey were purchased, and the former’s buildings made into a family home.¹³³ The family’s estate grew very substantially in the following centuries through inheritances and marriage. Indeed, Disraeli spoke of the family’s talent for ‘absorbing heiresses.’¹³⁴

On the death of Sir Richard Leveson in 1661, the Trentham and Lilleshall estates passed to his great nephew, Sir William Gower, who changed the family name to Leveson Gower, and united the West Midland estates with those of the Gowers in Yorkshire. The title of marquess of Stafford was bestowed upon Granville Leveson Gower in 1786. Through his marriage to the daughter of the duke of Bridgewater, the ‘canal duke’, his children became heirs to the enormous industrial fortune of the Bridgewater family. In 1803 their son, George Granville Leveson Gower, inherited the

¹³³ The following summary of the history of the Leveson Gower family is informed by N. J. Tringham, (ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire, Volume 11: Audley, Keele and Trentham*, (2013).

¹³⁴ E. Richards, *The Leviathan of Wealth: The Sutherland Fortune in the Industrial Revolution*, (London, 1973), p. 5.

annual net income from the Bridgewater Canal and became, in his own words ‘abominably wealthy’.¹³⁵

Leveson Gower married Elizabeth, Countess of Sutherland and heiress to the vast Sutherland estate in the Scottish Highlands, comprising over a million acres. He succeeded his father as marquess in 1803 and was described by contemporaries as a ‘leviathan of wealth’. By the late 1820s he had a gross income of almost £200,000 per annum. Upon the advice of his chief agent, James Loch, he invested in the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, an apparent rival to his canal network. Loch convinced the marquess to purchase a fifth of the railway’s shares for £100,000, the value of which rose spectacularly within a few years.¹³⁶

In January 1833, King William IV raised the marquess to the dukedom of Sutherland. The title was ostensibly in recognition of the duke’s support for the Reform Act, although Lord Francis, the duke’s second son, claimed that the duke was a reformer ‘out of mere cowardice and dotage’.¹³⁷ When he died in July 1833, the duke was the largest landowner in the country, as well as the largest canal and railway proprietor. The *Quarterly Review* claimed that his was ‘a single estate certainly not in these days equalled in the British Empire’. He was succeeded by his son, George Granville, who added ‘Sutherland’ to his surname in 1841.¹³⁸

The family’s main seats were Trentham Hall in Staffordshire, Lilleshall Abbey in Shropshire and Dunrobin Castle in the Scottish Highlands. Their London residence of Stafford House was one of the most opulent houses in the capital. Queen Victoria reportedly declared to the duchess of Sutherland, ‘I have come from my house to your palace’.¹³⁹ The family traditionally visited Trentham for only a fortnight each summer. Preparations for their arrival were extensive and

¹³⁵ E. Richards, ‘Gower, George Granville Leveson, first duke of Sutherland (1758–1833)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Quoted in Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p. 17.

included the dredging and refilling of the lake, which became plagued by pollution from the Potteries towns via the River Trent.

EARLS OF BRADFORD

The earldom of Bradford of the first creation was bestowed upon Francis Newport in 1694.¹⁴⁰ The title of Bradford was chosen after the Bradford hundred, the largest of Shropshire's administrative divisions. The Newport family had been established in Shropshire since the fifteenth century and the marriage of Richard Newport, son of the first earl, to Mary Wilbraham in 1681, brought the family to Staffordshire. Wilbraham's family owned the Weston estate as well as other Staffordshire properties, including the manor of Walsall.

Upon the death of the childless fourth earl in 1762, the Newport titles became extinct and his estates were divided by a deed of partition between his sister, the countess of Montrath, and his nephew, Sir Henry Bridgeman. In this partition Bridgeman drew the Weston estate, leaving the Walsall lot, which included the manor and the right of presentation to Walsall church, to Lady Mountrath. In 1802, the last earl of Mountrath died, devolving the Walsall estate to the Bridgeman family.

Sir Henry Bridgeman, who also owned estates in Lancashire, Warwickshire and Shropshire, was created Baron Bradford of Bradford in 1794. His eldest son, Orlando, later convinced the Prince Regent, a former school friend, to revive the earldom of Bradford in 1815, and Orlando was thus made the first earl of Bradford of the second creation.

Successive earls of Bradford continued to add to their existing estates through purchases of land throughout the 19th century, and oversaw considerable industrialisation and urban development of the Walsall and Lancashire estates. The profits from these two estates were reinvested to aid further

¹⁴⁰ The following summary of the family history of the earls of Bradford is drawn from M. Midgley (Ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire, Volume IV: Staffordshire Domesday and West Cuttleston Hundred*, (Oxford, 1958), pp. 170-173 and G. Wrottersley (ed.), 'History of Weston-under-Lizard', *Staffordshire Historical Collections*, vol. 2 [new series], (1899), pp. 194-294.

development across the Bradford's estates and used to improve the family seat at Weston Park, in the parish of Weston-under-Lizard, Shropshire.

The Bradford family held seven main estates in the counties of Staffordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Lancashire. The Bolton estate was situated on the prolific Lancashire Coalfield, exploited by successive earls of Bradford throughout the nineteenth century. Similarly, on the Knockin estate in Shropshire, mining and collieries operations were undertaken, most notably at Llanmynech. Smaller estates included Hughley and Tonge Castle in Shropshire, and the land surrounding the family seat at Weston.

1.5 STAFFORDSHIRE TOWNS

The thesis focusses on Staffordshire towns and Staffordshire aristocracy. It addresses the historic, pre-1974, county of Staffordshire, as both Longton and Walsall now reside outside of the modern county, each belonging to separate unitary authorities. A brief outline of the social and economic development of Longton and Walsall in the nineteenth century is necessary to provide background and context to the analysis contained in the thesis.

LONGTON

The town of Longton must be understood in the context of the Staffordshire Potteries. The six towns and surrounding villages of North Staffordshire, where pottery manufacture had been practised continuously from the eighteenth century, form a linear conurbation of some ten miles on outcrops of coal and clay.¹⁴¹ The Pottery towns of Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke upon Trent, Fenton and Longton are bordered to the west by the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme. While Newcastle's development was that of the slow evolution of a burghal community, the Potteries towns demonstrated the rapid growth of the industrial age.¹⁴² The below map from 1832 (figure 1) shows Lane End and Longton, the most south-easterly of the six towns, in relation to the rest of the Potteries, and the borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

¹⁴¹ R. Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1998), p. 11.

¹⁴² J. Jenkins, (Ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire, Vol. 8*, (London, 1963), p. 80.

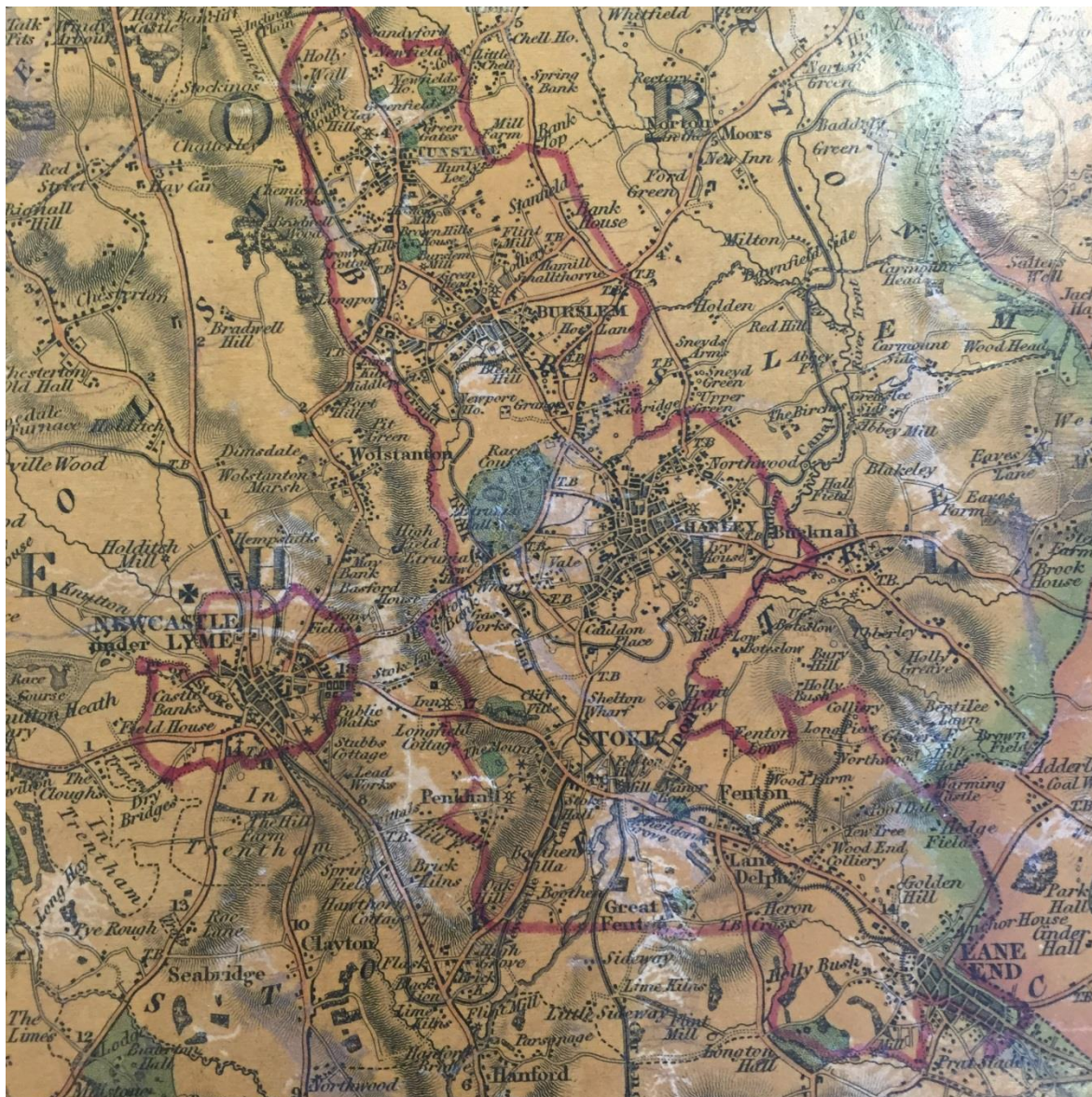


Figure 1: Map of North Staffordshire, 1832.¹⁴³

Between 1801 and 1851, the Potteries towns witnessed a 355% growth in population. This was greater than the average growth of factory textile towns in Northern England in the same period of 299%. Conversely, Newcastle grew by 123.5%, below the growth rate of most towns.¹⁴⁴ The majority of the growth was from natural increase. Marguerite Dupree suggests that 45% of the

¹⁴³ SRO, D593/H/2/9

¹⁴⁴ R. Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Lancaster, 1998), p. 13.

Potteries' population growth between 1841 and 1851 was due to in-migration, with most of that being short-distance migration from rural Staffordshire.¹⁴⁵

Each of the Potteries towns was overwhelmingly working class in character. A visitor in 1839 remarked on the absence of 'good shops, or houses, which indicate a middle class' as was common in most other towns. He observed only two classes of houses, and two classes of people: 'the thousands of those of the working order, and the fine massy and palace-like abodes of the wealthy employers.'¹⁴⁶

Despite these curious features, it has been observed that the Potteries have been 'relatively neglected by historians' compared with other industrial localities, such as those based on textiles.¹⁴⁷ Notable contemporary studies include those by Simeon Shaw and John Ward in 1829 and 1843 respectively, while many early twentieth-century studies focused on prominent industrialists, namely the master potters, rather than seeking to compile a history of Potteries society. Perhaps owing to the decentralised nature of the six towns, a comprehensive study of the Potteries as a whole has not yet been produced.

The Victorian County History volume on the North Staffordshire conurbation from 1963 remains valuable, despite its encyclopaedic style being a little dated. Ernest Warrillow's *Sociological History* from 1960 likewise remains an important resource, while the 1993 collection of essays compiled by A.D.M. Phillips in *Continuity and Change*, address several important themes. While several PhD theses have addressed aspects of North Staffordshire's history, none has yet focussed on Longton specifically. These accounts have tended to focus on the growth of industry and specialised micro-studies have addressed subjects such as the emergence of the factory system, occupational health and the role of female potters.¹⁴⁸ Several theses have charted the development

¹⁴⁵ M. Dupree, *Family Structure in the Staffordshire Potteries, 1840-1880*, (Oxford, 1995), pp. 87-91.

¹⁴⁶ *North Staffordshire Mercury*, cited Fyson, *Chartism in North Staffordshire*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ Dupree, *Family Structure in the Staffordshire Potteries*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴⁸ For example see; A. Popp, 'Business Structure, Business Culture and the Industrial District; The Potteries c1850-1900', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Sheffield Hallam University, 1997), M. Nixon, 'The Emergence of the Factory System in the Staffordshire Pottery Industry', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Aston University, 1976), C. Holdsworth, 'Potters Rot and Plumbism: Occupational Health in the North Staffordshire Potteries, 1890-1914', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 1995), C. Buckley, 'Women Designers in

of religion in the region, while Robert Fyson's impressive 1998 account of Chartism in North Staffordshire provides a valuable account of the political movement in North Staffordshire.¹⁴⁹

Longton is the most south-easterly of the Potteries town and was generally known as Lane End until the 1830s. The name was officially changed in 1848.¹⁵⁰ Consisting of roughly 1,000 acres in the parish of Stoke upon Trent, the townships of Longton and Lane End became a Borough in 1865. In 1883 the boundaries were extended to incorporate the suburbs of Florence and Dresden from Trentham parish, Normacot from Stone parish, and East Vale from Caverswall parish.¹⁵¹ Longton consistently ranked as the third most populous of the pottery towns, behind Hanley and Burslem, throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁵²

In 1821, the population of Longton and Lane End was 7,100. With the rapid extension of the pottery, coal and iron industries, the town grew considerably during the nineteenth century and had 15,000 inhabitants by 1851, and almost 20,000 by 1871. Following the annexation of the surrounding suburbs in 1883, the population swelled to 34,327, which had risen to 38,815 by 1901.¹⁵³

As Longton expanded, the centre of the town became heavily concentrated with buildings, both residential and industrial. In the early nineteenth century Lane End had been noted for 'the great irregularity... of its buildings of every size and sort, from the respectable residence of the manufacturer to the mud and saggar hovel of the pauper.'¹⁵⁴ As the town became 'populous and thriving', this irregularity was exacerbated as rows of terraced housing were erected alongside pottery works, brick fields and other manufactories.¹⁵⁵

the North Staffordshire Pottery Industry, 1914-1940', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of East Anglia, 1991).

¹⁴⁹ Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire'.

¹⁵⁰ Jenkins, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 8, p. 226.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁵² See population tables reproduced in Fyson, *Chartism in North Staffordshire*, p. 12.

¹⁵³ Jenkins, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 8, pp. 226-8.

¹⁵⁴ S. Shaw quoted in Jenkins, *History of the County of Stafford*, Vol. 8, p. 226.

¹⁵⁵ S. Pigot, *Typology of England*, (London, 1841).

Longton is recognised as containing the largest amount of poor quality housing in the Potteries towns in the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁶ However, housing is observed to have been largely of better standard than in other industrial centres and Longton had no more than fifty back-to-back houses by 1855. Moreover, the pottery towns were surrounded and separated by countryside, which was often within a mile of most houses, a luxury residents of many industrial centres did not have.¹⁵⁷

The Trent and Mersey Canal passed two miles west of the town. By 1834 four coaches ran through Longton, three of which ran daily between Liverpool and London, Burslem and Birmingham, and Longton and Manchester. The fourth, connecting Newcastle and Derby, ran three times a week. The town had its own postmaster by 1790.¹⁵⁸ A railway station was acquired in 1848, part of the North Staffordshire Railway Line from Stoke to Uttoxeter and Burton.

Although earthenware and porcelain production had existed in the eighteenth century, the pottery industry became established in Longton later than in neighbouring towns. Only in the early nineteenth century did the rise of the bone china industry bring importance to the town. This industry rapidly expanded and by 1851 there existed 42 potworks in Longton, more than in any other town. Unlike neighbouring towns, Longton was characterised by smaller scale undertakings rather than by the continued presence of great pottery dynasties of the likes of Wedgwood or Spode in the towns of Burslem and Stoke, respectively.¹⁵⁹

The history of Longton has received sparse attention from historians, perhaps in part owing to this absence of pottery dynasties in the town. Aside from the brief summary contained in the 1963 Stoke-on-Trent Victoria County History, J.H.Y. Briggs' research into 'the Birth of the Community' provides a summary of the industry, population and housing in the nineteenth-century town.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', p. 28., A. Phillips (Ed.), *The Potteries: Continuity and Change in a Staffordshire Conurbation*, (London, 1993), p. 117.

¹⁵⁷ Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', pp. 28-9.

¹⁵⁸ Jenkins, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 8, p. 228.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 238.

¹⁶⁰ Briggs, *The History of Longton: The Birth of a Community*.

However, this information is not presented in a scholarly style and the further volumes that Briggs planned for Longton's history never came to fruition.

The centre of Longton lay less than four miles to the north east of Trentham Hall, the Staffordshire seat of the duke of Sutherland. In 1831, the population of the parish of Trentham was 2,344. Access to Longton was afforded along Trentham Road. Much of the land between Trentham and Longton consisted of fields, small farm holding and cottages. Almost equidistant between the two settlements lay Blurton Chapelry, with a population in 1831 of 849.¹⁶¹

Although the duke of Sutherland held some land in the town of Longton, the majority of his development of the town in the nineteenth century was to the south of the town centre. The areas of Normacot and Spratslade consisted of little more than small clusters of cottages and farms until the mid-1860s when the third duke assented to the systematic suburban development of Spratslade, later renamed Florence in honour of his eldest daughter. This was accompanied by increased building of houses in Normacot. These areas were characterised by a systematic and regulated growth, in striking contrast to the piecemeal and haphazard growth of the rest of Longton. It is these aristocratic suburbs, rather than the development of the town of Longton itself, that are the focus of much of the analysis in this thesis.

WALSALL

The Potteries towns are similar in some respects to the towns of the Black Country in south Staffordshire. Indeed, Hanley-born author Arnold Bennett believed that the two districts were 'very similar; only the Black County is 'worse' as it is so much bigger.'¹⁶² Unlike most urban centres, the region consists of numerous scattered towns and villages, connected by common industrial, social and topological features. Which of the cluster of towns immediately to the north west of Birmingham should correctly be included in the Black Country is disputed, although the roughly rectangular area atop the 'Ten Yard Coal' seam offers the most common parameter.¹⁶³ This

¹⁶¹ W. White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, (London, 1851).

¹⁶² Cited in Trainor, *Black County Elites*, p. 77.

¹⁶³ Trainor, *Black County Elites*, pp. 1-3.

definition presents an area of a hundred square miles encompassing almost twenty localities. By 1901 this area had a population of 700,000.¹⁶⁴

Walsall lies towards the north-eastern edge of the Black Country, some nine miles north-west of Birmingham and six miles east of Wolverhampton. Unlike Longton, a product of the industrial age, Walsall has a considerably longer history, being an Ancient Parish consisting of a borough and foreign. The borough was first incorporated in 1627, and a new borough of Walsall was created in 1835, later becoming a county borough in 1889. While the medieval borough had been half a mile in diameter, the 1835 borough consisted of an area of roughly 10 square miles centred on St Matthew's Church, standing on a limestone hill in the centre of the town.¹⁶⁵ The area delineated as Walsall Foreign was considerably larger than the borough itself, and was the site of much of the urban expansion of the town in the nineteenth century.

¹⁶⁴ Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ M. Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 17, (London, 1971), p. 143, P. Liddle, *Victorian Walsall: An Economic and Social Study*, (PhD Thesis University of London, 1988), p. 24.

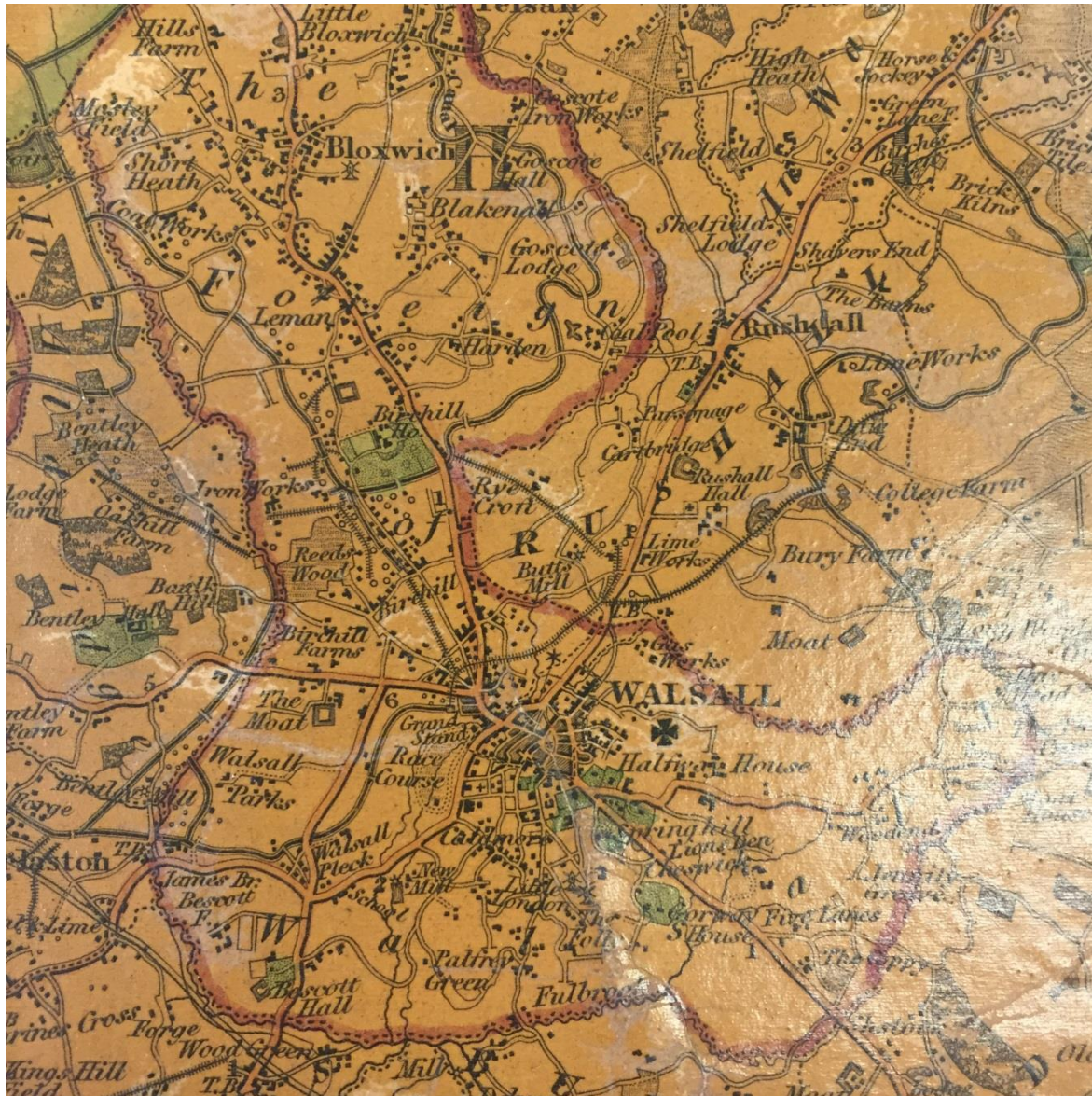


Figure 2: Map of Walsall and surrounding areas, 1832.¹⁶⁶

Although an established market community with ancient roots, Walsall experienced spectacular growth as a result of nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation. From 15,064 in 1831, Walsall's population increased to 86,430 by 1901, an increase of 477%. Phillip Liddle argues that Walsall's growth during Queen Victoria's reign exceeded that of every other English town which

¹⁶⁶ SRO, D593/H/2/9.

returned a member to Parliament in 1832.¹⁶⁷ By 1834, the town ranked second only behind Wolverhampton in terms of production in Staffordshire.¹⁶⁸

As with other Black County towns, Walsall became known for a mix of mining and metalworking industries. Limestone, coal and ironstone mines could be found on the parameters of the town, and employed many of Walsall's inhabitants. The workshops in the town centred on metal working and the leather trades. The town gained importance as a centre of horse furnishings, including the often elaborate working of metal to create stirrups, spurs and saddle bars. However, a wide variety of metal products were made in the town including clocks, watches and tools, leading to Walsall's reputation as a town of a hundred trades. The leather industry predominantly centred on the production of saddles, although when demand declined, attention was turned to the production of other leather goods.¹⁶⁹

Walsall was a town of workshops rather than factories, and was dominated by 'little masters' rather than large industrialists. Many of the town's workshops were conversions of house interiors. Even as the town's population increased, Walsall had few back to back houses, and had a sizable middle class, in contrast to the predominantly working class society of the Potteries.¹⁷⁰

Similarly to the Potteries, the Black Country has received limited attention from historians. While some accounts provide valuable detail of the Black Country generally, notably George Barnsby's *Social Conditions in the Black Country* and Richard Trainor's *Black Country Elites*, the region has been largely overlooked. In each of these accounts, Walsall's inclusion is negligible. Ernest Homeshaw provides a comprehensive, but now rather dated narrative of the administrative development of Walsall borough, while the 1976 Victoria County History volume covering the town is an invaluable, encyclopaedic resource.

¹⁶⁷ Liddle, 'Victorian Walsall', p. 23.

¹⁶⁸ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 17, p. 145.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 17, pp. 192-204.

¹⁷⁰ Liddle, 'Victorian Walsall', p. 23.

Phillip Liddle's 1988 thesis 'Victorian Walsall: A Social and Economic Study' provides a detailed and valuable narrative to the development of the town. Many of its chapters focus on demographic fluctuations; birth rate, death rate and migration levels, while later chapters focus on the economy of the town, its labour force and living standards of the poor.¹⁷¹

While Liddle's is the only PhD thesis to address Walsall explicitly, several theses have analysed aspects of Black Country society generally, focussing on areas including work, religion and crime. Themes such as the structures and relationships within coalmining families, and the growth of working class movements, add to our knowledge of the social development of this region. Janet Sullivan's 2014 thesis on industrialisation in Oldbury could suggest a return to focuses on individual Black Country towns.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Liddle, 'Victorian Walsall.'

¹⁷² For amongst numerous examples see;

R. Leese, 'The Impact of Methodism on Black Country Society, 1743-1860', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 1972), J. Ridgeway, 'Structures, Relationships and Attitudes: Coal Mining Family Life in the Black Country during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 1996), D. J. Phillips, 'Crime and Authority in the Black Country 1835-60; A Study of Prosecuted Offences and Law Enforcement in an Industrialising Area', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1973), E. Taylor, 'The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1863-1914', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Keele University, 1974), L. Cort, 'This is the Place for Toil': Neighbourhoods at Work in the Later Victorian Black Country, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University College London, 2001), J. Sullivan, 'Paying the Price for Industrialisation: The Experience of a Black Country Town, Oldbury, in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2014).

2.0: URBANISATION FIRST PHASE: 1830-40

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The 1830s were arguably the most definitive decade in nineteenth century urbanisation. They formed the chaotic breeding ground out of which the more stabilised and prosperous mid-Victorian period would later emerge. Religious and political tension ran high, and fears grew that Britain might witness a revolution. The 1832 Reform Act, the Poor Law Amendment Act, religious tensions, the cholera epidemic and an economic depression combined to make the decade an uncertain and troubling one for many.

These changes posed difficulties for aristocratic landowners who faced mounting demands for change from society whilst simultaneously desiring to preserve their own privileged position. This chapter analyses the management of the Bradford and Sutherland estates as landowners and their agents addressed these challenges in the 1830s. It examines the agency structure on each estate and the integral role individual agents played in how the estates were managed. The burgeoning professionalisation of the agency role will be highlighted, as will the social and professional backgrounds of several individual agents. The 1830s were an important decade in the development of the earl of Bradford's urban estate in Walsall. These developments, and the integral role of chief agent Peter Potter, will be examined. In contrast, the relative lack of enthusiasm for urbanisation on the duke of Sutherland's North Staffordshire estate will be highlighted.

This chapter will serve as a 'baseline' to which comparisons will be made in later chapters. In particular, the chapter will demonstrate how the structure of estate agency, the process of urbanisation, and the relations of an estate to its tenantry, existed in the 1830s, the chronological starting point for this thesis.

2.2 AGENCY STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE AGENT

The analysis of land agents as presented by historians such as Thompson, Spring and Beckett focus on the role of the agent almost exclusively in the rural setting. Therefore, as will be demonstrated, the role of the agents discussed in this chapter, most notably of Peter Potter the elder, differ from the generalisations made by historians, as he had considerable involvement in urban developments.

Thompson's description of the 'ideal' model of agency structure, as outlined in the preceding chapter, where the chief-agent managed the principal estate and supervised the accounts of the sub-agents for the detached estates, relates closely to Lord Stafford's estate as it operated under James Loch's stewardship from August 1812.¹ A similar model was adapted on the Bradford estates, following the appointment of Peter Potter as chief-agent in 1820. There was a recognition, by smaller as well as grand estates, that good management was increasingly necessary and profitable to a landed estate.²

Walsall was chosen by the mid-1820s as the residence for the chief agent of Bradford's estates. Walsall was considered the most accessible and central to the detached estates, and preferable to the ancestral seat of Weston. The relocation of the chief agent from the principle agricultural estate, Knockin, to the growing town of Walsall, is indicative of the increasing importance of urbanisation to the Bradford estate, taking it away from Thompson's model.

On the Sutherland estate, Loch resided for the most part in London, although often travelled to the Scottish Highlands. He delegated day-to-day operations to his sub-agents. An estate of the magnitude and wealth of the Leveson Gowers required a chief-agent who was not tied down to a geographical location. Moreover, Loch's presence was regularly required in the capital due to his own career interests as a Member of Parliament for the Wick Burghs constituency from 1832 to 1852. Conversely, Potter only had local interests and was accordingly situated in the most convenient place for the management of the estates. On both the Sutherland and Bradford estates,

¹ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 166.

² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Thompson's description of a relationship of complete confidence between owner and chef-agent is apparent, and many of the landowners' powers were delegated to Loch and Potter respectively.³

STAFFORDSHIRE ESTATES AND PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL AGENTS

From his appointment in 1812, Loch undertook the centralised decision-making for the Sutherland estate as a whole and employed professional agents on the individual estates. Beneath Loch existed a well organised structure of agents. These sub-agents were in charge of geographical areas of the estate and were answerable to Loch. Loch coordinated with Lord Stafford as well as with the London solicitors and bankers. He was in charge of estate finances and much of estate policy. Loch acted as the link between the landowners and the localised sub-agents who lived amongst the tenantry. Ultimately, as stipulated in his contract, Loch acted 'in the name of and on behalf of the marquess', to run his estates for the maximum benefit of the Leveson Gower family.⁴

Upon his appointment, Loch quickly restructured the estate. The nature of this agency restructuring was consistent with the professionalisation of estate agency as discussed by historians and heralded great efficiency, competence and personal accountability. Indeed, Loch is one of Spring's case studies, suggesting he was a forebear of the breed of professional agents. The Leveson Gower estate in North Staffordshire was overseen by an agent situated in Trentham. In 1817, Loch sent the incumbent, Francis Suther to oversee parts of the estates in Sutherland, and replaced him with William Lewis, a Scotsman from Kirkcaldy.

Lewis was personally selected and trained by Loch, and the two had a close professional relationship, working together for 25 years until Lewis' retirement. Correspondence between Loch and Lewis was frequent and often friendly in tone, more so than between Potter and his sub-agents on the Bradford estate. Loch regularly enquired after Lewis' health, which was frequently poor, and sought his advice on diverse matters of estate management. Lewis' opinions were respected by Loch and the subagent was privy to highly sensitive information, including details of the duke's

³ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 153.

⁴ Staffordshire Record Office (hereafter SRO), D4092/I/8, Letter of Attorney, Marquess of Stafford to James Loch, 1812.

personal expenditure and health problems.⁵ Whilst Loch decided on central policy, he would consult with Lewis to ascertain if his ideas were feasible at a local level, often asking for ‘some judgement... [on] how far my notion would be achievable.’⁶

Although Loch acted as an intermediary, relaying the duke’s instructions to his subordinates, Lewis was also in direct contact with the landowner. The duke asked for Lewis’ opinion on matters of local importance and often suggested that Lewis was to decide how to proceed with specific issues.⁷ The duke’s letters to Lewis included personal details about family parties and visits, suggesting some level of personal relationship.⁸

As will be demonstrated, rather than Loch having ‘a double duty’, to both the landlord and the people, as has been suggested by his biographer, Eric Richards, this duty was borne more by Lewis.⁹ Lewis was conscientious as an agent and had a good relationship with the tenantry, particularly those who were his neighbours in Trentham. Indeed, Lewis’ relationship with the Trentham tenantry is indicative of the different pressures in the role of absentee chief agent, and sub-agent who lived amongst the tenantry.¹⁰

As is apparent for many agents on aristocratic estates, Lewis was severely overworked. Until 1834, he managed the entire Staffordshire and Shropshire estates, including Lilleshall Abbey and the family’s estates in Wolverhampton. By 1834, as the role of the agent had increased in scope and importance, Lewis felt he could no longer perform the role of agent for both the Shropshire and Staffordshire estates to his satisfaction. He informed Loch that the Shropshire property was ‘full employment for any man’ and believed the current situation was detrimental to both estates.¹¹

⁵ ‘After a better day yesterday, the duke is not so well today and I very very much fear the worst’. SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Loch to Lewis, 18.7.1833.

⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/1/16 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1830], Loch to Lewis, 13.6.1830.

⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/3/33 [In-Letters: General of William Lewis, Jul.-Dec. 1835], Duke of Sutherland to Lewis, 23.11.1835.

⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/3/33 [In-Letters: General of William Lewis, Jul.-Dec. 1835], Duke of Sutherland to Lewis, 23.11.1835.

⁹ E. Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p. 31.

¹⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Loch to Lewis, 9.8.1833.

¹¹ SRO, D593/K/3/2/14 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1834], Lewis to Loch, 17.1.1834.

Loch concurred, and in 1834 William Smith was appointed to manage the Shropshire estates. Lewis was heavily involved in Smith's training and remained in regular correspondence with him as they coordinated estate matters. Lewis also influenced the restructuring of the Scottish estates, offering Loch his opinions on how the agency would be improved and efficiency increased. Due to his frequent poor health, Lewis retired in 1842 after suffering a stroke. He retired to the model farm at Groundslow, two miles south of Trentham Hall.

Subordinate to Lewis were a number of men who fulfilled some of the roles of sub-agents, undertaking the role along-side other occupations, and operating on a localised scale. These can perhaps be best likened to the farmer-bailiff in Thompson's discussion of late eighteenth century estate structure. Indeed, Loch characterised the position as one of 'half agent – half bailiff – fit to command and direct.'¹² Loch heralded the importance of the subagents and championed the 'value of an active and zealous steward or bailiff'.¹³ Lewis himself emphasised the importance of 'competent agents... on the spot... keeping always strictly in view the situation and means of the tenantry and the interests and reputation of our noble family.'¹⁴

While the bailiffs worked under a subagent, Loch demanded that he, as chief agent, must be the source of authority for these bailiffs. In removing a bailiff under Mr. Young, a Scottish factor, Loch cited specifically his objection to the loyalty of the man, stating that he was more like Young's servant than a subagent. Loch informed Lewis that he had 'told Lord and Lady S yesterday [that] I must have a person who looked to me alone, and not to Mr Young, and they agreed.'¹⁵

Lewis was in regular correspondence with numerous subordinate bailiffs including those in many of the townships on the North Staffordshire estate. At Lane End, Lewis was in regular correspondence with James Glover, who wrote to Lewis concerning farming practices and asked for advice so that he could 'execute [Lewis'] wishes at a cheaper rate as well as in less time'.¹⁶

¹² SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Lewis to Loch 24.1.1832.

¹³ J. Loch, *An Account of The Improvements on the Estates of the Marquess of Stafford*, (London, 1820), p. 198.

¹⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Lewis to Loch 29.1.1832.

¹⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Loch to Lewis 24.1.1832.

¹⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/3/33 [In-Letters: General of William Lewis, Jul.-Dec. 1835], Glover to Lewis, 6.8.1835.

Glover professed that he would endeavour to give Lewis ‘every satisfaction by keeping things right and all in order’ in Lane End.¹⁷

Similarities exist between the Sutherland agency structure in the 1830s, and that of the Bradford estate. In 1820, Lord Bradford appointed Peter Potter as chief-agent and instructed him to oversee a reorganisation of the agency structure. As with the appointment of Loch on the Sutherland estate, this restructuring was indicative of the trend towards professionalisation of estate agency. Potter became the principal agent and receiver. Subordinate to him was a bailiff for each of the six main estates. These bailiffs were to ‘assist to greater extent, collect, report and correspond with the principal agent.’ Potter was to visit all estates twice yearly.¹⁸

However, the size of the Bradford estate did not warrant the employment of a dedicated chief-agent in Loch’s mould, free from the responsibility of the management of a specific geographical estate. Instead, Potter acted as both the chief-agent, coordinating and dictating to sub-agents on the smaller estates, as well as being the agent of the Walsall estate.

Potter cannot therefore be considered the parallel of either Loch or Lewis as his role constituted elements of both. In some ways, Potter’s position as chief-agent was akin to Loch’s in that he coordinated directly with, and was answerable only to, the landowner. Moreover, Potter also acted as the link between Lord Bradford and the sub-agents of the lesser estates, as well as between the aristocrat and his tenantry. However, in his role as the Walsall agent, Potter had responsibilities that Loch did not have, and which were similar to Lewis’ role. The day-to-day running of the Walsall estate, the collection of rents and the interaction with tenants were tasks that Loch delegated to his localised sub-agents, a liberty Potter did not have in Walsall.

As with Lewis and Loch, Potter was a diligent agent. The scope of his knowledge and the diversity of the functions he performed is notable. Potter liaised with the sub-agents with authority on diverse subjects, and demonstrated Spring’s desirable attribute of versatility. Potter demonstrated a

¹⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/3/33 [In-Letters: General of William Lewis, Jul.-Dec. 1835], Glover to Lewis, 6.8.1835.

¹⁸ SRO, D1287/13/8 K/264, Potter to Lord Bradford, 16.11.1820.

comprehensive knowledge of farming practices, while simultaneously acting in a legal capacity with Mr Darwell, the Walsall solicitor.¹⁹ Potter had a degree of political knowledge and influence, as demonstrated by his input to a House of Commons committee on Turnpike roads in April 1830, while also acting as a spokesman for tenants when they were troubled by outside authorities.²⁰

However, as will be discussed, Potter's most significant attribute can be considered his knowledge and expertise as a land surveyor, which impacted greatly upon the considerable development of Walsall from the late 1820s until his death in 1843. Potter's influence, through his decedents, was to have a decisive impact on Walsall's growth for a further century.

As with the Sutherland estate, the Bradford agency structure underwent modification in the 1830s. While Lewis felt the superintendence of both the Staffordshire and Shropshire estates was too much for one man to effectively manage, a similar realisation was made by Potter. By the late 1830s George Piggott was effectively chief-agent for the Bradford's Lancashire estate, relieving some of the burden from Potter, who was now in his late 60s. It was deemed that the Lancashire estate, with its several mines and coal seams, required a dedicated agent to itself, leaving Potter to focus on the other estates. The vast profitability and potential of the Bolton estate was becoming apparent and began to outstrip the income of the other estates.

Piggott remained subordinate to Potter, but was granted much more authority to make decisions than the other sub-agents. Although gaining some experience with limestone mines on the Walsall estate, Potter recognised that Piggott's knowledge of the Lancashire Coalfield surpassed his own. Potter resolved to 'throw no obstacles' in the way of local decisions, provided Piggott proposed only policies which would improve Bradford's property.²¹

¹⁹ Walsall Local History Centre (hereafter WLHC), 59/21 (Letter 1730), Potter to Bradford, 24.2.1830 is one of many such examples of this.

²⁰ See WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1763), Potter to Simpson, 10.4.1830. See for example the case of Mr Ogle's field being entered by the Junction Canal Company (WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1759), Potter to T. Eyre Lee, 7.4.1830.)

²¹ WLHC, 59/21, (Letter 1863), Potter to Piggott, 9.1.1830.

BACKGROUND AND QUALITIES OF AGENTS

Spring's description of many agents being the sons of 'practical men' and often already acquainted with the varied business of land management, largely applies to William Lewis.²² Hailing from Kirkcaldy, his personal correspondence consists largely of letters to family members still living and working on farms in Fife. His professional correspondence depicts knowledge of diverse matters relating to the running of an estate and agriculture. Although his social background is difficult to ascertain, Lewis was undoubtedly a practical man from a Scottish farming family. Although evidently intelligent, there is no evidence of his receiving formal training. He was instead selected and trained personally by Loch. Thus, Lewis fits Spring's archetype of the land agent neatly.

Conversely, James Loch's background has been researched in detail by historians, most notably by his biographer Eric Richards. The Loch family's Drylaw estate near Edinburgh generated considerable wealth. Upon his father's death, the eight-year-old Loch lived with his uncle on his estate near Kinross.²³ Loch studied law at the University of Edinburgh, where he was described by tutors as a 'glittering student'. Loch wrote for the *Edinburgh Review* and was president of the Speculative Society.²⁴ Although called to the English Bar as a conveyancing barrister in 1806, Loch declined a legal career and offers of entry into politics in order to become auditor and estate commissioner to Lord Stafford in August 1812.²⁵

In many ways, Loch's education and social background are considerably grander than Spring's typical model. However, as the chief-agent of an estate as vast and wealthy as that of the marquis of Stafford, it is perhaps unsurprising that a highly educated and qualified man was sought for its management. As well as his legal training and formal education, Loch demonstrated a diverse practical knowledge of estate management, honed from his upbringing on his uncle's estate. Spring

²² Spring, *English Landed Estate*, p. 100.

²³ Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p. 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-2.

²⁵ Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p. 24. Loch would later have a political career, first becoming an MP in 1827.

observed that Loch was involved in the daily administration of the estate to a greater degree than other barrister-auditors he examined on great estates.²⁶

Peter Potter's social background and education also challenges Spring's model of the typical land agent. Potter was born into a relatively affluent family in London. His father had been a coal and corn merchant and was reportedly a 'man of some substance'.²⁷ He was educated at Christ's Hospital school where he was considered a 'prodigy of intellect' displaying a proficiency for Latin and mathematics.²⁸

In 1790 Potter was appointed as midshipman with the East India Company. He meticulously kept log books of his voyages to China, Java and Calcutta. These expeditions included a period of imprisonment as a prisoner of war by the French in Mauritius in 1794.²⁹ Potter ended his nautical career in 1796 when he returned to London and embarked on a career as a town surveyor while also working for the duke of Devonshire to lay roads through his vast Derbyshire estates. Potter occasionally undertook some work as a surveyor for Lord Bradford until he accepted the position of Bradford's chief agent in 1820.³⁰

Although his social and professional background, as well as his urban upbringing, does not fit Spring's model, Potter's experience of working as a town surveyor and for an aristocratic landlord evidently provided the practical knowledge implemented so effectively as Bradford's chief-agent. Potter was employed as an agent for an expanding urban town. Therefore, the skills and attributes required for such a role were fundamentally different to those that Spring focuses on in his analysis of rural estates, with their agricultural focus. Potter's years as a surveyor in London, where he helped into fruition numerous urban developments, honed many of the skills required to realise the

²⁶ Spring, *English Landed Estate*, p. 80.

²⁷ J. Morley, 'The Potters of Walsall: History of the Potter Family, Surveyors and Land Agents of Walsall'. (Typescript; copy in SRO, D4994/2).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

potential benefits of urbanisation in Walsall, and which had such an impact on the growth of that town.

Thompson observes that the phenomenon of agents rising from backgrounds as surveyors was not uncommon. The rigours of dealing extensively in the valuation of land stood these men in good stead to take over the management of estates.³¹ Webster concurs, arguing that the knowledge acquired through the inspection of the value of land, as well as mathematical techniques and mapmaking skills, provided surveyors with many attributes desirable in a land agent.³² Indeed, Potter employed his teenage son, Peter, as a surveyor whilst training him to become an agent. He evidently considered experience as a surveyor essential preparation for that career.

Loch, Lewis and Potter all possessed the three attributes Spring described as essential qualities for successful agents. 'Incessant industry' was a trait both Lewis and Potter demonstrated. Lewis managed estates in Staffordshire and Shropshire and was continuously moving between Trentham, Lilleshall and Wolverhampton, as well as travelling occasionally to Dunrobin Castle in Sutherland. Similarly, as well as fulfilling the role of agent in Walsall, Potter was also responsible for overseeing six other estates spread across four counties. Potter further oversaw the family's numerous charities, most notably Preston Hospital in Shropshire. Indeed, Spring's hagiographic description of Grey of Dilston administering the management of the vast and geographically diverse northern estates of Greenwich Hospital could similarly apply to Potter or Lewis and their incessant travels between estates and creation of meticulous reports.³³

Spring's second vital attribute for the agent - versatility - was also demonstrated by the Bradford and Sutherland agents. Lewis and Potter displayed proficiency and authority in a remarkable range of areas. In addition to his education and legal training, Loch was also a practical man, and demonstrated knowledge and skill in a variety of areas. In the correspondence of Potter, Loch and

³¹ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 160.

³² Webster, *Agents and Professionalisation*, p. 33.

³³ Spring, *English Landed Society*, p. 97.

Lewis, the variety and diversity of instructions and advice given to subordinates on matters of estate management is remarkable.

Finally, Spring argues that fundamental to an agent's work was his farming skill and management of the rural tenantry. Potter's role in Walsall was mainly concerned with urbanisation, highlighting an important deficiency in Spring's analysis and its application to all aristocratic estates. Yet, despite his urban background, Potter gave instructions on farming practices to sub-agents on rural estates with considerable authority. As is unsurprising on account of his agricultural background, Lewis appears to have been a proficient and knowledgeable farmer.

Another area of importance that should be considered is that of an affinity with the landowners' outlook. This can be assessed with regards to several facets of the agents' duties, such as their dealings with religious matters and politics. Potter was a Dissenter, having been baptised as an adult around 1792.³⁴ He described himself as a 'Trinitarian Presbyterian', claiming that despite some differences on the topic of baptism, he maintained a 'strong predilection' for the Established Church.³⁵

Indeed, in October 1834 Potter felt the need to justify his religious beliefs to Lord Bradford. He stressed that they did not affect his conduct as Bradford's agent and would not present a conflict with his employer's own religious views. Potter stressed that he had always exercised his authority in accordance with the earl's wishes and cited several instances in which he had promoted the Established Church on the Bradford estates. Indeed, Potter had provided Bradford with advice on how to combat the growth of 'sectaries' on the estate, including the erection of a new chapel on the Knockin estate with the objective of increasing Church attendance amongst the tenantry, and nullifying the appeal of Dissenters.

In spite of this, Potter believed there had been 'many insinuations' and an 'undercurrent from various quarters setting against me' for many years in light of his being a Dissenter.³⁶ In the

³⁴ Morley, 'Potter's of Walsall'.

³⁵ SRO, D1287/9/9 A/133, Potter to Bradford, 30.10.1834.

³⁶ SRO, D1287/9/9 A/133, Potter to Bradford, 30.10.1834.

tumultuous 1830s there was in Walsall, as nationally, an intense distrust of those with spiritual views conflicting with the Established Church. The controversy surrounding the payment of church rates in the late 1830s ultimately led to Potter informing Lord Bradford that he had withdrawn from his Dissent in March 1837. Potter cited his disgust at the ‘outrageous and unchristian conduct’ of the majority of Dissenters in Walsall, and elsewhere, over the ‘worthless question’ of church rates.³⁷

That Potter renounced his non-conformist views as a reaction to the political conduct of Dissenters, rather than any theological conversion, suggests that Potter considered that his reputation as Bradford’s agent could not be upheld whilst his co-religionists were in such public odium. Tellingly, Potter’s sons, two of whom were in the employ of Bradford, also denounced their Dissent, whilst his daughter and his wife did not. It is possible that Potter and his sons decided that, although the current earl of Bradford evidently did not doubt the Potter family’s religious integrity, the increased suspicion of non-conformists might change that situation in the future. As professional, ambitious men, the Potters perhaps decided it prudent to realign themselves publicly with the Establishment.

In matters of politics, agents often held similar views to their employers. Lord Dudley’s decision to remove Loch from his duties as agent in 1832 due to differences in opinion regarding the Reform Bill, is indicative of the importance of an affinity of outlook. On the Bradford estate, although Potter explicitly resolved not to discuss personal political views with Lord Bradford, he and his employer shared a support for Conservatism. Potter wrote passionately about his support for Conservative candidates and his dislike of political opponents. Indeed, in the 1837 election in Walsall, Potter informed Bradford that the Conservative candidate’s chances of success were not good, stating ‘we are likely to be disappointed’.³⁸

³⁷ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/98, Potter to Bradford, 21.3.1837.

³⁸ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/194, Potter to Bradford 31.7.1837.

Loch's political leanings have been previously analysed, with biographer Eric Richards suggesting that he was generally liberal and non-doctrinaire, being opposed to resisting public opinion. Loch felt that all extremes should be channelled into compromise by government.³⁹ S.G. Checkland defines Loch's professional political outlook as 'conservative amelioration' and states that, despite his early Whiggism and his role in the Reform Bill, Loch cannot be considered to be a radical as he was developing a career working for the aristocracy.⁴⁰

Indeed, Loch believed that the aristocracy was essential to the stability, prosperity and well-being of the nation and was horrified by the prospect of political turmoil in England.⁴¹ Upon the defeat of the Leveson Gower family in the Staffordshire elections of 1820, Loch complained that the yeomanry and the manufacturing districts had 'arrogantly cast off their dependence on the higher ranks', something that would lead to catastrophe.⁴²

Checkland's idea of 'conservative amelioration' for the previously radical leaning Loch raises the question as to the extent that agents absorbed aristocratic values. In discussions of landownership, Loch can be seen to have fully absorbed the values of his employers as seen most starkly with regards to the estate's Scottish policy. Conversely, Lewis remained clear that he was an employee of the estate and served to improve and maintain the position of the ducal family without absorbing their values for himself. While undoubtedly holding a strong affinity for the Bradford family, in Walsall, Potter had a business-minded professionalism, especially with regards to the development of the family's urban possessions, with securing profit as the primary, and often only, motivator.

PROFESSIONALISATION

The reorganisation of the Bradford estate structure following the appointment of Potter in 1820 supports Thompson's argument that the professionalisation of estate agency occurred in the early nineteenth century. Similarly, the appointment of Loch by the marquis of Stafford in 1812 and the

³⁹ Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, pp. 30-1.

⁴⁰ S. Checkland, Forward to Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p. x.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁴² Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p. 27.

accompanying restructuring of estate agency suggests professionalisation only developed in the early nineteenth century, rather than in the previous century as Mingay propounds. Similarly, on the local estates, Lewis can be considered in many respects a 'professional' agent, employed on merit in light of his agricultural knowledge. Conversely, throughout the eighteenth century, clergymen had often fulfilled the role of Trentham agent until 1814, when Loch appointed Francis Suther to replace the Reverend Thomas Butt as agent. This implies attempts were made by Loch to change the old system of patronage in the management of the estate.

In his running of the Sutherland estate agency Loch epitomised professionalisation. In employing subordinates, Loch preferred to offer substantial wages to secure the best available man for the job.⁴³ When an agent or sub-agent was selected, Loch ensured they were rigorously trained. He personally trained Lewis in 1817 and closely supervised Lewis' training of William Smith in 1834. Loch worked on a meritocratic principle, as demonstrated in the increase in his sub-agents' salaries as they proved their worth. Loch ostensibly despised 'favouritism' which he described as the 'ruin of all usefulness' when shown by an agent.⁴⁴

However, Loch did demonstrate a preference for certain families, most notably the Pensons, several of whom were employed at Trentham. Indeed, Loch stated in 1844 that he had always felt that any branch of the Penson family was 'entitled to a more than usual consideration'.⁴⁵ Between 1840 and 1854, 90 individuals employed at Trentham Hall shared 37 family names, suggesting that they were recruited through kinship ties and word of mouth.⁴⁶ Such practices suggest that Loch showed levels of favouritism and patronage which complicates the view that the agency structure he oversaw was completely professionalised.

Many of the agency positions on the Bradford estate were virtually inherited, a phenomenon that does not fit with Brassley's definition of a profession. Although Potter was appointed on merit in

⁴³ Spring, *English Landed Estate*, p. 92.

⁴⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/1/20 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1834], Loch to Lewis, 21.7.1834.

⁴⁵ Loch to Duchess of Sutherland, 3.4.1844, cited in Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire, Volume 11*, p. 233.

⁴⁶ Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire, Vol. XI*, p. 233.

1820, the position of chief-agent was fulfilled by his eldest son upon his death. Following the death of the younger Peter Potter in 1881, the Walsall agency was managed by his second son, George Gybbon Potter. He was in turn succeeded by his son Edward Gybbon Potter. Indeed, into at least the 1940s, the Walsall agent was Edward's son, Charles Potter, demonstrating a 120 year period of the Potters inheriting the agent's role. Moreover, the agents on the smaller Bradford estates often passed on their position: Edward Griffith, agent for the Knockin estate, was succeeded by his son, as was Mr Carter, the agent for some of the rural areas at the turn of the twentieth century.

In other areas of estate administration, nepotism was rife. In 1832, Potter secured a position for his second son, John, as solicitor for the Preston Hospital Charity, administered by the Bridgeman family. Potter wrote to Lord Bradford to ask that John be named as successor to Mr Ware, on his death or resignation. Potter pointedly argued that Ware had 'no children nor near relative in the profession'.⁴⁷ This comment indicates that, even in an occupation such as a solicitor, on the Bradford estate, if the incumbent had a relative in that profession, they might be expected to succeed to the position. Years later, Peter Potter the younger took great offence that his eldest son, Peter, declined to follow in his footsteps as Lord Bradford's chief-agent, deciding instead to become a clergyman.⁴⁸

Such practices call into question the levels of 'professionalism' of the Bradford agency structure, as the positions of many of the agents were virtually inherited. However, the conduct of Peter Potter whilst in the role of agent for the earl of Bradford, meets several of Brassley's criteria of a professional. He was paid a salary for his services, was qualified for the job through his work as a surveyor, and was given the position on his own merits due to the reputation he had built working for the duke of Devonshire, rather than through any hereditary or personal favouritism.

With the exception of James Loch, whose starting salary was £1,000, the remuneration of agents on the Sutherland and Bradford Estates was generally lower than that suggested by Thompson, who

⁴⁷ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/81, Potter to Bradford, 8.11.1832.

⁴⁸ Morley, 'The Potters of Walsall'.

argues that by 1815 a salary of £750-£1,000 could be expected.⁴⁹ The pay scale for Sutherland subagents was based on meritocracy. Sub-agent Lewis' starting salary in 1817 was £250 and by 1834 this had risen to £400.⁵⁰ Additionally, Lewis received certain allowances including a house on the Lilleshall estate, as well as his home in Trentham. He was provided with money for travelling costs and living expenses incurred during his work for the duke. He was also afforded £80 to employ a farm bailiff.⁵¹ On the appointment of a new agent for the Shropshire estate, Lewis recommended paying the candidate £250, and let his 'exertion prove himself worth more.'⁵²

Potter, as chief-agent for the earl of Bradford, commanded a salary of £500.⁵³ He also had some input with Mr Piggott on the running of the Bolton estate, for which he was paid an additional £35.⁵⁴ However, out of this he had to pay rent for Gorway House, built for him by Lord Bradford in 1827, at a rate of £36 per annum in 1835.⁵⁵

As has been demonstrated, the agents on the Sutherland and Bradford estates conformed to the historiographical narrative of agents in several respects. Potter and Loch, as chief-agents, assumed many of the powers of the landowners and made decisions with great levels of autonomy. The agency structure, as outlined by Thompson, closely reflects the Sutherland structure with Lewis in control of a large geographical area, with a series of subordinates beneath him. The comparatively much smaller Bradford estate emulated this system, but adapted the role of chief-agent to better fit that estate's needs and resources.

Both estates witnessed definite steps towards the professionalisation of the agency role in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The appointment of Loch in 1812 and Potter in 1820 heralded a restructuring of the agency of both estates, and the implementations of notably more

⁴⁹ E. Richards, 'Loch, James (1780–1855)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004), Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 162.

⁵⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/2/14 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1834], Lewis to Loch, 1.2.1834, SRO, D593/K/3/1/20 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1834], Loch to Lewis, 29.1.1834.

⁵¹ SRO, D593/K/3/2/14 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1834], Lewis to Loch, 1.2.1834.

⁵² SRO, D593/K/3/2/14 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1834], Lewis to Loch, 1.2.1834.

⁵³ SRO, D1287/1/30. Lord Bradford's Account Books.

⁵⁴ SRO, D1287/1/30. Lord Bradford's Account Books.

⁵⁵ SRO, D1287/1/30. Lord Bradford's Account Books.

professionalised systems. In terms of education and social background, William Lewis adheres to the archetype of an agent neatly, coming from an agricultural family and educated through practical experience. Potter's London upbringing and naval career notably differ from this trend. However, the rural focus of the existing historical accounts mean that little is known of the background of agents involved in urbanisation. Potter's work as a surveyor provided essential skills for his influential role in the development of Walsall.

Thus a key area in which the roles of agents discussed in this thesis differ from those identified in the work of Spring, Thompson *et al.* is in their involvement with the urbanisation of their respective aristocratic estates. While historians recognise the importance of agents to the management of aristocratic estates, little focus has been afforded to the instrumental role agents played in the development of land on their urban estates.

2.3 AGENTS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Having examined the historiography of the agents' role, and established the importance of agency structure to the fulfilment of estate policy, we are able now to examine the impact of the agents on urbanisation in the 1830s. Urbanisation fluctuated as a priority for each estate throughout the century and, in part as a result of this, Walsall and Longton experienced very different rates of urbanisation. The first attempts at urban development of Lord Bradford's land in Walsall commenced in the late 1820s, while, conversely, the duke of Sutherland made no attempt to develop his land in Longton and Lane End until the 1860s. As a result, the roles of the agents on each estate are markedly different in the 1830s.

Early nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation impacted on the ancient borough of Walsall and by 1831 the town's population was 15,000, an increase of over 3,000 from ten years previously. The 1830s represent a key period in the development of the town, as the population had risen to almost 21,000 by the end of the decade.⁵⁶ It was noted in 1834 that in Staffordshire, Walsall 'ranks as the second manufacturing town in the county, as regards its population, and yields to none of them in beauty and elegance'.⁵⁷

The earl of Bradford owned large parts of the town, stretching in all directions around the ancient borough. The other aristocratic landowner in Walsall was Baron Hatherton, who owned land predominantly in the north east of the town. Although the rural Knockin estate had previously been the Bradford estate's main source of income, the estate ledgers demonstrate the increasing revenue gained from the Walsall estate as it was developed.⁵⁸

Through his agents and solicitors, Lord Bradford was very active in leasing out land as building plots for houses and streets. Moreover, Bradford's land was leased by entrepreneurs and manufacturers as they established workshops and small businesses in the town. Bradford also

⁵⁶ M. Greenslade, (ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire, Vol. 17: West Bromwich, Smethwich, Walsall and Walsall Wood*, (London, 1976), p. 145.

⁵⁷ W. White, quoted in, Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire, Vol. 17*, p. 145.

⁵⁸ SRO, D1287/1/30. Lord Bradford's Account Books.

leased his mineral rights in the limestone quarries in Walsall Wood and elsewhere to prospective miners.⁵⁹ The below map (figure 3) demonstrates how these streets had been developed in the centre of the town by 1842.



Figure 3 Map of Walsall with Bradford land for building plots shaded, 1842.⁶⁰

Demonstrating the importance that a change of individual landlord could have, the commencement of the development of the Walsall estate coincided with the accession of George, second earl of

⁵⁹ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/75, Potter to Lord Bradford, 19.8.1826.

⁶⁰ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 208/3140

Bradford, in September 1825. In the following years, plans were laid for the first important development of the estate. Bradford land to the south west of the existing borough of Walsall was developed with the laying of Bradford Street, which was completed in 1831. This road greatly improved communications from Walsall to Wednesbury and Darlaston. However, while the succession of the aristocrat may have coincided with this development, it was undoubtedly Potter who was 'directing the operations.'⁶¹

Indeed, a brief consideration of the correspondence from the 1820s demonstrates that the initial impetus for a building project at Walsall came explicitly from Peter Potter. He desired to emulate the successful developments that had begun on the Bolton estate in the early 1820s, under his direction. Potter wrote to the second earl of Bradford in April 1826, seven months after he had succeeded his father, to express his preference that he, as 'controlling agent', be housed permanently in Walsall, as he was 'somewhat sanguine in my expectations of the Walsall estate being of much greater importance than it has hitherto been considered'. This was to be achieved, Potter advocated, by 'an extension of the mining operations and the establishment of a good building scheme; as has been arranged by me... at Bolton'.⁶²

Potter had been instrumental in the implementation of a building policy in Bolton and, as early as 1821, had publicly advertised the availability of Lord Bradford's land to be let in the town, 'upon leases for 99 instead of 999 years as is generally the custom.'⁶³ Potter anticipated that the shorter lease would make the prospect more appealing to potential lessees. The policy generated some interest immediately, as Potter informed his employer that he had 'effected the letting of several plots to most respectable persons'. He predicted that 'a beneficial result will speedily follow.'⁶⁴

Indeed it did, and in September 1826, Potter wrote to the new earl of Bradford to update him on the 'system which has been adopted there with great success (if I may be permitted to say so) for the

⁶¹ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 17, p. 147.

⁶² SRO, D1287/12/1 K/227, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.4.1826.

⁶³ SRO, D1287/13/8 K264, Potter to Lord Bradford, 26.12.1821.

⁶⁴ SRO, D1287/13/8 K264, Potter to Lord Bradford, 26.12.1821

last four or five years'.⁶⁵ Several new roads were nearing completion and Potter predicated that they would soon 'furnish building frontage of considerable value, and I have no doubt will be eagerly sought after'.⁶⁶

Plans for similar ventures were already underway in Walsall, and in August 1826, Potter updated Bradford of negotiations to lease mines in Walsall to a Mr Price, whilst also detailing a 99 year building lease offered to Charles Windle. Potter had negotiated terms of £23 for the first 21 years and £30 for the remainder of the term which he confessed he would be 'much gratified if this should prove the forerunner of greater success in lettings of this description.'⁶⁷

Potter approached Bradford with a proposal for purchases of land for £400 which would consolidate his landholdings in Walsall and facilitate further building projects. The land, Potter believed, was situated so that with 'in the event of the new road being made and our building project going on, in which we have hitherto been very successful, it will be worth at least £1000.' He added, 'were the case to be mine I would not hesitate to buy it'.⁶⁸

Lord Bradford assented and on completion of the purchase in May 1827, Potter presented Bradford with a plan of the estate in Walsall, pointing out that 'a part of your estate which was heretofore detached will now become connected, and should our building schemes get established and in greater use on the revival of Trade and Manufacture, the value thereof will be greatly increased.'⁶⁹

Potter soon presented his employer with a plan for a new road through the town: Bradford Street.

Potter sought developers to build streets off this new thoroughfare, and the adjoining land was divided into building plots. In 1832, John Eglington became one of the first to take a building lease from Lord Bradford and build houses and streets around Bradford Street. In deference to the aristocratic landowner, the new streets were named Newport and Little Newport Streets, after the earl of Bradford's heir, Viscount Newport. These streets were laid out and 28 houses were quickly

⁶⁵ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/75, Potter to Lord Bradford, 1.9.1826.

⁶⁶ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/75, Potter to Lord Bradford, 1.9.1826.

⁶⁷ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/75, Potter to Lord Bradford, 19.8.1826.

⁶⁸ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/76, Potter to Lord Bradford, 4.1.1827.

⁶⁹ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/81, Potter to Lord Bradford, 28.5.1827.

built. A row of terraced houses were soon built on Bradford Street between Newport Street and Cross Street.⁷⁰

Pockets of urban development were commenced on the Bradford estate in other parts of Walsall foreign. The 'Windmill' area of Caldmore, south of the town centre, was developed in the 1830s and early 1840s. Potter arranged for building leases to be granted in the newly laid Orlando Street, named after the late earl of Bradford, and many other predecessors of the Bridgeman family, and also at the north end of Sandwell Street. Bradford land in the Pleck area was developed in this decade to the west of the town. Bridgeman Street, a new thoroughfare connecting Bradford Street and Pleck Road was completed by 1836.⁷¹ This was later to become a densely populated neighbourhood developed by the Bradford estate, most notably in the 1850s where residential and industrial spaces emerged alongside each other.

Grander residences were also built on the estate, and, in 1838, two large houses were being built near the bridge over Walsall Brook. By 1838, Bridgeman Place had been built to the north west of the ancient borough. Later called Bridgeman Terrace, these houses were described by contemporaries as 'a handsome row of fashionable houses with stucco fronts.'⁷² The first resident of one of these houses was Charles Forster, the inaugural Member of Parliament for Walsall from the creation of the political borough in 1832. This demonstrates that the highest potential class of lessee were attracted to the developments on the Bradford estate, as well as workers in the modest terraced houses.⁷³

THE ROLE OF POTTER IN URBANISATION

The role of Peter Potter, as Lord Bradford's agent, in overseeing these developments cannot be overstated. Utilising his experience as a town surveyor, Potter laid plans for the new thoroughfares before Lord Bradford. He realised the potential benefits for the proprietor of improving

⁷⁰ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 17, p. 147.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁷² Cited in Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 17, p. 158.

⁷³ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 17, p. 162.

communication routes to other towns, and to ensure that these routes provided access to the Bradford estate, allowing the exploitation of future developments in the town.

Once new roads were completed, Potter tirelessly sought to ensure that adjoining land was leased out as building plots to developers, to erect houses. This was most notably done with the main roads of Bradford Street and Bridgeman Street. Potter could proudly inform Bradford in 1838 that both sides of Bradford Street were entirely being used as building grounds.⁷⁴

Potter wrote in detail to Bradford about his plans. He informed the landowner of development opportunities and regularly offered advice on how to improve the family's position in the town. In April 1838, Potter enthused to Bradford about a purchase that would be 'highly beneficial' to the future of the estate.⁷⁵ He described a new road that had been laid on Bradford's land which could soon be developed into building sites for houses and further streets. However, one field close to the road belonged to another proprietor who had commenced limestone mining. Potter informed Bradford that he had considered it his duty to attempt to '[get] rid of that which might be an intolerable nuisance.' Potter had already negotiated a purchase of the land and all details of the transaction. The agent wrote to the landlord merely to secure his assent to the purchase.⁷⁶

Potter assumed responsibility for negotiating the terms of the building leases and often discussed these in detail with Bradford only when a problem arose. Bradford was not intimately aware of, much less heavily involved in, the development of the Walsall estate. Instead, the landlord delegated authority to Potter, allowing the agent to act as he saw fit in the development of the town to a extensive degree.

The timing of developments was further delegated to Potter's judgment. In 1837 Potter informed Bradford that he was holding back from leasing out building plots along one road, as he was waiting to see what effect the railway would have on land in the area before he committed to

⁷⁴ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/99, Potter to Bradford 10.4.1838.

⁷⁵ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/99, Potter to Bradford 10.4.1838.

⁷⁶ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/99, Potter to Bradford 10.4.1838.

development.⁷⁷ He, quite correctly in light of the effects of railways on the character of urban neighbourhoods in similar nineteenth century towns, realised that railway cuttings and other impacts of railway lines could have a detrimental impact on the price that land near railways could command.⁷⁸

Despite his oft professed dislike and objections to railways and their detriment to the value of land on the estate, in light of the ‘Public Rage [that] runs so much now in favour of them, I am compelled against my wish to go along with the current’ and he duly entered into negotiations for the building of railways on Bradford’s estates. Potter endeavoured to bring as much advantage to the estate from the railways and to ‘avoid all the evil which they are capable of producing.’⁷⁹ In the negotiations concerning the building of a new railway line on the Bolton estate, Potter insisted to railway companies that if the newly planned railway tracks were to gain assent to run through Bradford land, the main station in the town would have to be located in Bridgeman Street. He recognised the benefit for businesses on the estate that would be gleaned from the increased footfall from railway passengers and the increased trade in the town.⁸⁰ Thus, Bolton’s railway station, opened in 1838, was known interchangeably as Bridgeman Street station and Bradford Square station. A similar approach was later undertaken by Potter’s son in Walsall, and the town’s railway station was built in 1849 in Bridgeman Street.

Potter referred to these urban developments of the aristocratic estate as ‘my schemes’, schemes which, in October 1831, he proudly informed Lord Bradford had ‘succeeded to the utmost of my expectations’.⁸¹ Potter’s position of authority, with Lord Bradford’s acquiescence often a formality, has precedent for other agents on landed estates. Thompson discusses the varying levels of autonomy agents could possess, suggesting that on some estates the landowners’ agreement was not sought for many decisions on the implication of policy.⁸² However, Thompson qualified this by

⁷⁷ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/98, Potter to Bradford, 6.3.1837.

⁷⁸ See, for example WLHC 59/21, (Letter 2020), Potter to Piggot 11.2.1831 for Potter’s objections to railways and their detriment to estates.

⁷⁹ WLHC 59/21 (Letter 2020), Potter to Piggot 11.2.1831.

⁸⁰ WLHC 59/21 (Letter 2021), Potter to H. Cory 11.2.1831.

⁸¹ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/80, Potter to Bradford, 3.10.1831.

⁸² Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 175.

adding that while some agents had considerable levels of input into the decision-making process, the ultimate decisions would always be made by the owner. He concluded that no agent was able to embark on a project without the permission of his employer.⁸³

This is supported by Potter's relationship with Lord Bradford. While the agent felt it was appropriate to press Lord Bradford if he felt the landowner was ignoring an opportunity, he could not stray from Bradford's expressed wishes. Where their opinion of the merits of a proposed development differed, Potter justified his attempts to influence the landlord by telling Bradford that he considered it his duty to improve the estate. Ultimately however, despite his considerable autonomy, Potter could not go against the landlord's decisions. He once remarked to a potential developer that he did not feel 'authorised to deviate from His Lordship's instructions to me, even if I accord with your view on the subject'.⁸⁴

Potter's advice to Lord Bradford on urban developments in Walsall was extremely detailed. He was diligent in his research before he presented a suggestion to the aristocrat. When Bradford challenged his advice, or asked further questions of him, Potter's responses were invariably measured and well informed. These knowledgeable responses meant that Potter had the capacity to influence the landowner's policy. In February 1838, Potter wrote to Bradford regarding the new Poor Law Workhouse to be erected in Walsall as a result of the 1834 Poor Law Act. Potter was convinced the erection of the workhouse on the Bradford estate would be highly beneficial for the future of the estate and, in his eagerness that the development be commenced on Bradford land, offered favourable terms to the Poor Law commissioners. Potter was anxious to ensure that the site on the Bradford estate was selected and that this opportunity was not lost to another landowner.⁸⁵

In this instance, Bradford reacted indignantly to Potter offering lower than market value terms for the land on his behalf. Moreover, Bradford did not desire that a workhouse be erected on his land, believing such an institution was not befitting of his family's noble reputation and the aristocratic

⁸³ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 175.

⁸⁴ WLHC, 59/21, (Letter 1820), Potter to Smallwood, 3.7.1830. SRO, D1287/18/26 K/98, Potter to Bradford 6.3.1837.

⁸⁵ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/98, Potter to Bradford, 28.2.1837.

intentions he held for his estate. Bradford favoured instead the building of ‘respectable houses’, and instructed Potter to instead seek developers to erect these. Undeterred, Potter stressed the benefits of having the workhouse situated on the estate, highlighting that it would lead to better roads being built through the estate at the public expense. Bradford was persuaded by Potter’s arguments and assented to the erection of Walsall workhouse, which was built in 1838 at the junction of Pleck Road and Moat Road, the very site initially proposed by Potter.⁸⁶

As has been demonstrated, Potter wielded considerable influence over the urban developments on the Walsall estate in the 1830s. He had a remarkable measure of autonomy over all aspect of the urban development project. The initial impetus for a building project in the town is shown to have come from Potter, whilst the timings of the developments, the specifics of the projects and the terms offered were all left to the agent’s. Once streets were laid, Potter devised numerous ways to maximise the profit for the estate, often through the letting of building leases on the new thoroughfares. In one such letter to the landowner, Potter added, ‘there are various other modes, as I have heretofore suggested, where a sum of money might be employed to profit, in every point of view.’⁸⁷

The approval of Lord Bradford was often sought only as a formality. Even when the landowner was hesitant on a proposal, Potter had such influence as to change this decision. Therefore, Potter should be considered an integral contributor to the nineteenth-century expansion of Walsall. Such evidence further demonstrates that the assertions of Cannadine and Beckett that the landowner made the majority of decisions on estates, should be reconsidered. Successive earls of Bradford were happy to acquiesce to Potter’s schemes, and had faith in his promises of vast profits.

URBANISATION ON THE SUTHERLAND ESTATE

While the 1830s witnessed the advent of urban developments on the earl of Bradford’s Walsall estate, the same cannot be said in the north of the county on the Leveson Gower’s land in Longton.

⁸⁶ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/98, Potter to Lord Bradford, 6.3.1837.

⁸⁷ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/75, Potter to Lord Bradford, 1.9.1826.

While the 1830s saw an increase in population, as well as industrial development in the town, the primary focus of the Sutherland's chief-agent was 'improvement' of their English and Scottish estates, and nullification of the adverse criticism their Highland Clearance policy received.

The below map (figure 4) shows the duke of Sutherland's land to the south of the growing townships of Longton and Lane End in 1832. The triangle formed by three roads in the centre of the image is the area that would be renamed and developed as Florence, later in the century.

Stretching east is Normacot. In 1832 however, there were no intentions to build on this rural buffer between Longton and Trentham, to the south.



Figure 4: Map of Longton and surrounding areas, 1832.⁸⁸

Moreover, after succeeding his father in July 1833, the early years of the second duke's tenure were characterised by attempts to control expenditure, an objective Loch implemented throughout the agency structure. This was necessitated in part by the costly rebuilding of Trentham Hall and the creation of elaborate Italianate gardens in the grounds.⁸⁹ It was these developments, rather than urbanisation, which occupied the efforts of Loch and William Lewis.

Although Lord Stafford was the largest landowner around Longton, no attempt was made to develop the land with new housing until the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1824, a plan was drawn up to build a housing estate on the north-west side of Longton. This plan (see below, figure 5) included details of the proposed locations of the 'best houses', on the edge of the development, and the 'small houses' which comprised the majority, in the interior. This was a principle replicated on the estates developments later in the century. Many of the properties were proposed to have gardens. However, this proposal was not undertaken and the proposed development never came to fruition.

⁸⁸ SRO, D593/H/3/447/a+b.

⁸⁹ S. Gregory, 'The Historic Gardens at Trentham', *Transactions of the Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, vol. 44 (2010), p. 85.



Figure 5: Plan of building land at Lane End, 1824.⁹⁰

Land the duke owned to the south of Longton was developed by the Longton Freehold Society in to the suburb of Dresden in the 1850s.⁹¹ However, the duke's agents' first foray into urban developments would not come until the development of Spratslade (later renamed Florence) and Normacot areas from the mid-1860s.⁹² This change of policy was prompted in part by the success of the Dresden development, but also due to fears of the character of tenants that might be attracted to this development in the absence of a paternalistic landlord. The duke did, however, invest in Longton in other respects, and attempted to improve the facilities for its growing population, most notably with the Lane End Water Works.⁹³

⁹⁰ SRO, D593/H/3/144, 'Plan of Building land at Lane End belonging to the Most Noble the Marquis of Stafford', 1824.

⁹¹ J. Briggs, *The History of Longton: The Birth of a Community*, (Stoke-on-Trent, 1982), p. 51.

⁹² Dobraszczyc, 'Florence', p. 5.

⁹³ Briggs, *History of Longton*, p. 50.

The delayed involvement of the duke of Sutherland in the urban development of Longton is an example of a landlord following, rather than leading, urban development. Despite the duke not building on his land, Longton developed at a rapid rate in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1841, Longton was described as a 'populous and thriving market town' that had 'risen to opulence and importance, within comparatively few years.' Longton had a population of 10,393 in 1841 with Lane End adding a further 1,952.⁹⁴

That the duke followed, rather than led the rise of urbanisation in Longton, is in stark contrast to the policy of the earl of Bradford in Walsall. Under the stewardship of Potter, the Bradford estate laid important roads and streets which would greatly shape the development of the town. This demonstrates that great variety occurred in aristocratic inclinations towards developing urban estates. In the north of Staffordshire, the duke of Sutherland was uninterested in urban developments, being preoccupied with grander matters such as the restoration of ancestral palaces.

However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the estate in the 1830s found itself in great need of maximising income due to the spiralling expenditure of the estate. Therefore, while it might have been considered by the duke and his agents that the Sutherland estate was above the scramble for quick profits through speculative housebuilding, as was rife in Longton, and that there was less financial incentive for the Sutherland estate to consider urban development than a comparatively less established estate such as Lord Bradford's, the economic situation of the Sutherland estate was cause for considerable concern for Loch and Lewis. There was a necessity for the estate to maximise income. That the vast potential for profits from developing urban land and securing rental incomes, as shown by the Bradford estate, was not considered by the duke or his agents, suggests that ideological objections to urbanisation decisively impacted upon the estate's solvency. When applications were received as to the availability of land to develop into housing, the response

⁹⁴ Pigot, *Typology of England*, 1841, White, *Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, 1851.

from the Sutherland agents was invariably that the duke was not entertaining such notions at this time.⁹⁵

Although the duke was not developing his land, there were many others who were building in Longton. As manufacturers established businesses in the town, houses were quickly erected amongst the pot banks. These ‘capitalist-landlords’, as local historian John Briggs described them, were primarily concerned with profits rather than any sense of community, and often sought to erect as many houses as possible on the land they bought.⁹⁶

As with many ‘speculative’ builders, accusations of shoddy houses emerged. The unorganised and unregulated development contributed towards the haphazard nature of urban development in Longton, as was characteristic of this early period of rapid urbanisation across Britain. Residential and industrial holdings were built alongside each other, with no regards to the health of occupants, or recognition of the importance of air circulation. However, historians such as Marguerite Dupree have observed that houses in North Staffordshire were of a better standard than many comparable industrial areas, although Longton is often ranked as among the worst of the pottery towns for the quality of its housing.⁹⁷ As will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, once the Sutherland estate determined to develop their land around Longton from the mid-1860s, strict building regulations were enforced to prevent poor quality housing being erected on the estate. Whether the earlier involvement of the aristocrat in urban development would have significantly improved the overall standard of Longton’s housing provision, can only be speculated.

There did exist some older dwellings on the duke’s land around Longton, notably in the southern hamlet of Spratslade, where he owned two thirds of the cottages.⁹⁸ Briggs’ research suggests that the duke’s tenants in these cottages paid markedly less than the average rents of tenants elsewhere on the Sutherland estates. Moreover, they paid substantially less than the rent for a cottage

⁹⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Lewis to Smith, 29.4.1832.

⁹⁶ Briggs, *History of Longton*, p. 48.

⁹⁷ Dupree, *Family Structure in the Potteries*, p. 94, Fyson, ‘Chartism in North Staffordshire’, p. 29.

⁹⁸ Briggs, *History of Longton*, p. 49.

elsewhere in Longton.⁹⁹ The duke's modest rents, Briggs argues, were offered in exchange for their good moral behaviour. The duke's agents kept registers of the tenants' behaviour, with misdemeanours, including arrears of rent or drunkenness, being recorded as reasons for terminating a tenancy.¹⁰⁰ The duke's tenants were aware that they did not pay market value for their cottages, and accordingly, Briggs suggests the moral discipline expected of them by the estate was mostly adhered to.¹⁰¹ Briggs' analysis thus characterises the stewardship of the estate as driven by patriarchal, rather than entrepreneurial, motivations. As will be demonstrated, once the estate resolved to develop their land on a grander scale later in the century, the primary objective became the maximisation of profit, rather than any continued sense of paternalism towards the tenants.

The majority of the duke's cottages in Spratslade had gardens or allotments, marking these as distinct from the cramped terraces quickly becoming characteristic of Longton. The correspondence between William Lewis and his subordinates in Lane End in the 1830s reflect that the focus remained on agricultural matters for the estate's agents. While Potter's letters to Lord Bradford about Walsall concerned the purchase of land for the laying of streets and the erection of houses, Lewis and James Glover discussed the price of barley.¹⁰²

Thus, the two estates' priorities in the 1830s are markedly different. While Potter was instrumental in urban development in Walsall, Lewis' efforts mainly concerned the reduction of expenditure and implementation of efficient farming practices. Despite these differences, the demanding role and diligence displayed by the two agents is remarkably similar, and both played an integral role in the running of their aristocratic estates.

SUTHERLAND ESTATE IN THE 1830s: 'IMPROVEMENTS' AND THE REDUCTION OF EXPENDITURE

⁹⁹ Briggs, *History of Longton*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰² SRO, D593/K/3/3/33 [In-Letters of William Lewis, Jul-Dec 1835], Glover to Lewis, 30.12.1835.

The Bradford agency structure and Potter's role, responsibilities and authority, are aptly demonstrated through the urban developments in Walsall. To understand Lewis' position as agent for the Sutherland estate, and Loch's influence on the Staffordshire estate as chief agent, consideration must be made of the priorities of the estate as they existed in the 1830s. Whereas the priority of the Bradford estate in Walsall was urban development, the primary policies of the Sutherland estate, and accordingly the priorities of the agents, can be considered as the implementation of 'improvements', both in agriculture, but also in the conduct of the tenantry, and in the management of the estate. Additionally to this, Loch was increasingly anxious to reduce the spiralling expenditure of the estate. The responsibility for implementing this was assumed in Staffordshire by Lewis.

Historians, notably Thompson and Spring, speak of the 'spirit of improvement' emerging on aristocratic estates in the early nineteenth century. There came an emphasis upon achieving greater efficiency from both the land itself and from the tenantry.¹⁰³ Land agents began to view agricultural improvements as an obligation of both landowners and tenants. James Loch was one of the most emphatic believers of this, and was a pioneer of the benefit of the improving landlord. His incessant drive for improvements and efficiency saw him bear the brunt of the public odium directed at the Sutherland family for their role in the Highland Clearances.

This improving ethos was implemented on the North Staffordshire estate. While much has been written on the impact of these 'improvements' on the Sutherland estate in Scotland, and the stain of those policies still besmirches the reputation of Loch and the Leveson Gowers, it is seldom recognised that the zeal for increased efficiency was also enthusiastically pursued on the North Staffordshire estate. Moreover, the fallout from the Highland policy profoundly coloured the judgement of the Sutherland estate, and impacted upon their policies towards their tenants for generations.

¹⁰³ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 154.

The consideration of the English estate and Scottish estates as separate entities fails to recognise that the successes or difficulties of policies implemented on one part of the estate, could have a direct impact upon the policy pursued elsewhere. The discussions between Loch and Lewis demonstrate the links between policy in Scotland and in Staffordshire, and how Loch asked for Lewis' opinions on his policies, and confided in him his hopes for the estates. In January 1833 Loch was convinced that no great change of the sort attempted on the Scottish estate could be 'undertaken without the certainty of some temporary unpopularity' and he believed it would require 'constant labour and incessant toil until we broke in upon [the Highlanders'] ancient habits and customs.'¹⁰⁴ Lewis shared Loch's enthusiasm for the improvements made in the Highlands, most notably the laying of new roads. He believed that 'the doors are now open for great exertion and enterprise and I trust the natives and all interested will take advantage and benefit from what has been done for them.'¹⁰⁵

Loch believed in the benefits of estate improvements which were a cornerstone of his ideas on estate management. He expected his improving ethos to be shared by his subagents, and also the tenantry. Loch's mentality of improvements was echoed at local level by Lewis, who saw it as the duty of the agent to 'always be ready to carry every improvement into effect' and considered that the Sutherland estates presented 'more room for extensive improvements than anything else in Britain'.¹⁰⁶

Loch impressed upon Lewis how the improvements in Scotland had been implemented 'by the people themselves under the direction of the factor', stressing that this would also need to be the case on Lewis' estates in Staffordshire and Shropshire.¹⁰⁷ Loch also advocated the need to change the mentality of the Staffordshire tenants, believing that they should be made to be more self-sufficient and shown the benefit of 'calling into exertion their own industry to relieve their own

¹⁰⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 24.1.1832.

¹⁰⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Lewis to Loch, 29.1.1832.

¹⁰⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Lewis to Loch, 23.1.1832, 6.6.1832.

¹⁰⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 5.1.1832.

wants.¹⁰⁸ This echoes the tenor of the Poor Law Commission and its ambitions to render the poor more independent in the early 1830s.

A further objective of Loch's estate management was to reduce the expenditure of the estate. The personal excesses of the Sutherland family, and indeed other nineteenth century aristocrats, have been examined by Hugh Cunningham who highlights the 'conspicuous consumption' that was integral to aristocratic leisure culture. It was part of the role of the aristocrat, Cunningham argues, to demonstrate how wealthy they were through the acquisition of expensive commodities and the hosting of lavish parties.¹⁰⁹

By 1833, Loch recognised that the expenditure of the estate was unsustainable. He accepted that there was little he could do to influence the personal spending of the duke and duchess, but was, however, able to influence the expenditure of the estate generally. His correspondence with Lewis highlights his increasing efforts to do this.

This policy demonstrates the estate's structure of authority. Loch devised overall policy, and pursued this ruthlessly. He instructed Lewis to implement this policy at a local level in Staffordshire and Shropshire. Their exchanges demonstrate the limits of the authority of agents. While they were able to make some changes to the outlay of the estate, in other areas they were powerless, often due to the wishes and whims of the duke and duchess.

In the early 1830s Loch wrote to Lewis on several occasions to encourage vigilance in recording how costly developments on the English estates were progressing. He feared that the estate was incurring a great risk in 'expending so large a sum of money without being satisfied as to how it is going.'¹¹⁰ Loch reviewed the monthly abstracts of the Trentham estate and wrote to Lewis to 'entreat your attention to the reduction of expenditure at that place.' Loch proposed dismissing

¹⁰⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 5.1.1832.

¹⁰⁹ H. Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture' in FML Thompson (Ed.), *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, vol. 2: People and their environment, (1990), p. 291.

¹¹⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 23.1.1832.

workers, stressing to Lewis that ‘we are really much in want of the money.’¹¹¹ He ordered Lewis to review the last five years of expenditure to identify possible areas of reduction. Loch ordered there were to be ‘no further new buildings or improvements at Trentham’, and Lewis resolved to ensure that ‘the whole expenditure will now shortly be reduced to a very small scale.’¹¹²

Despite these efforts, by 1835, it had become evident that the expenditure of the Sutherland estate, the richest in the country, was in a perilous state. Loch considered that the expenditure at the house at Trentham was a primary cause for concern, observing in March 1835 that ‘the house expenditure of Trentham should be £1000 a month’.¹¹³ Loch prophesied that the effects would be considerable; telling Lewis ‘I foresee want and the most serious difficulties will ensue and a reduction of everything must be the consequence.’¹¹⁴ This proved to be so as the expenditure problems soon impacted upon estate policy. Loch was exasperated that planned improvements on the Trentham estate could not now be realised; ‘one of the fruits of expending more than there is income’.¹¹⁵ Loch further halted the renovations at Trentham Hall in February 1835 whilst the outlay, described as ‘fearful’ by Lewis, was properly examined.¹¹⁶

At Loch’s instruction Lewis compiled a detailed audit of the expenses of the Trentham estate and advised on how these could be reduced. However, despite this list of seventeen areas of expenditure, in many instances Lewis found himself unable to reduce the outlay as shown in comments such as, ‘The general expenditure of management cannot well be reduced... the rent charges remain... poor rates must continue.’¹¹⁷ There were areas that Lewis identified as being ripe for pruning the outlay, but to his frustration found he was unable to act. Most notable is his

¹¹¹ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 23.1.1832.

¹¹² SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Lewis to Loch, 5.1.1833, SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Loch to Lewis, 7.10.1833

¹¹³ SRO, D593/K/3/1/21 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Loch to Lewis, 21.3.1835.

¹¹⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/1/21 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Loch to Lewis, 17.3.1835.

¹¹⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/1/21 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Loch to Lewis, 17.3.1835.

¹¹⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Lewis to Loch, 21.1.1835, SRO, D593/K/3/1/21 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Loch to Lewis, 20.1.1835, Loch to Lewis, 19.2.1835, Loch to Lewis, 21.2.1835.

¹¹⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/2/15 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Lewis to Loch, 23.2.1835.

observation that ‘the gardener I am afraid will be expensive but over which I have but little control’. This is recognition that the second duke, and especially his wife, encouraged a considerable outlay on the gardens at Trentham.

Lewis did not recommend the increase of rents, observing that these were considered ‘reasonable and fair.’¹¹⁸ However, there may have been an appreciation that increasing rents would produce little increase of yield as the rent collection the previous summer had indicated the considerable number of tenants who found themselves in arrears. Loch instructed Lewis to identify what he could abstain from spending, and cautioned that any new applications for outlay would be ‘a sore subject’ and instructed that he must not request any further funds.¹¹⁹ Lewis was thus forced into an invidious position, as he was instructed to navigate between the duke’s heedless expenditure and Loch’s drive for sustainability.

Despite the evident need to maximise the estate profits, and the fact that the spiralling expenditure of the estate was impacting upon the implementation of policies it desired, urban developments and the leasing of land for building plots was not considered as a solution in North Staffordshire. Urban development could be highly lucrative, and was an opportunity exploited by many aristocratic landowners, as Loch would have been well aware. The growing population of Longton and the neighbouring pottery towns, as well as the abundance of available land on the duke’s estates merited consideration of this as a viable policy.

The decision not to implement a policy of urban development was ideological and was allowed to impact decidedly on the estate’s finances in the 1830s. Whether Loch was personally opposed to urban development, or whether he felt that the duke would oppose such an idea if he suggested it, is not clear. However, whenever applications were made for building leases on the estate, they were rejected by the agents with the refrain that the duke was not entertaining such notions at this

¹¹⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/2/15 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Lewis to Loch, 23.2.1835.

¹¹⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/1/21 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Loch to Lewis, 16.2.1835.

time.¹²⁰ Moreover, Loch's scathing attitude towards the Dresden development in the early 1850s, implies that he himself considered such developments unbecoming of an aristocratic landlord of the prestige of the duke of Sutherland. This desire to preserve the status of the estate demonstrates a further obstacle to the professionalisation of estate management. Consideration of what undertakings were befitting of the Sutherland estate retarded the implementation of policies which could have allowed agents to address the financial problems the estate faced in the 1830s. Ultimately, perceptions of prestige inhibited the solvency of the estate.

¹²⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Lewis to Smith, 29.4.1832.

2.4 AGENTS AND TENANTS

The policies and priorities of the estates directly impacted upon the lives of the tenantry and shaped the relationship between the estate and the people. It was the agents who formed the link between the landowner and his tenants and who implemented estate policy on the ground. It was the local agent who often bore the brunt of public odium when unpopular policies were implemented.

The 1830s were a particularly tense period in the relationship between landowners and their tenants nationally. The bonds of loyalty and deference to the traditional elite were strained by the growth of towns, and the vast movement of people from rural to urban communities. The impact of this uprooting of traditional ties was yet to be understood.

Agents were required to strike a balance between empathy towards tenants in difficulties and enforcing control over the collection of rents. Notions of paternalism towards the tenantry competed with the desire to maximise profits. The chief agents of both estates compiled detailed reports on the state of the rents, and gave instructions to their subordinates concerning those tenants in arrears.

On the Bradford estate, Peter Potter demonstrated compassion towards agricultural tenants when matters beyond their control impeded their ability to pay rents, believing ‘it would be bad policy... to deal harshly with them.’¹²¹ In 1830, after a harsh winter, he advocated a 15% reduction of rents for farmers to Lord Bradford.¹²² However, Potter was generally strict towards the tenantry as he believed leniency fostered complacency, to the detriment of the landlord. In September 1830, Potter observed that the arrears of tithes in the parish of Morton, Shropshire, were principally from Lord Bradford’s tenants. Potter concluded this situation was occasioned by his geographical detachment from these tenants, and determined to ‘put a stop to their irregular proceedings.’ Potter came down harshly on the Morton tenants, sending notice for four of them to quit, and vowing to personally collect the next Morton rents.¹²³

¹²¹ WLHC, 59/21, (Letter 1700), Potter to Simpson, 29.1.1830.

¹²² WLHC, 59/21, (Letter 1732), Potter to Simpson, 26.2.1830.

¹²³ WLHC, 59/21, (Letter 1875), Potter to Griffith, 13.9.1830.

Potter regularly relayed information to Lord Bradford about specific tenants, especially those in arrears. He rarely counselled leniency. On one occasion, Potter believed a tenant was demonstrating ‘ingratitude and an attempt to take advantage’ of Lord Bradford in asking for longer to pay his rent, adding that ‘were the case entirely mine, I would not listen to [such appeals].’¹²⁴

Although James Loch has been examined by historians, his relationship with the Staffordshire tenants, and his copious correspondence with William Lewis, has not been the subject of detailed academic examination. Loch encouraged Lewis to be firm on those tenants who had fallen into arrears, and often instructed the debtors to be removed. Similarly to Potter, Loch ‘resolved... never to indulge anyone, it always being to their ruin as well as the landlords’.¹²⁵ As did Potter, Loch sent long reports to his local subagents detailing instructions for individual tenants in arrears. This demonstrates that decisions were taken by the chief agent, rather than being made locally. The tone and content of Loch’s and Potter’s instructions were remarkably similar, demonstrating detailed knowledge of individual tenants, as well as showing their involvement in the local estates.

In August 1833, following the succession of the second duke of Sutherland, and congruent with attempts to stabilise the estates accounts, Loch redoubled his efforts to secure outstanding rents. He advocated the removal of any tenants unlikely to pay their arrears. Accordingly, Loch’s instructions to Lewis were forceful and included refrains such as, ‘Gibbs... must pay up – he has always been too dilatory... I am sorry George has been permitted to get two years into arrears – it cannot go on... give him some money and put him out.... Don’t let Smith rest until he pays – if you do he will be removed like the others.’¹²⁶

Loch chastised Lewis about the poor state of the Trentham rents. Lewis, who intimately knew the tenantry and the pressures they faced, struggled to be as ruthless as Loch expected. Loch entreated Lewis to be ‘much more strict than you have been in the collection of the rents’, observing that the tenants had been allowed to get into a ‘state of difficulty’ which put the new landlord into an

¹²⁴ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/79, Potter to Bradford, 16.9.1830.

¹²⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/1/16 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1830] Loch to Lewis, 12.2.1830.

¹²⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Loch to Lewis, 9.8.1833.

‘invidious position’.¹²⁷ He believed Lewis’ intimacy with the tenantry had affected his business sense.

Lewis’ s indignant reaction to this insinuation demonstrates the differing pressures and duties of chief agent and local subagent, as well as the varying levels of compassion manifested by individual agents. Lewis was stung by Loch’s comments, declaring himself ‘hurt’ that Loch had ‘deem[ed] it necessary to entreat me to be much more strict... in the collection of the rents’. He maintained that ‘everything has been done in the way of preparing for payment that I possibly could do.’¹²⁸

Lewis highlighted the local economic situation to justify the low returns informing Loch that ‘the last three years have been very defective wheat years which has operated much against the Trentham tenantry’.¹²⁹ Lewis further laid before Loch the individual situations of certain tenants in arrears. These included Mrs Garner, a widow supported by her relatives, and the family of the late George Ellin, whom Lewis had allowed to stay on the land as it was ‘one of those cases that unfits one at times from acting with severeness [*sic*]’.¹³⁰

In each of the instances he cited, Lewis resolved to now serve each tenant a notice to quit, suggesting that while his predisposition was to offer leniency towards those who were struggling, Lewis’ compassion was powerless once Loch determined that the tenants must be removed. Lewis objected to Loch’s instructions to take legal action against the tenants to be ‘a course under every consideration objectionable’ under present economic circumstances in North Staffordshire. However, despite his objections, he vowed to follow Loch’s instructions, ‘without a moments delay.’¹³¹

Loch’s aspersions prompted Lewis into securing outstanding rents. Four days later Lewis informed the chief agent that: ‘[Gibbs] promises to pay immediately... Key will pay in a few days...

¹²⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Loch to Lewis, 9.8.1833.

¹²⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Lewis to Loch, 13.8.1833.

¹²⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Lewis to Loch, 13.8.1833.

¹³⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Lewis to Loch, 13.8.1833.

¹³¹ SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Lewis to Loch, 13.8.1833.

Mitchell is a thorough bad one and is distraised upon'.¹³² Thus, although Loch later assured Lewis that he had not intended to suggest he had been negligent in collecting the rents, his comments had the desired effect in ensuring the local agent redoubled his efforts to secure outstanding rents. This, when taken with Loch's nonchalance at receiving criticism from the tenantry for estate decisions, ('the responsibility of having recourse to law proceedings may rest with me'), warrants the conclusion that Loch deliberately chastised Lewis as he knew this would provoke the desired reaction.¹³³

Indeed, Loch confided in Lewis that his intentions in suggesting that the solicitor, Mr Fenton, write to those in arrears, was calculated to induce the tenants to 'think it more serious... and that he could state the necessity of paying'. It was not, Loch admitted, with the view of instilling immediate legal proceedings.¹³⁴ Loch was not averse to employing scare and manipulation strategies to induce the tenants to pay. His letter to Lewis suggests that such tactics were also utilised on his subagents.

Lewis objected to Loch's aspersions that he had been negligent in recovering rents entrusted to his collection. He recognised that he had not used 'severe extraction' methods that 'many similarly situated would have done', perhaps alluding to the prevalent reputations held by some agents as being ruthless and unscrupulous. Lewis assured Loch that when fulfilling his duties, he had always 'pursu[ed] that course conceived most becoming my noble employers character and honour'.¹³⁵

Lewis believed a compassionate approach was justified, and reminded Loch of an instance when the orphan family of a deceased tenant had 'found themselves fairly and kindly treated' by Lewis. As a result, when the family 'sold themselves', they instructed the auctioneer to bring Lewis the whole proceeds of the sale – some £12. Lewis believed it was only his 'fair and compassionate conduct' towards the family that had secured the estate this income. Had he been firmer and

¹³² SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Lewis to Loch, 13.8.1833.

¹³³ SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Loch to Lewis, 21.8.1833.

¹³⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Loch to Lewis, 21.8.1833.

¹³⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Lewis to Loch, 13.8.1833.

distraigned the tenants, 'I could have got no more nor so much besides avoiding all unpleasantness.'¹³⁶

The use of such an anecdote to justify leniency was repeated by one of Lewis' successors as Trentham agent some thirty years later. In September 1864 George Fleming informed the chief agent that a tenant near Longton had committed suicide after getting into difficulties with a loan society.¹³⁷ The day before, the man had paid all his arrears to the agent. Fleming, similarly to Lewis, favoured a conciliatory approach towards those in arrears and stated that as the tenant was 'an honest and quiet person' Fleming had not 'pressed or even asked him to pay his arrears.'¹³⁸ That he paid his debt to the estate before ending his life, was considered by the agent in 1864 to demonstrate his appreciation of the lenient treatment he had received from the Trentham agent.

In August 1833, Loch was unconvinced by Lewis' anecdotes, believing that although tolerance may see 'a man in difficulty brought round - it can often happen that the contrary is the result.'¹³⁹ Loch had long believed that the tenantry must be tightly managed and taught the necessity of the timely payment of rents.¹⁴⁰

The pressures of the role of subagent, charged with enacting estate policy while living amongst the tenantry, are shown to be starkly different to those of the chief agent, who dictated policy from afar. To demonstrate this, Lewis complained that, in the course of fulfilling his duties, 'no man knows what I have suffered on many occasion', a claim which Loch accepted, recognising Lewis' unenviable position of eliciting rents from his neighbours. Loch accepted that 'it is more difficult for one in your situation to enforce strictness than for me.'¹⁴¹ However, Loch charged that 'the Trentham rents have not been attended to as strictly as those in Shropshire'.¹⁴² Evidently Loch

¹³⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/2/13 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Lewis to Loch, 13.8.1833.

¹³⁷ SRO D593/K/3/8/15 [Out-letter book of George Fleming, 1864] Fleming to George Loch, 7.9.1864.

¹³⁸ SRO D593/K/3/8/15 [Out-letter book of George Fleming, 1864] Fleming to George Loch, 7.9.1864.

¹³⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Loch to Lewis, 21.8.1833.

¹⁴⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/1/16 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1830] Loch to Lewis, 12.2.1830.

¹⁴¹ SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Loch to Lewis, 21.8.1833.

¹⁴² SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833] Loch to Lewis, 21.8.1833.

believed that Lewis' relationship with the Trentham tenants had affected his business sense and impacted the collection of the rents.

This assertion is supported in several instances, and Lewis was palpably less compassionate and trustworthy towards the Shropshire and South Staffordshire tenantry than those he knew more intimately at Trentham. In January 1834, Lewis informed Loch that 'caution and great prudence' would prove essential for the new subagent on the Shropshire estate as he believed the tenants there undertook 'much mischief' during Lewis' absences from Shropshire.¹⁴³ Lewis warned that 'the cottagers require a very constant watching', suggesting that although he may have been compassionate and trusting towards many of his neighbours in Trentham, he was more suspicious of tenants with whom he was less familiar, and was more inclined to recommend their surveillance.¹⁴⁴

Lewis was less sympathetic to the plight of the Staffordshire tenantry, when he felt tenants were seeking to take advantage of the leniency of the estate. Observing that a tenant, Mr Penson, had underpaid and complained that his rents were too dear, Lewis retorted that they were 'non such thing [*sic*]' and that Penson 'ought to be ashamed of himself to say so.'¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Loch's later observations that any branch of the Penson family was 'entitled to a more than usual consideration' was not shared by Lewis who instead found the underpayment 'truly provoking... after the liberal manner [Penson] has been treated by the Marquis of Stafford and Lord Gower'.¹⁴⁶

Loch's enthusiasm for implementing 'improvements' is well documented and, as has been discussed above, Lewis as his Staffordshire subagent also espoused the ethos of improvements. This impacted upon the attitude of Lewis towards the tenants in North Staffordshire.

Lewis and Loch favoured tenants who were industrious and willing to improve their holdings. Lewis was critical of those tenants he considered lazy or inefficient farmers and in deliberations about

¹⁴³ SRO, D593/K/3/2/14 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1834] Lewis to Loch, 17.1.1834.

¹⁴⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/2/14 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1834] Lewis to Loch, 1.2.1834.

¹⁴⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Lewis to Loch, 23.1.1832.

¹⁴⁶ Loch to Duchess of Sutherland, 3.4.1844, cited in Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire, Volume 11*, p. 233, SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Lewis to Loch, 23.1.1832.

whether those in arrears could be given more time, Lewis invariably commented upon their farming efficiency.¹⁴⁷

Whilst visiting the South Staffordshire estate in 1835, Lewis informed Loch that most tenants were content with the current rates of rent, but observed ‘a little grumbling amongst some of them at Penn and Rowley’. Lewis attributed this dissatisfaction ‘more to their own mismanagement and indolence than to any fault of the lands.’ He informed Loch privately of his belief that ‘a change or two’ of tenants would ‘prove advantageous to the estate’.¹⁴⁸ Thus Lewis demonstrated himself receptive to the benefits of removing inefficient tenants from their land in distant parts of the county, while he was less willing to do so in North Staffordshire, where he had a closer and more personal relationship with the tenantry.

In encouraging the tenantry to ‘improve’ themselves, Loch was willing to exploit the cholera outbreak of 1832 which ravaged England and Scotland. Loch noted that the outbreak and rapid spread of the disease offered ‘the greatest possible moral and physical advantage’ as it would give the estate a compelling pretext to ‘get them to clean their houses and to remove all filth from without’.¹⁴⁹

Loch felt that ‘if full advantage was to be taken’ of the outbreak, then ‘infinite good might be done’ to parts of the English estates too, most notably the Shropshire cottages. Loch enthused to Lewis in January 1832 that ‘nothing but a case such as the present’ would ‘justify the inspection of the inside, or the almost forcible removal of nuisances from the outside’ of tenants houses. He impressed upon Lewis that such an opportunity ‘ought not to be lost’.¹⁵⁰ This level of calculation and opportunism was characteristic of Loch and was doubtlessly replicated by similarly situated agents.

¹⁴⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/2/15 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Lewis to Loch, 6.3.1835.

¹⁴⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/2/15 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1835] Lewis to Loch, 20.3.1835.

¹⁴⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 5.1.1832.

¹⁵⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 5.1.1832.

The agents also sought to control the behaviour and morality of those living and working on their estates. Loch often instructed Lewis to chastise tenants who misbehaved. In February 1830, Loch observed that a tenant named Brett, was ‘a very troublesome fellow’ and instructed Lewis that ‘if he doesn’t mind his manners he must have notice to quit.’¹⁵¹

Loch believed that the improvement and maintenance of the moral character of the tenants was one of the many advantages to the tenantry from living on an aristocratic estate. He believed that Lord Stafford’s influence had been used to ‘[extend] the comfort or advancing the good behaviour of his cottagers’ which was an ‘an object of great solicitude’ for Lord Stafford. The tenants’ ‘regular and decent behaviour’ was the subject of care and attention, and Loch resolved to give ‘strict directions to watch carefully over them, and where possible to promote their improvement’ to the land agents.¹⁵²

As with the conduct of tenants, the conduct of workers on the Trentham estate was also tightly regulated. No instance highlights this more starkly than the dismissal in 1832 of Dorothy Doar, head housekeeper at Trentham Hall. Loch wrote to Lewis in April 1832 informing him that Mrs Doar was pregnant and that Lady Stafford had determined that, while there was no suggestion that the pregnancy was illegitimate, the housekeeper ‘cannot stay’. While recognising that Doar, an employee of Trentham for some 14 years, was ‘a most excellent and zealous and faithful person’, Loch agreed whole heartedly with her dismissal. He informed Lewis that her pregnancy would set ‘a bad example to others, and a Housekeeper who has maids to look after should not be bearing children even to their husbands.’¹⁵³

While Doar was to be dismissed, Loch encouraged Lord Stafford to provide funds to establish a small shop on the estate from which she could sell groceries and for which Lewis sought a suitable property. However, in May 1832, rumours reached Loch that Doar had been stealing supplies from the Trentham stores. Loch confessed himself, ‘very slow and unwilling to believe anything against

¹⁵¹ SRO, D593/K/3/1/16 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1830] Loch to Lewis, 25.2.1830.

¹⁵² Loch, *Account of Improvements*, pp. 227-30.

¹⁵³ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 2.4.1832.

Mrs Doar. I have always considered her a good and faithful servant.’ He asked Lewis to ‘investigate carefully these stories’.¹⁵⁴ Throughout these discussions, Loch was in London, immersed in the debates concerning the introduction of the Great Reform Act of 1832 and the turbulent ‘days of May’. Yet Loch’s instructions to Lewis are remarkably detailed, demonstrating awareness of the intricacies of the Trentham estate and the dynamics between staff.

Loch delegated authority to Lewis and gave him ‘full power to act if upon full enquiry you think it proper to do so, which one on the spot alone can judge of’.¹⁵⁵ Lewis had long been convinced Doar was stealing and oversaw the forced examination of Mrs Doar’s property. He relayed to Loch the ‘disgraceful scene of robbery’ and ordered that Mrs Doar ‘should be removed from the house instantly’.¹⁵⁶

Loch, shocked by developments, instructed Lewis to inform him privately of whether other Trentham employees’ wages were sufficient, believing that ‘to make people honest and above suspicion they should have enough’.¹⁵⁷ Loch recognised, privately at least, that economic necessity and desperation created by her dismissal for falling pregnant had compelled Mrs Doar, a previously loyal and trustworthy employee, to steal from the estate.

The reaction to Mrs Doar’s pregnancy, despite this being within the bonds of marriage, and regardless of her long service to the family, illustrates how the Sutherland estate reacted firmly to challenges to their moral code. Her later deceit only manifested itself after the decision had been taken to remove her from Trentham Hall. Unsurprisingly, the estate was ruthless when employees they were less familiar with flouted their authority. On New Year’s Eve 1831, Lewis acted decisively against employees working on reconstructing Lilleshall Hall who had ‘made a stand... for an advance of wages.’ Lewis confessed to Loch that he was actually ‘rather glad’ as this gave him the opportunity to eject the ‘most officious’ of the men, and he duly sacked 15 workers.¹⁵⁸ This

¹⁵⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 19.5.1832.

¹⁵⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 19.5.1832.

¹⁵⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Lewis to Loch, 29.5.1832, 31.5.1832.

¹⁵⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 30.5.1832.

¹⁵⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Lewis to Loch, 1.1.1832.

instance demonstrates the existence amongst some classes of workers of a burgeoning class consciousness, and some awareness of issues of their rights.

Lewis however saw this suspension of work in the demand for better pay, as laziness, and observed that a culture had developed amongst certain classes of worker so that they ‘object to doing anything like a full day’s work’ noting that these workers sought to ‘poison the minds of the others.’¹⁵⁹ Loch approved of Lewis’ decisive action in the matter and praised his subagent for settling the matter in ‘your usual decided and proper manner’ believing that this firm stance would ‘prevent all future attempts’ to demand increased wages.¹⁶⁰

As has been demonstrated, agents fulfilled an integral role in implementing the estates policies, directed from the chief agent, onto the local estates. The subagents served as the link between and landowner and his tenants, and were often placed in an unenviable position. Lewis’ evident compassion and empathy for the tenants he lived amongst was of little interest to Loch, who insisted that the agent pressurise those in arrears to either pay, or face eviction. Loch’s policy was motivated by his own pressures, as he attempted to control the spiralling expenditure of the estate, and the ducal family itself.

Agents were further responsible for implementing and enforcing the moral code of the estate, both amongst tenants and the employees at Trentham Hall. How these measures of social control were replicated as the estate embarked upon an unprecedented building project of terraced housing on the edge of Longton will be examined in the following chapter.

¹⁵⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/2/12 [Out-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Lewis to Loch, 1.1.1832.

¹⁶⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 2.1.1832.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In the early stages of urban development of the two Staffordshire towns, the aristocratic landowners played markedly differing roles. The earl of Bradford wholly supported Peter Potter in his projects of laying roads and erecting houses as Walsall expanded, and gave him considerable authority to fulfil these projects. Meanwhile, in the north of the county, while Longton became a thriving pottery town, the duke of Sutherland was preoccupied with the expenditure of his estate, the 'improvement' of his vast lands in Scotland, and the restoration of ducal palaces.

Only after seeing how the Longton Freehold Society could develop unused land in the 1850s were the duke's agents prompted to develop their estate around Longton. That there were considerable profits to be realised from urban development were not considered in the 1830s in the context of the pressing necessity to address the estate's finances demonstrates that ideological objections to urbanisation impacted negatively on the estate's solvency. As will be examined in the following chapter, the Florence and Normacot developments were, to some extent, ideologically motivated in a desire to protect the social character of the tenantry.

The role agents played in the 1830s was vital to the running of the two estates. Potter in particular was instrumental to the development of the town of Walsall, influencing politics and religion, as well as his key role in urban development. Lewis, without the authority of a chief-agent, had less impact in shaping general policy. However he too played an integral role in the implementation of estate policy in North Staffordshire, most notably in the reduction of expenditure and the removal of tenants in arrears. The 1830s were not the time for urbanisation on the Sutherland's North Staffordshire estate. When this was enacted later in the century, Lewis' successors as Trentham agent, most notably George Menzies, played an important role in the development of Longton, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The chief-agents were remarkably involved with, and intimately aware of, individual tenants' and workers' circumstances on the local estates. On 10th May 1832, the day after the Reform Act had been vetoed by the House of Lords, prompting the resignation of the Prime Minister Earl Grey,

Loch wrote to Lewis from London. While Loch's letter began with a discussion of politics, ('I am really most anxious to see how the people will take all this'), the majority of his letter gave Lewis detailed directions regarding Mrs Doar, the housekeeper at Trentham. This demonstrates the importance even of these trivial matters of estate management to the chief agent.¹⁶¹

This chapter has served to demonstrate how the Sutherland and Bradford estates were managed in the 1830s, and how the individual agents acted within a structure of authority. It has shown how decisions on estate policy in areas of urbanisation, improvements, expenditure and the management of the tenantry were implemented on the local estates, and the conflicts these could cause for local sub-agents caught between empathy for tenants and the policy for recovery of arrears. It has demonstrated the levels of influence and authority that some agents were granted and how they could act in the name of the landlord, often without the necessity to seek formal consent.

The case studies examined here demonstrate the involvement of agents at all levels of estate management. They further show how little the aristocrats themselves were involved in the management of their estates. Such findings contribute to our knowledge of the management of the estates which formed a considerable proportion of Britain for much of the nineteenth century. Moreover, they demonstrate how the whims of landowners, and the motivations and diligence of individual agents, could impact considerably on the development of large areas of land and, in some instances, result in the rapid development and growth of towns.

As is shown, and as will be developed further in this thesis, the role of the agents on aristocratic estates was integral to much more than merely the physical layout of streets. In the case of some landed estates, agents, who were from a variety of social and professional backgrounds, could impact decidedly on many aspects of the growing towns and in the process of urbanisation and industrialisation in Britain. This discussion of the two estates in the 1830s will be continued in subsequent chapters on later decades. Comments will be made on how the management of the

¹⁶¹ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832] Loch to Lewis, 10.5.1832.

estate, the policy towards urban development, and the management of the tenants living on the land, changed and developed.

3.0 URBANISATION SECOND PHASE 1850-69

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will analyse the role of agents of aristocratic landowners in the management of estates in the middle of the nineteenth century. The 1850s and 1860s saw changes to the management of the Bradford and Sutherland estates in Staffordshire, as well as significant urban and suburban developments on both estates. The towns of Walsall and Longton grew in these decades, both at the impetus of the aristocratic estates and independently of them.

After briefly considering relevant secondary literature, this chapter presents an analysis of the role of the estates' agents in what can be considered the 'second phase' of urban development, following the earlier developments in the 1830. The impact agents had on shaping the character of urban developments will be demonstrated. Their relationships with the tenantry will be considered, and the manner in which individual personalities impacted upon the effective fulfilment of estate policy will be highlighted.

From 1851 to 1871, the population of Walsall rose from 26,822 to over 48,500, an increase of over 80 percent.¹ The 1850s witnessed the largest growth in population in the town of any decade in the nineteenth century. This increase slowed but continued into the 1860s and '70s. The extension of mining and building of ironworks from 1850 underpinned the great increase in the population, especially of the Pleck area to the west of the town centre, which, by 1858, was believed to be over 2,500.² There was a resultant demand for housing for the workers coming into the towns, and streets of cottages and terraced houses were built on the Bradford estate to capitalise on this. As with other urban centres, Walsall witnessed significant levels of Irish immigration following the famine in the late 1840s.

In North Staffordshire, Longton also witnessed substantial population growth, albeit not as dramatically as that of Walsall. From a population of 15,149 in 1851, the town was home to 19,748

¹ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 17, p. 145.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. 17, p. 158.

twenty years later, an increase of 30 percent.³ Since the 1830s, Longton had seen several developments of its centre. A new market and town hall had been erected in 1844 which was replaced and extended in 1863.⁴ The continuing expansion of the pottery, coal and iron industries saw many areas around the centre become solidly built up with pottery works and terraced houses. Unlike other pottery towns, Longton became known for having a great number of smaller scale pottery works, rather than larger factories. In 1859, there were over 60 pottery works in the town. More than half of these were devoted to the manufacture of bone china.⁵ The popular use of the name 'Lane End' gradually declined, in favour of Longton and, following a petition by inhabitants, in 1848 the name 'Lane End' had been officially changed to Longton for postal and governmental purposes. The townships of Longton and Lane End were incorporated as a borough in 1865.⁶ Thus, Longton's urban identity became more sharply defined in this period.

³ Jenkins, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 8, p. 227.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

3.2 SECONDARY LITERATURE

In David Cannadine's chronology of the relationships between aristocratic landlords and their urban estates, the period of 1850s and 1860s falls within a phase of 'remarkable calm, compromise, balance and mutual admiration'. Cannadine suggests that, following the acrimony and confrontation of the 1830s and 1840s, the middle decades of the nineteenth century was a time of rapprochement between the aristocracy and the towns.⁷ The mid nineteenth century were a period of economic boom which contributed to a renewed social deference towards traditional elites.

Cannadine utilised evidence from the Sutherland estate in North Staffordshire to form his analysis, contrasting the hostility towards the 'Trentham interest' in the 1820s with the widespread lamentations at the death of the duke of Sutherland in 1861.⁸ Cannadine demonstrates that even in towns with no large aristocratic landowner, the patronage of a grandee was considered an indispensable prerequisite for the launch of any society or institution.⁹ As Richard Cobden observed with distaste, by the 1860s, the British had once again become 'a servile, aristocratic race'.¹⁰ However, this 'honeymoon period', Cannadine suggests, was only to last for a generation, and by the 1870s and '80s hostility and conflict resurfaced, and an anti-aristocratic climate returned.¹¹

Although Cannadine identifies a renewed sense of deference amongst tenants on aristocratic estates, an analysis of the duke's tenantry around Longton can complicate this picture. Moreover, the example of the largely unexamined estate of the earl of Bradford can be used to challenge Cannadine's analysis.

While Eric Richards has undertaken copious research into the Sutherland estate, his investigations cover the period 1780-1855, with James Loch often the primary focus. The management and policies of the estate after Loch's death in 1855 are largely uncovered in existing historiography.

⁷ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰ Cobden, cited in Cannadine, *Lords and Landlord*, p. 47.

¹¹ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 49.

Annie Tindley attempts to address this imbalance and ‘continue the narrative and investigation started by Richards’ by examining the management, policies and ‘decline’ of the Scottish estate after 1850.¹² To some extent, this chapter seeks to continue Richards’ narrative in North Staffordshire and examines the management of the duke’s estates following George Loch’s appointment as commissioner. Tindley identifies a definite change in the attitude and approach toward the tenantry in Scotland, as well as in agricultural policy. Similar changes in tenant relations can also be discerned in North Staffordshire, while a policy of suburban development was undertaken for the first time.

H.J. Dyos was one of the first to study the phenomenon of suburbs with his case study of Camberwell, South London. Subsequent studies have extended his analysis to developments in other localities, notably in North America.¹³ McManus and Ethington chart the changing perceptions of suburbs, demonstrating that early suburbs were those parts of urban areas lying beyond the physical limits of the city, usually outside the city walls. Here lived the ‘underclasses and outcasts’ who could not afford the privilege and safety of living within the city itself. The unpleasant, polluting and dangerous trades were concentrated in suburbs, where the ground rent was cheaper.¹⁴ These negative connotations were inverted in the mid-nineteenth century as the emergent English middle classes sought residences ‘away from the environmental nuisances that they themselves had brought into being’.¹⁵

Harris and Larkin outlined five characteristic dimensions of suburbs which can be utilised in analysing the duke of Sutherland’s Longton suburbs. They highlight the peripheral location in relation to a dominant urban centre, a partly (or wholly) residential character and low population

¹² A. Tindley, *The Sutherland Estate, 1850-1920: Aristocratic Decline, Estate Management and Land Reform*, (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 2.

¹³ For example see K. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985) and T. Gardner, ‘The Slow Wave: The Changing Residential Status of Cities and Suburbs in the United States, 1850–1940’, *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2001), pp. 293–312.

¹⁴ R. McManus, and P. Ethington, ‘Suburbs in Transition: New Approaches to Suburban History’, *Urban History*, vol. 34, no. 2, p. 320.

¹⁵ McManus and Ethington, *Suburbs in Transition*, p. 320.

densities. A distinctive culture or way of life is discernible, as are separate community identities, often embodied in local governments.¹⁶

As will be demonstrated, there is a disparity between the suburban developments undertaken by the Sutherland estate and the urban housing erected alongside industrial premises on the Bradford estate. While Lord Bradford did grant building leases for the erection of houses and villas on the periphery of Walsall, these were leased on individual plots, while the Sutherland estate systematically planned whole neighbourhoods to be developed.

On the Sutherland estate, there was an evident desire to create a separate community identity for these suburbs, distinguishing them from the urban centre of Longton. Attempts were made to develop a distinctive culture, not least through the decidedly middle class recreational facilities permitted in Florence, namely a tennis and lawn bowls association. Moreover, these suburbs were explicitly to be residential in character, with all industrial activity prohibited. In Walsall, there was no such clear delineation between housing and industry. Once the Sutherland estate agreed to develop their land around Longton, they remained committed to maintaining a respectable character to these developments, rather than entrepreneurial profits offered by quickly and cheaply erected houses by individual developers and speculative builders.

¹⁶ R. Harris and P. Larkin, (Eds.), *Changing Suburbs: Formation, Form and Function*, (London, 1999), pp. 8-14.

3.3 AGENCY STRUCTURE

The following section examines the individual agents charged with the management of the Bradford and Sutherland estates, before analysing the agency structure and the power dynamics within those structures. Finally, the relationship between agents and the landowners, and changes in this dynamic resulting from the death of the aristocrat will be considered.

PETER POTTER THE YOUNGER

Peter Potter the younger possessed many of the professional qualities of his father, and became highly valued by Lord Bradford, and respected by Walsall's elite.¹⁷ Potter succeeded his father as chief agent on the latter's death in March 1843. He was aged 32, some fifteen years younger than his father had been at his own appointment in 1820. The younger Potter had been trained for the role by his father from an early age. His teenage journals detail exposure to the work of an agent and surveyor accompanying his father on business trips, meetings and rent collections.¹⁸

The elder Peter Potter undertook many of the chief agent's duties until shortly before his death. His sons Peter, and John, the Walsall solicitor, shared increased responsibility to ensure continuity in estate management.¹⁹ It does not appear to have been suggested that another man might have assumed the agency of the Bradford estate. As Potter aged, his sons increasingly assumed his duties of estate management and his eldest son took over the role of agent following his death. Thus the succession of the position of chief agent was essentially inherited, and the transition was carefully managed to preserve continuity in a manner similar to that of an aristocratic title. This challenges the momentum towards an increased professionalisation of the role of chief agent, despite other indicators that the conduct of the Potters heralded an increased professionalism of the Bradford agency.

¹⁷ Obituary cited in Morley, *Potters of Walsall*, p. 27.

¹⁸ WLHC, Accession No. 1093 - Journal of Peter Potter II (1831).

¹⁹ This is evidenced by Bradford's references to the Potter's as a joint unit, for example 'I distinctly understood from the Messrs. Potter'. SRO, D1287/18/27 K/108/2 Lord Bradford to the Reverend Mr Fisk, 19.1.1843.

In the face of early criticism of his conduct, Lord Bradford defended his new agent, expressing his great confidence in Potter's 'integrity, ability and high principle' While not possessing the 'superior talent of his father, nor as yet all his experience', Bradford declared his confidence that Potter would make a 'valuable and trustworthy' agent.²⁰

The younger Potter's early correspondence with Lord Bradford upon his permanent assumption of the chief agent's role, contained detailed and informed advice on a range of estate matters, demonstrating his confidence in fulfilling this new position.²¹ Considerable levels of continuity were achieved following the death of the incumbent and the younger Potter regularly referred to his father's notes concerning previous transactions.²² As shortly as a month after his father's death, Potter assured Bradford that 'everything in regard to the future management of Your Lordship's estates [had been] definitely and satisfactorily arranged.'²³

The detail and scope of the information provided by Potter was similar to the measured analysis of prospective purchases compiled by his father, albeit with some initial timidity.²⁴ Potter described proposals in detail to Lord Bradford, outlining the potential benefits and problems of purchases of land. He negotiated leases of property and of building plots in Walsall, and possessed the freedom to accept or decline tenancy candidates as had been exercised by his predecessor. Potter displayed knowledge of relevant legal precedents, and furnished Bradford with details of the situations of other landowners. He offered clear and comprehensive assessments of the likely success of legal action and potential financial benefits.

Potter possessed his father's anticipation of the potential and future value of urban land.

Concerning applications for building land near Bridgeman Street for a manufactory in 1862, Potter predicted that, while perhaps not desirable, once erected; this manufactory would rapidly cause a demand for building plots for workers' houses. He warned against the rejection of the proposal,

²⁰ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Lord Bradford to the Reverend Cotton, 11.11.1843.

²¹ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Potter to Lord Bradford, 21.3.1843.

²² SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Potter to Lord Bradford, 9.5.1843.

²³ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Potter to Lord Bradford, 9.5.1843.

²⁴ Potter said he was 'not prepared to give a decided opinion as the advisability of purchasing' in reference to specific land. SRO D1287/18/27 K/107A, Potter to Lord Bradford, 27.7.1843.

which the estate's London accountants had counselled, believing that if the applicant could not be accommodated on Lord Bradford's estates, he would apply elsewhere and the lucrative opportunity would be lost.²⁵

This far-sighted approach had been demonstrated repeatedly by Potter's father such as in considering the long-term benefits for the estate of providing the site for a Walsall Poor Law workhouse in 1838. Both agents made decisions based on considerations of a proposal's future worth, rather than merely their short term benefit or the landowner's initial distain. This distinguished the Potters as proficient agents. James Loch on the Sutherland estate similarly implored his subagents to think five years ahead in making any decisions.²⁶ However, as detailed in the previous chapter, the Sutherland estate displayed short-sightedness in not appreciating the vast potential for the profits which urban development could have brought to the estate, especially in a period of financial strain.

Despite enjoying considerable autonomy in decision making, due in no small part to the advantages his father's management had brought to the estate, Peter Potter the younger's authority was not limitless. In June 1860, he was reminded that he remained answerable to Lord Bradford, and that the chief agent could not act entirely on his own initiative. Concerning repairs to Knockin Hall, the London accountant Simpson pointedly insisted that Lord Bradford should 'have such matters – indeed all of every moment brought before him and his authority given.'²⁷ Yet Potter was unperturbed by the chastisement, and Simpson himself conceded that Potter's actions had been 'doubtless... the proper thing to be done'.²⁸ This irksome reminder of the source of ultimate authority was mere postulating, and Potter's proposed course was continued.

GEORGE LOCH

²⁵ SRO, D1287/Colliery box 2, Q/331/1, Potter to Simpson, 29.9.1862.

²⁶ Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p 12.

²⁷ SRO, D1287/1/33/G159, Simpson to Potter, 11.6.1860.

²⁸ SRO, D1287/1/33/G159, Simpson to Potter, 11.6.1860. SRO, D1287/1/33/G160, Potter to Simpson, 12.6.1860.

On the Sutherland estate, the incumbent chief agent was also succeeded on his death by his son. George Loch became chief agent in 1855, yet he has been relatively overlooked by historians in comparison with his much celebrated father. In her analysis of the duke's Scottish estates, Annie Tindley purports that George Loch was eager to continue and improve his father's methods. He implemented measures to increase the chief agent's control over his subordinates, and insisted that he be 'kept informed of all matters of interest' on the estate. He lamented the lack of infrastructure to achieve this, and accordingly demanded weekly reports. He assumed control of the appointment and dismissal of all subordinates.²⁹

Loch's 'intrusive and controlling' style of management caused tensions with some of the more established factors. John Horsburgh saw Loch's management as 'injurious to the interests of the proprietor and destructive to the proper status and usefulness of the factors'.³⁰ The duke believed it was Loch's prerogative regarding how much authority his subagents were afforded, and Horsburgh was replaced by a man Loch was more satisfactorily able to 'direct his ideas about status.'³¹

Similar trends can be witnessed with George Loch's management of the Staffordshire estate. Loch's insistence on controlling all aspects of estate management reduced the autonomy of Trentham agent George Fleming. Loch's micromanagement continued once George Menzies replaced Fleming as agent in 1865.

Loch believed Menzies to be a more capable agent than Fleming, whom he considered incompetent. Yet despite Menzies quickly demonstrating himself to be an able and intelligent agent, he was prevented from authorising the most routine matters without first consulting Loch. As with the Scottish estates, Loch was to be consulted on all estate expenditure, regardless of how trivial. From the erection of a fence, to the necessity of a bailiff having a pony, all expenditure was supervised by Loch.³² Loch's interference had a negative effect on the 'status and usefulness' of

²⁹ Tindley, *Sutherland Estate*, p. 14. George Loch to William Gunn, 25 Nov 1855, quoted in Tindley, *Sutherland Estate*, p. 14, Horsburg to Duke of Sutherland, 20.1.1859, and 8.2.1859, quoted in Tindley, *Sutherland Estate*, p. 15.

³⁰ Horsburgh to Duke of Sutherland, 4.3.1859, quoted in Tindley, *Sutherland Estate*, p. 15.

³¹ Tindley, *Sutherland Estate*, p. 15.

³² SRO, D593/K/3/9/1, Loch to Menzies, 24.1.1865.

Menzies' position as Trentham agent, as estate matters were often delayed to receive Loch's assent.³³ Paradoxically however, Loch actively increased Menzies' authority, or rather the perception of his authority, with regards to his management of the tenantry.

GEORGE FLEMING

George Fleming had followed an unconventional route to become Trentham agent. A gardener, he was transferred from the Scottish estate to Lilleshall Abbey, where he became head gardener. He was held in high esteem by the second duke of Sutherland and his wife, and was appointed as head gardener at Trentham in 1841.³⁴ Fleming oversaw the extensive renovation of the gardens and received national recognition in the horticultural press for his improvements.³⁵

Following William Lewis' retirement in 1842, William Steward assumed the Trentham agency. Steward was in poor health and took a leave of absence in 1847. Fleming temporarily undertook the duties of agent at the encouragement of James Loch and the duke. He impressed in the role and, upon Steward's return, the two uneasily shared the agent's duties. Considerable resentment existed between the two men, and they scarcely communicated, much to Loch's exasperation.³⁶ In 1858, Steward was deemed responsible for the fraud committed by a farm bailiff and was invited to resign. George Loch, now chief agent, objected to Fleming's appointment on account of his lack of training, but was overruled by the duke.³⁷

Fleming was competent as an agent, but was prone to mistakes and errors of judgement. These infuriated George Loch and justified his objections to the appointment of a gardener, rather than an

³³ For example, in February 1865, Menzies informed Loch that he 'would go no further in the matter' until he had heard from Loch regarding the unfreezing of a drain on the estate. (SRO, D593/K/3/9/41, Menzies to Loch, 23.2.1865). He had however ordered a plumber, and hoped he 'had not done wrong by acting without [Loch's] sanction' in that action.

³⁴ Gregory, *Historic Gardens at Trentham*, pp. 88-9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-9, Fleming himself wrote about his methods in the *Gardeners Chronicle* and in the transactions of the horticulture society of London.

³⁶ Gregory, *Historic Gardens at Trentham*, pp. 90-1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-1.

experienced agent. Fleming held the position until the end of 1864, when he was persuaded to assume tenancy of the model farm at Groundslow and return to his role as gardener.

GEORGE MENZIES

In 1864 George Menzies was chosen to replace Fleming as Trentham agent. Menzies hailed from Dunfermline and was the son of a manager of works, implying an elevated background compared to many land agents.³⁸ By 1861, the 24 year old Menzies was a farmer of 276 acres in Dunfermline, 'employing 6 Ploughmen, 10 Women and 1 Boy and 2 Agricultural Labourers.'³⁹ Such responsibility at a young age suggests he was considered a proficient farmer. Indeed, Loch approvingly observed to the duke that Menzies 'farm[ed] an area much bigger than he owns... and wishe[d] to improve his position'.⁴⁰ Menzies assumed the role of agent for the duke's North Staffordshire estate on 1 January 1865, and remained in the role until his retirement by 1911.

Menzies' Scottish, agricultural background is consistent with that of many Trentham agents, demonstrating the consideration by the ducal family that Scotsmen made efficient agents. Even once suburban development became more prevalent, the Sutherland estate continued to consider agricultural proficiency as the paramount prerequisite for their agents. This is in contrast to Lord Bradford's preference for a chief agent who was a trained surveyor with an urban background.

AGENCY RESTRUCTURING

Having discussed the individual agents, the structure of each estate's agency will be considered in order to determine how the policies of urbanisation and tenant management were enacted. In the early 1860s, the agency of the earl of Bradford's estates underwent considerable restructuring. The impetus for this change came from Peter Potter rather than being dictated by the landowner. This signifies the influence and authority Potter held in the administration of the Bradford estates, as his proposal initiated an overhaul of their management.

³⁸ George Menzies: 1851 census.

³⁹ George Menzies: 1861 census.

⁴⁰ SRO, D593/K1/5/135, Loch to duke of Sutherland, 3.10.1864.

By August 1859, Potter's health, which was often poor, had deteriorated considerably, notably since the retirement of his brother and business partner, Josiah.⁴¹ Potter felt unable to fulfil his duties as chief agent and wished to enter semi-retirement. The manner in which this was effected was revealing of the nature of the agent's relationship with the landowner and indicative of the relative levels of patronage, as opposed to professionalism, of the estate management.

Potter proposed to Lord Bradford that he and his brother John, a solicitor in Walsall already employed by the estate, should temporarily fulfil the duties of chief-agent jointly, until his health improved. Potter reserved for himself the administration of Preston Hospital Charity, evidently perceiving his health adequate for this. In addition, Potter proposed that his eldest son, 19 year old Peter, act as assistant to John Potter.⁴² The youngest Peter Potter had worked in his father's office for four years, demonstrating the tendency of the Bradford agents to train their eldest sons in preparation to succeed to the role. The essentially hereditary nature of the position of Bradford chief agent, and the preparations for succession of this, does not conform to Brassley's definition of professionalisation.⁴³

Potter assured Bradford that his proposal was borne only from a 'desire for the successful management of the estates' rather than the 'pecuniary gain' of the Potter family.⁴⁴ Bradford accepted Potter's proposal, demonstrating his confidence in the judgement of his chief agent of 17 years. Bradford's strong affinity for the Potter family, combined with an evident inertia and desire for continuity, motivated this decision. John Potter was undoubtedly a knowledgeable solicitor, and offered Bradford advice on diverse subjects, whilst deputising as agent. However, his inexperience of estate management was sometimes evident, while the existence of joint agents created some duplication of efforts, and some instances of confusion.⁴⁵

⁴¹ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/143, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.8.1859.

⁴² SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/143, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.8.1859.

⁴³ Brassley, cited in S. Webster, 'Estate Improvement and the Professionalisation of Land Agents on the Egremont Estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770-1835', *Rural History*, 18:1, (April, 2007), p. 49.

⁴⁴ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/143, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.8.1859.

⁴⁵ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/144, John Potter to Lord Bradford, 22.7.1860, SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/143, John Potter to Bradford, 28.12.1859, In one letter to Lord Bradford John Potter mentions that he had not seen

By June 1860, despite Peter Potter's improved health, he found that any 'business of a harassing nature' or 'any long continuous effort at ordinary business' exhausted him.⁴⁶ He requested a complete and permanent restructuring of the Bradford agency.

Potter's proposal removed the position of chief agent and decentralised the estate management. He suggested that he retain control of the Walsall and Castle Bromwich estates, and of Preston Hospital, whilst the remaining estates were to be administered separately.⁴⁷ A clear distinction was thus made between the urban and rural parts of the estate, with Potter desiring to relinquish the management of the agricultural tenantry. Potter expected to be allowed to remain at Gorway House, the residence of the chief agent. Lord Bradford again readily accepted his agent's proposal, drawing Potter's gratitude for the landowner's 'desire to meet my views'.⁴⁸

Bradford did oppose the proposal of Potter to manage two estates, and instead entrusted the agency of the Castle Bromwich estate to the subagent, Twamley. He instructed that the rural estates should each be administered individually by their existing subagent.⁴⁹ These measures, and the removal of the chief agent, effectively returned the Bradford agency to its structure before the appointment of Peter Potter the elder in 1820. The centralisation of decision making, and authority in one chief agent as implemented in 1820, is indicative of the increased professionalisation of estate agency and the attempts to implement a more regimented system of estate management. This was a trend witnessed on other aristocratic estates, including the Sutherland estate. The 1860 decentralisation Peter Potter the younger proposed, does not appear to have been replicated on other landed estates, although the position of Sutherland chief agent was discontinued towards the end of the nineteenth century.

his brother for 11 days, so was unaware as to any instructions Lord Bradford had given concerning tenants in arrears (SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/144, John Potter to Lord Bradford, 22.7.1860).

⁴⁶ SRO, D1287/1/33 G160, Potter to Simpson, 12.6.1860.

⁴⁷ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/144, Potter to Lord Bradford, 21.6. The 'remaining estates' refer to Knockin, Weston, Hughley and Tonge.

⁴⁸ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/144, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1860.

⁴⁹ Edward Griffith became agent for the rural estates of Knockin and Hughley, as well as Weston from 1868. Before that point Weston had been administered by Twamley, in addition to his agency of Castle Bromwich.

While the initial restructuring in 1820 intended to maximise efficiency and centralise decision making, the restructuring of 1860 pandered to Peter Potter's personal circumstances, and was implemented at his behest. Potter dictated the terms of the restructure and specified the duties he wished to retain and relinquish. Upon accepting that he could no longer fulfil the role of chief agent, rather than allowing the appointment of a direct successor, Potter was permitted to restructure the estate administration to 'furnish [himself] with a suitable occupation' as he did not wish to 'lead an idle life'.⁵⁰

The restructuring of the administration of the estate to benefit an employee, rather than for the advancement of the estate, raises questions as to the professionalisation of the Bradford estate management. That this restructuring was proposed by the individual whom it would benefit, rather than being ordered at the behest of the landowner, suggests a familiar level of employment and a continuance of systems of patronage in which Bradford's affinity for the Potter family influenced policy, ahead of professional considerations.

It suggests that either the professionalising elements in the 1820 restructuring once Potter was appointed were coincidental, or that the process of professionalisation was discontinuous. In 1820, the first earl of Bradford intended the estate's agency structure to become more efficient, and his agents more competent. The benefits Peter Potter's appointment and the vision of the agent and his son brought to the estate, surpassed the expectations of the landowner. Thus, when Bradford's successor was faced with a request to change the agency structure to accommodate the Potter family, he was happy to assent, any notions of a desirable professional model were immaterial.

If Bradford felt that the relative size of the constituent estates enabled their administration by subagents, negating the need for a chief agent, the professional course would be to remove the position of chief agent earlier. The Bradford estate agency was significantly restructured twice: once in 1820 and again in 1860. On both occasions, this restructuring accommodated successive members of the Potter family, indicating their influence with successive earls of Bradford.

⁵⁰ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/144, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1860.

Following this agency restructuring, Peter Potter maintained a role more powerful than merely the Walsall agent, and was considered superior to the subagents who administered a single geographical area.

The overhaul of the Bradford agency contrasts with the manner in which the Sutherland estate management was altered in the 1860s. The latter was driven by the needs of the estate, irrespective of loyalties to individuals. George Loch, with the assent of the duke of Sutherland, removed Fleming as Trentham agent in 1864. Loch had initially opposed Fleming's appointment, and a series of errors by Fleming early in 1864 provided an opportunity to press for his removal. In January, Fleming submitted inaccurate figures causing discrepancies of several hundreds of pounds in the accounts. He erroneously informed Loch that a tenant had died, prompting Loch to instigate arrangements for her property, before discovering she was very much alive. In April, Fleming listed the wrong parish on an eviction notice for troublesome tenants, causing weeks of delay. Loch proposed that Fleming revert to his former position as head gardener at Trentham while assuming the tenancy of the model farm at Groundslow.⁵¹

Fleming was reluctant to relinquish his role as agent, considering this as a 'retrogressive movement' and the proposal was not immediately enforced.⁵² That the agent could impede a plan favoured by the landowner and chief agent challenges assumptions of an entirely authoritarian dynamic. A desire to avoid appearing to poorly treat an aging and loyal employee prevented the immediate removal of the agent, suggesting a check on the freedom of action of aristocratic landowners. The public odium prompted by the Highland Clearances policy earlier in the century had heightened the Leveson Gowers' sensitivities towards their reputation as estate managers.

Although Fleming was reluctant to relinquish the role of agent, ultimately Loch insisted he be replaced. Fleming forwarded numerous proposals that would see him retain some of the agent's duties, which were all rejected by Loch. Fleming was not permitted to select which roles he would

⁵¹ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Loch, 24.1.1864, SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Loch, 8.1.64, SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Loch, 18.4.1865, SRO, D593/K1/5/135, Loch to Fleming, 11.12.1864.

⁵² SRO, D593/K1/5/134, Loch to Fleming, 29.8.1864.

retain, in direct contrast with the Bradford estate restructuring. Loch rejected all proposals to remove responsibilities from the remit of the agent, believing the transfer of any duties would ‘diminish the sense of responsibility by which every agent ought to be controlled and guided’.⁵³ The ‘best and most efficient men’, he believed, were always the ‘most tenacious of retaining the management of their own departments.’ The management running of an estate would be impeded should this rule not be observed.⁵⁴

This contrasts starkly with developments on the Bradford estate and demonstrates the differing attitudes towards the perceived importance of individual personalities. Lord Bradford acquiesced to the complete restructuring and decentralisation of the estate management at the request of Potter, disposing of the position of chief agent. On the Sutherland estate, the duke and chief agent replaced the Trentham agent to maximise efficiency, regardless of the preferences of the incumbent.

Potter was indispensable to the Bradford estate, while Fleming was valued but disposable. The necessity of retaining the services of the Potter family was paramount for Lord Bradford, while the integrity of the agent’s position was integral for Loch. The agency hierarchy was rigidly maintained, and the position always occupied by the most suitable individual available. This is evident in the absence of dynastic inheritance of the role of Trentham agent. When the incumbent agent left or was replaced, a thorough review of suitable replacements was conducted, with no suggestion that the incumbent’s relatives assume the role.

Fleming was removed without a superior agent being identified as a replacement. Loch utilised his professional networks to identify a suitable agent. William Menzies, known from Loch’s London circle, advocated the appointment of his cousin, George Menzies.⁵⁵ Following a meeting at Dunrobin, Loch recommended Menzies to the duke, describing him as ‘a very intelligent person... with much general information on many subjects’. Menzies, Loch believed, made many ‘shrewd observations’ and had ‘more address than is common with young Scotsmen in his position.’⁵⁶

⁵³ SRO, D593/K1/5/134, Loch to Fleming, 17.9.1864.

⁵⁴ SRO, D593/K1/5/134, Loch to Fleming, 17.9.1864.

⁵⁵ SRO, D593/K1/5/134, Loch to William Menzies, 17.9.1864.

⁵⁶ SRO, D593/K1/5/135, Loch to duke of Sutherland, 3.10.1864.

Menzies assumed his duties as Trentham agent from 1 January 1865. Loch provided abundant support in the early months of his agency, in comparison with the often indifferent attitude he displayed towards Fleming.

The agency structure became more efficient under Menzies than it was under Fleming. Whereas continuity was achieved in agent changeover on the Bradford estate management, there were notable differences on the Trentham estate. Menzies quickly demonstrated himself to be a competent agent, yet George Loch capitalised on the appointment of a new agent to adapt the role, and reaffirm his own authority as chief agent.

Loch was in regular contact with Menzies and his letters were friendly and encouraging. Menzies was self-assured in his role from the outset and asked Loch for advice considerably less frequently than the more experienced Fleming had. Loch replied regularly to Menzies, whereas Fleming's letters had frequently been ignored.

Loch adapted facets of the agency structure, bringing the Trentham agency in line with the duke's other estates. He reduced the authority of subordinate agents, and solidified Menzies' position of authority in the day to day management of the North Staffordshire estate. Menzies, however, remained subordinate to Loch, and was to report regularly to the chief agent on all developments on the estate, including trivial matters.⁵⁷

In February 1865, Loch ensured that the Trentham agent held all authority over the Trentham estate finances, instructing that only Menzies should have authority to draw cheques on the estate account. This curtailed the practice of subagents withdrawing from the account for estate disbursements. Subagents were further to immediately lose the authority to make deposits, as all monies paid to the estate could now only be submitted by Menzies.⁵⁸ These were the existing practices on the duke's other estates, and had only been departed from at Trentham as Fleming had not 'fel[t] entire confidence in himself on undertaking' such business.⁵⁹ This demonstrates Loch's

⁵⁷ See SRO, D593/K/3/9/1, Loch to Menzies, 11.2.1865.

⁵⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/9/1, Loch to Menzies, 14.2.1865.

⁵⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/9/1, Loch to Menzies, 14.2.1865.

frustrations that Fleming had not been competent to fulfil all the agents' duties. Loch wished Menzies to enact these changes 'quietly and as if entirely from yourself'. Menzies was not to reveal that Loch had changed the estate's practices, creating the appearance that Menzies had acted on his own initiative.⁶⁰

Loch therefore had contradictory objectives for an agency restructuring. He insisted on being informed of everyday aspects of the estate management, reducing Menzies autonomy, yet conversely, he gave the Trentham agent additional responsibilities over his subordinates. He actively fostered the impression that the new agent had more authority than his predecessor.

The Sutherland agency doubtlessly became more efficient under Menzies than it had been under Fleming. This was due to the opportunity of a new agent, with no prior knowledge or relationship with the tenantry, being able to enforce the stricter practices that George Loch desired. This increased efficiency can be considered an indicator of the further professionalisation of the estate management. Great strides had been made in professionalisation upon the appointment of James Loch in 1812, which have been well-documented by Richards. However, the changes implemented upon the appointment of George Menzies in 1865 demonstrate that a drive for professionalisation was reignited by George Loch once the opportunity to remove Fleming arose. This is therefore in contrast to what can be considered the diminishing professionalisation of the Bradford estate agency in the mid-1860s, as indicated by the further entrenchment of the Potters in several levels of estate management.

⁶⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/9/1, Loch to Menzies, 14.2.1865. Loch instructed Menzies, 'quietly, and as if entirely from yourself, assume your proper position in these matters, not referring to me as having directed you to do so. It will be better that you appear to do it as matter of course.'

3.4 AGENTS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENTS

The 1860s witnessed the first attempts at urbanisation on the Sutherland estate in North Staffordshire. These developments were comparatively slower, and more cautiously implemented, than on the Bradford estate in Walsall. Peter Potter the elder had utilised his experience as a London surveyor to make great progress in developing Bradford's land in Walsall; Potter trained his sons as surveyors. Peter Potter the younger was well versed in practices of urban development and was able to capitalise on the influx of population into Walsall in the 1850s. He oversaw the development of several areas of working class housing on the Bradford estate.

On the Trentham estate, the Sutherland agents had no experience of urban development. Fleming, an experienced gardener, and Menzies, recruited for his proficiency in agricultural management, lacked the expertise of the Bradford agents. In stark contrast to the Bradford estate, the limited initial plans for suburban developments around Longton were undertaken by John Elliot, a surveyor from Newcastle-under-Lyme who was hired to work on commission by the estate. The 1860s witnessed only the early planning stages of the new suburban developments. The initial take-up of building plots was somewhat slow until the 1880s, when the number of houses built and leased out increased significantly, as will be discussed further in the following chapter.

The developments of Florence and Normacot were envisioned by the Sutherland estate as suburban developments, with no industrial activity permitted. The estate initially sought respectable tenants to inhabit villas and semi-detached houses. This is in contrast to the policy adopted on the Bradford estate, where the building of working class districts such as Pleck and Birchills, allowed factories and manufactories to be erected amongst the rows of workers dwellings.

The motivations of the Bradford estate were purely commercial: to lease out their land in the manner most likely to maximise profits. There is little discernible attempt at social control or paternalism in the building of houses in Walsall. Ostensibly at least, the Sutherland estate did have some aspirations at controlling the character of the estate they planned in the mid-1860s. However, in practice, commercial concerns were paramount, and it was recognised that extending the

paternalistic control traditionally enjoyed over the Trentham tenantry would be impractical in the newly planned suburbs of Longton.

BRADFORD ESTATE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENTS

The 1850s witnessed the largest population increase in the nineteenth century development of Walsall. From 27,000 in 1851 the population leapt to just under 40,000 ten years later. While the speed of this increase abated slightly in the 1860s, the population of Walsall had risen to 48,500 by 1871.⁶¹ To capitalise on this increase of population, the 1850s and '60s witnessed considerable developments of Lord Bradford's land in Walsall. The leasing out of building plots was handled by chief agent Peter Potter the younger in a similar manner to that which his father had fulfilled in the 1830s.

Extensive developments were made on Bradford's land in the west of the town in the 'Rollingmill' area between the railway station and Pleck Road. Several new streets were laid, many with thematic names. Five streets were named after the second earl of Bradford; Earl Street, and one street for each of his four names: George Street, Augustus Street, Frederick Street and Henry Street. Nearby, Weston and Brineton Streets were laid, representing links with the earl's Weston estate. Development in this area continued into the 1860s and early 1870s. Further building leases in the Windmill area, to the south of the town, were also granted, and in Cemetery Road (later named Barleyfields Row) in the 1850s. The Tantarra Street area in northeast Walsall was developed systematically from the 1850s with both Lord Bradford and Lord Hatherton, the other large landowner in the town, granting leases in this neighbourhood.⁶²

The earl of Bradford's land in the Pleck area, to the west of the town, was developed extensively in the 1850s. The extension of mining on the peripheries of the town, and building of ironworks, led to a great increase in the population of this area, said to be over 2,500 by 1858.⁶³ The Bradford estate capitalised on this with the building of working class districts on their land in order to house

⁶¹ Greenslade, (Ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, pp. 143-5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

the increased influx population. Factories and rows of workers cottages were built, mostly to the east of Pleck Road, while terraced houses were built on the west of that road towards the end of the 1850s. Lord Bradford's land around St John's church was also made available for building leases.⁶⁴ Towards the end of the decade, terraces were built on Bradford land at the north end of Pleck Road, while Moat Street was completed by 1860. However, it has been observed that most of the houses in this area date from the end of the century, suggesting that there were delays in leasing out this land for development.⁶⁵

The importance of the Pleck area for the Bradford estate increased rapidly around the middle of the century. In December 1866, Potter observed that Pleck had produced the greatest increase in rentals on the estates in the previous years. Of the total increase of £357 in the building lease rentals during the last two years, no less than £280 was derived from the Pleck district. Potter enthusiastically informed Bradford that these increases looked set to continue in the following years.⁶⁶ The Bradford estate pursued a policy of building neighbourhoods of a considerable number of working class houses on their urban estate, and allowed factories, workshops and other industrial premises to be built and operated. In these districts, no measures were enforced to clearly delineate land for dwellings and land for manufactories, in stark contrast to the policy on the Sutherland estate. The rent record show that this was a very lucrative policy for the estate, and Pleck soon became integral to the profitability of the Bradford estate, surpassing more established developments.

Similarly, Lord Bradford's land in the Birchills area, a 'poor locality' to the north of the town, began to be developed in the 1850s.⁶⁷ Unlike Pleck, this area already had a sizable population by the start of the decade. Bradford land in Regent Street and the eastern end of Farringdon Street was developed, as was a block of streets between Birchills Street and Wolverhampton Road.⁶⁸ Building

⁶⁴ Greenslade, (Ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, pp. 158-9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶⁶ SRO, D1287/12/4 K/243/1, Potter to Lord Bradford, 24.12.1866.

⁶⁷ Greenslade, (Ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, p. 159.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

leases were granted on Bradford land near Hollyhedge Lane in 1857, as well as in the later 1860s and in 1873. Moreover, the east side of Green Lane between Upper and Lower Union Streets were built on in the mid-1850s and 1860s.⁶⁹ In each of these streets, the majority of houses built on the Bradford estate were terraced houses to be leased to workers and higher-skilled manufacturers.

The influx of population to the area, and the rapid erection of a large number of houses, led to overcrowding and the worsening of sanitation and living conditions. The Birchills area became amongst the most notorious of Walsall's neighbourhoods for these conditions, and the quality of properties erected in the 1850s, including those on land leased in building plots from Lord Bradford, was questioned later in the century. Lord Hatherton also granted several building leases in Birchills, especially in the areas of Green Lane in Birchills nearest to the town between 1849 and 1861.⁷⁰

The developments by the Bradford estate slowed into the 1860s although leases were granted in Belvedere Road. Bradford Place was completed in 1866, at the junction of Bradford and Bridgeman Streets.⁷¹ Elsewhere, villas and terraces were built around the north of Birmingham Road, in an attempt to attract more respectable classes of tenant. This area was described as the 'most beautiful part of Walsall' and the streets were later observed by a local journalist to being 'reminiscent of a Parisian boulevard.'⁷²

In these developments, Lord Bradford allowed Peter Potter a considerable degree of autonomy, as had been afforded to his father. While expressing a preference for respectable houses, Bradford accepted Potter's assurances that these were not always possible and allowed the erection of a variety of houses, which Potter assured his employer would benefit the estate.

Indeed, once the third earl of Bradford succeeded his father in 1865, it was evident that the new aristocrat had limited knowledge or interest in his Walsall estate. In March 1866, Lord Bradford

⁶⁹ Greenslade, (Ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, p. 160.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

asked several ill-informed questions of Potter regarding the nature of the tenantry on the Walsall estate, suggesting he fundamentally misunderstood the urbanised nature of Walsall. Potter politely replied that it was difficult to answer Bradford's enquiry regarding agricultural holdings as there were only two large farming tenants on the estate. He tactfully observed that Bradford's suggestions had no bearing in reality on the Walsall estate.⁷³ This highlights the relative lack of knowledge the succeeding earl of Bradford had of his estates, especially the urban Walsall estate. Accordingly, Bradford allowed Potter, whose knowledge and experience of the urban estate far surpassed his own, to develop Walsall as he saw fit, and rarely rejected proposals or challenged Potter's plans.

SUTHERLAND ESTATE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENTS

Despite being the largest landowner around Longton, the duke of Sutherland declined to develop his estate until the 1860s. This reluctance, certainly when considered in comparison to the enthusiasm with which Lord Bradford developed his estate in Walsall, could be considered as indicative of a correlation between the grandness of aristocratic rank, and a willingness to consider urban development a desirable pursuit. The duke of Sutherland and his agents, it might be assumed, saw themselves as above the need to erect cheap houses for industrial workers in urban areas due to their vast pre-existing wealth. Conversely, less established members of the aristocracy such as the earl of Bradford, may have been more willing to exploit the influx of population to the mining and manufacturing areas of his estate to erect urban houses, and profit from building leases and ground rent. However, as can be seen with the duke of Norfolk, who developed large areas of Sheffield with low quality, cramped housing, the assumption that ducal landowners considered themselves grander than those who sought urban development, cannot be applied uncritically, or universally.⁷⁴ Moreover, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Sutherland estate

⁷³ SRO, D1287/20/5 P/243, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.3.1866.

⁷⁴ See Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, pp. 405-6.

was very much in need of an increase in profits, in order to counter its unsustainable expenditure. That urban development, reluctantly pursued in the 1860s, is indicative of this economic necessity.

In July 1850 the Longton Freehold Society purchased land to the south of the town, between Cocknage Road and Belgrave Road, known as Spratslade Farm, and formerly owned by the duke of Sutherland. The Society had around 200 members and 300 shares.⁷⁵ The first annual meeting of the Society was held in Longton Town Hall in August 1850, in which the ‘political, moral and social influence’ the society would exercise upon the members was outlined. This included, ‘conferring the elective franchise, elevating their status among their fellow men, and setting a good example of prudence forethought and self-reliance’.⁷⁶ The Leveson Gower family were traditionally Liberal in politics and were supportive of the principle of extending the franchise. This is most notable in the ‘Reform Crisis’ of 1832 and their support for the Reform Bill saw the family raised to ducal status the following year. However, the attempts of the Longton Freehold Society to exert political, and especially social, influence over its membership undoubtedly caused some unease for the duke and his agents. Indeed, the growth of the Freehold Society contributed to the decision to develop the Florence and Normacot estates from 1864.

By 1851, White’s Directory of Staffordshire indicates that the name of Spratslade Farm had been changed to Dresden, and a suburb of 30 acres was beginning to be developed there.⁷⁷ Upon hearing this name, chosen by the society in reference to the German city famed for its porcelain manufacture, James Loch was scathing, writing ‘Dresden!!! What provoked such a name in such a place.’⁷⁸

Thomas Forrester, a land surveyor of Longton, submitted a plan of 11 streets for the new estate. The streets were given thematic names, reflecting the Liberal ideals of the Society. Cobden Street, Villiers Street, Russell Street and Peel Street were named after prominent national leaders, while

⁷⁵ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 20.7.1850.

⁷⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 17.8.1850.

⁷⁷ W. White *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, (London, 1851), p. 362.

⁷⁸ SRO, D593/K/1/5/69, James Loch to the Reverend John Hutchinson, (n.d.).1.1852.

Stoke upon Trent Liberal MP John Lewis Ricardo and Stafford MP John Ayshford Wise were also honoured with streets in their name. (See plan below, figure 6).

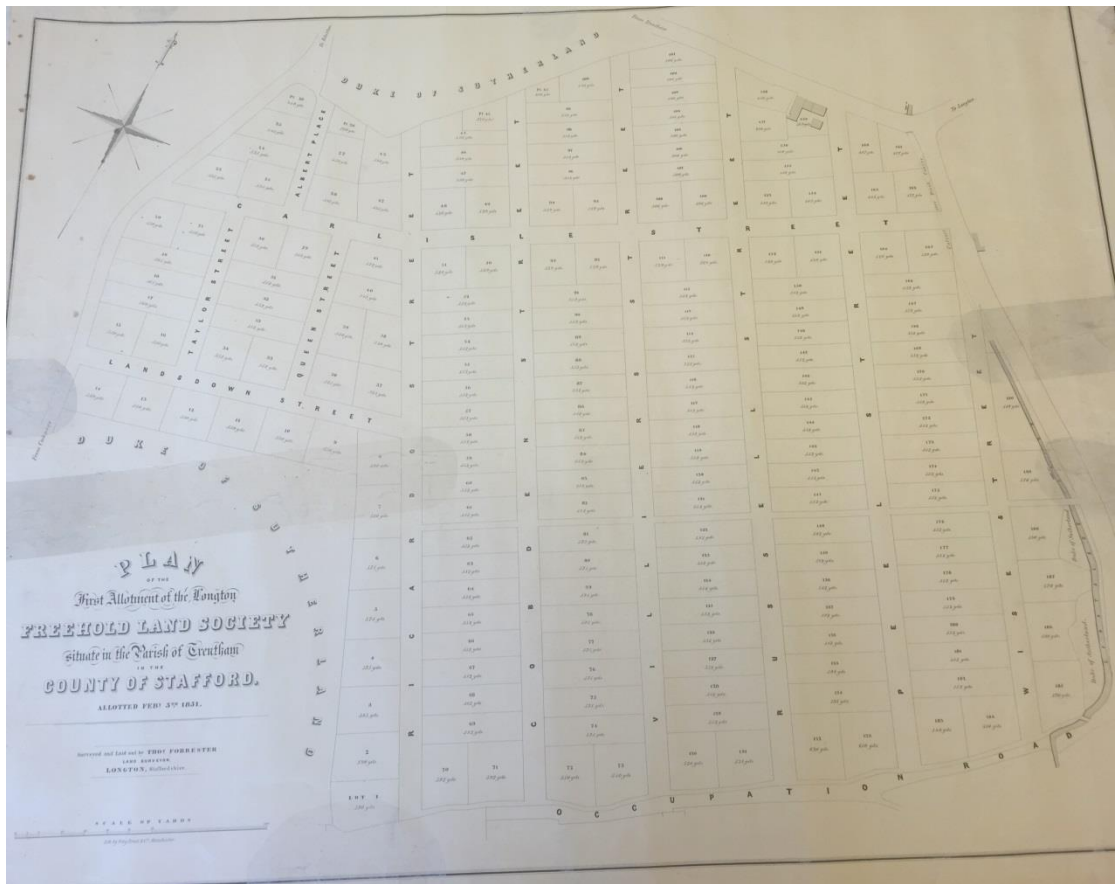


Figure 6: Plan of Dresden, laid out by the Longton Freehold Land Society, 1851.⁷⁹

The estate was divided into 190 plots, each principally between 500 and 600 square yards. By 1864, 505 houses had been built on this estate which were owned by 168 persons. The Longton Freehold Land Society bought a second estate, at East Vale, adjoining the centre of Longton, where 41 plots were sold, and 270 houses erected by 1864. A third estate, comprised of considerably smaller plots, was purchased by the society near Bridge Street, where some 95 houses were constructed.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ SRO, D593/H/3/356.

⁸⁰ Jenkins, (Ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 8, pp. 230-2.

Building societies played an important role in the development of other towns. The Walsall Freehold Land Society bought land in Caldmere and Palfry, to the south and southwest of the town centre, in the 1850s. Lots were intended to be purchased by the working classes, who would accordingly be entitled to vote. These houses were reportedly built on wide streets with sewers and back gardens, prompting historian Mary Lowndes to claim that the Freehold Society was thus responsible for breaking the tradition of back-to-back and court developments in the town.⁸¹

Lowndes characterises the inhabitants of the Freehold Society houses as ‘prosperous craftsmen’ and although some were bought by developers seeking to rent them out, the majority were inhabited by workers in saddlery and other trades, as well as railway workers.⁸²

In North Staffordshire, the growth of the Dresden development prompted the Sutherland estate into considering urban development of their estate, and plans were prepared as early as 1852 for a new housing estate at Spratslade, north of Dresden. This consisted of five streets with 64 building plots, as shown below in the 1867 plan of building plots (figure 7). However, commencement of this development was delayed by the estate for 15 years until 1867, when the Trentham Hall Estate Office prepared new plans for the development of the Spratslade and Normacot areas.

⁸¹ Lowndes, ‘The Caldmere District of Walsall in the Nineteenth Century. With Special Reference to the Decade 1861-1871’, (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975). p. 23.

⁸² Lowndes, ‘The Caldmere District’, p. 64, C. Schling, ‘The Prosecution of the Delicate Art of Horticulture’: The Culture of Working Class Gardening in Walsall, 1830-1890, (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2014), pp. 37-8.

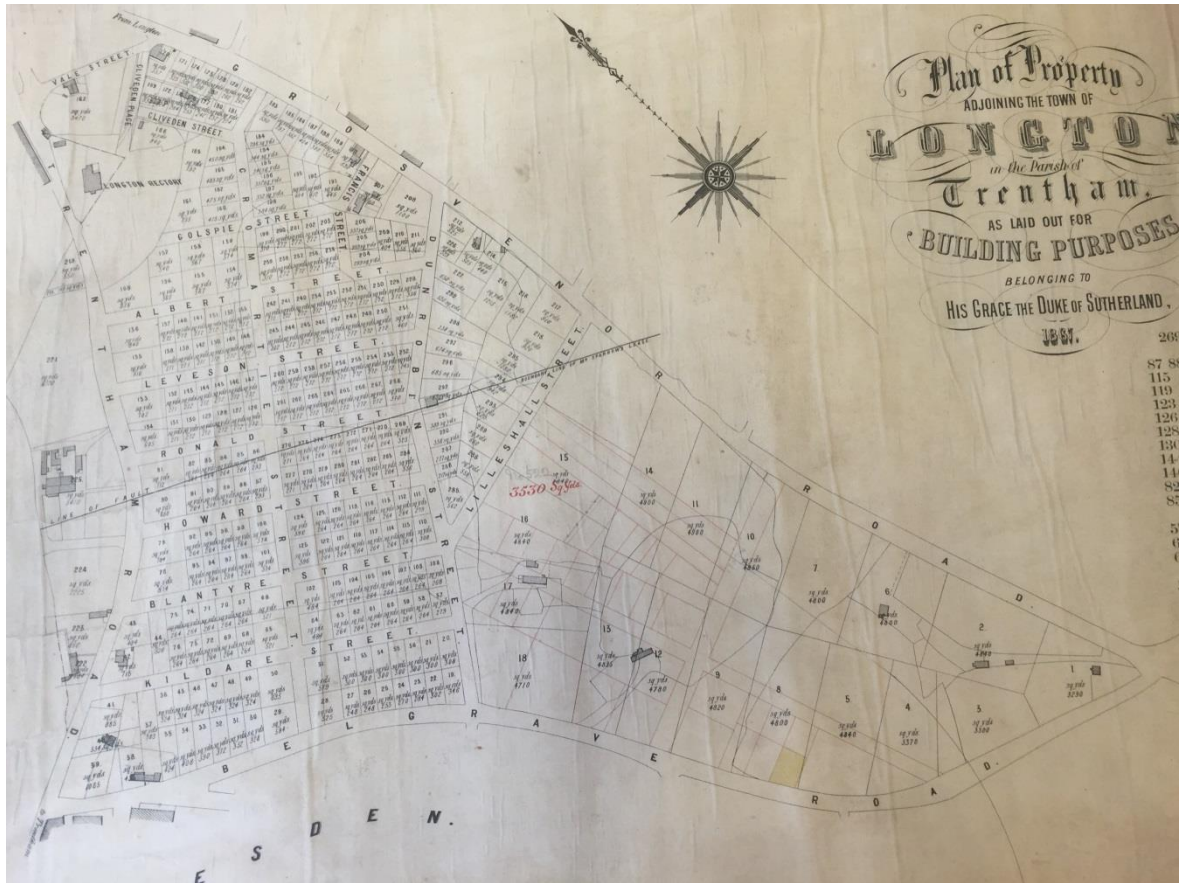


Figure 7: Plan of land, later renamed Florence, laid out for building plots, 1867.⁸³

NORMACOT

The Spratslade area, situated between Dresden and Longton, was later renamed Florence in honour of the duke's eldest daughter. This area contained very few existing buildings in 1864 and can be considered an entirely new development. Conversely Normacot, lying to the east of Florence, had an existing, if small, community by the mid-1860s and was developed in a more piecemeal fashion than Florence until the 1880s. The 1830s and '40s had seen some initial development to the 'centre' of Normacot, with the building of a chapel, a church and a school to serve the small number of cottages and farms in the area. These were mainly occupied by pottery workers who

⁸³ SRO, D593/H/3/361.

would supplement their income by selling milk that they produced on their Normacot smallholdings in Longton.⁸⁴

From the 1864, a more systematic development of Normacot was undertaken. The estate desired to modernise the neighbourhood and the old winding lanes were widened and straightened. Many of the old cottages were demolished, and building plots were laid out along new streets.⁸⁵ The houses built in the 1860s were erected in the quadrilateral formed by Spring Road, Belgrave Road, Normacot Road and Eversley Road. These houses were not built in a grid like, systematic manner, as with Florence, and as with later developments by the estate in Normacot.



Figure 8: Plan of land in Normacot laid out for building purposes, 1864.⁸⁶

In many ways the duke of Sutherland's agents' approach to developments in Normacot was in stark contrast to Lord Bradford's agents in Walsall. Successive agents of Lord Bradford were keenly aware of the potential benefits of developing the Walsall estate. Although Bradford expressed a

⁸⁴ Dobraszczyc, *Normacot: From Forest to Furnace to Suburban Development*, (2011), p. 14.

⁸⁵ See for example SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Garrett to Menzies, 30.4.1878 which discusses pulling down three cottages in Normacot.

⁸⁶ SRO, D593/H/3/360.

preference for respectable houses and tenants on his estates, he allowed the erection of a variety of houses which the Potters assured him would be lucrative.

This approach is markedly different to the Sutherland estate's policy of developing its land around Longton. This can best be characterised as reluctant suburban development. The lack of interest in developing its potentially lucrative land was shown by the curtailing of early plans to develop the Spratslade area in 1824, and the erection of the Dresden area by the Longton Building Society on land formally owned by the estate, rather than seeking to develop this land themselves. The Trentham agents regularly received requests to develop the land of the duke in North Staffordshire, with the majority of these being dismissed immediately, with the agents expressing that this was not part of the duke's plans for his estates.

However, by 1864, the early success of the Dresden development where 505 houses had been erected, had sufficiently demonstrated the demand for housing on the periphery of Longton, while simultaneously prompting fears that the absence of a paternalistic landowner to oversee the social and moral character of the Dresden development prompted the necessity for the duke to develop his land in the areas, if only to preserve a buffer between Longton and Trentham.

The manner of the Normacot and Florence developments is indicative of the estate's initial hesitancy, as well as demonstrating the differing responsibility and duties considered befitting of an agent on aristocratic estates. In 1864, chief agent George Loch appointed a surveyor, John Elliott, who was made wholly responsible for the selling and preparing of the building plots in Normacot. Elliot was to 'transact all the details viz. laying of roads, plots of land, seeing and letting with the purchasers etc'.⁸⁷ Fleming's role in the development was limited to forwarding inquiries he received for building plots to Mr Elliott, who conducted all arrangements before seeking ultimate approval from Loch.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [out letters of George Loch], George Loch to Duke of Sutherland, 26.7.1864.

⁸⁸ SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [out letters of George Loch], George Loch to Fleming, 29.7.1864.

Elliot received no salary for these services and was paid only by commission, calculated by the yards of land sold, and the rents received. Loch assured the duke that such an agreement would mean that there was no risk to the estate as Elliot's remuneration would 'come to an end as the land was all disposed of.'⁸⁹ The short term sale of land shows the lack of desire for a concerted development policy by the estate.

Indeed, Loch ensured that if the land did not sell, there would be no expenditure for the estate, meaning there would be 'every inducement to use exertion in disposing of the land'. This was also calculated to disincline Eliot from selling the land cheaply to potentially unscrupulous developers, as it would encourage Eliot to 'obtain as high a price as possible, for the commission will diminish as the price diminishes.'⁹⁰ The annual cost of remuneration towards Elliot was estimated to not exceed £50, an amount Loch characterised as not being excessive, indicating the limited investment the Sutherland estate was prepared to commit to urban development of their land.⁹¹ Finally, should the land be sold faster than expected, and the remuneration to Elliot become 'larger than shall seem sufficient,' the whole question of development would be reconsidered.⁹²

This small investment, and the lack of faith in development as a successful and desirable policy, are in stark contrast to the development of Walsall by the earl of Bradford. Here, his agent's enthusiasm and faith in development is notable, as well as the considerable resources invested into development over an extended period of time. The integral role of the Potters in directing and instigating the developments, differs from the passive role of Fleming in the development of Normacot.

Loch recognised the importance of a 'practiced land valuer' and believed that delegating the developments to Elliot would spare the estate 'the addition of an amount of labour with which it would be unequal, with its present strength, to cope'.⁹³ If a suburban development was to be

⁸⁹ SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [out letters of George Loch], George Loch to Duke of Sutherland, 26.7.1864.

⁹⁰ SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [out letters of George Loch], George Loch to Duke of Sutherland, 26.7.1864.

⁹¹ SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [out letters of George Loch], George Loch to Duke of Sutherland, 26.7.1864.

⁹² SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [out letters of George Loch], George Loch to Duke of Sutherland, 26.7.1864.

⁹³ SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [out letters of George Loch], George Loch to Duke of Sutherland, 26.7.1864.

⁹³ SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [out letters of George Loch], George Loch to Fleming, 29.7.1864.

pursued, Loch advocated keeping the role of surveyor entirely separate from the duties of his agents. In contrast, Peter Potter the elder was appointed as Lord Bradford's agent specifically because of his experience as a surveyor, and his role in development projects in London, and for the duke of Devonshire. That the earl of Bradford employed a surveyor as his chief agent demonstrates the contrasting attitudes towards urban development on aristocratic estates. Lord Bradford envisaged that an experienced surveyor would be invaluable in the development and running of his estates. He employed Potter as chief agent despite his inexperience of agricultural matters, previously considered imperative for an aristocratic land agent.

On the Sutherland estate, the skills of a surveyor were not perceived to be important for the Trentham agent, and Fleming's and Menzies' horticultural and agricultural knowledge were considered more befitting of an agent. By the 1860s, when a surveyor was deemed necessary, one was employed by the estate only temporarily.

Fleming characterised Normacot in 1864 as 'a very pretty neighbourhood – one much coveted by the Longton people' on account of the dry soil and pure air.⁹⁴ However, Fleming observed that the smoke from the few 'wretched' ovens existing in the neighbourhood was 'no small nuisance'. He advocated that it would be 'greatly to the Duke of Sutherland's interest... [to] do away with the pot works' entirely.⁹⁵

As such, the Sutherland estate from the mid 1860s determined that potbanks and other industrial premises should not continue on their Normacot estate. Loch stipulated that the 'continuance of potworks in that neighbourhood' would be 'inconsistent' with the character the estate desired to promote and 'the purposes which it is hoped it may be applied.'⁹⁶ The estate had no desire for its land at Normacot to become an extension of the industrialised and polluted Longton, where piecemeal development, and absence of planning regulations, had resulted in potbanks, factories

⁹⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 20.4.1864.

⁹⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 20.4.1864.

⁹⁶ SRO, D593/K1/5/134, George Loch to Fleming, 24.7.1864.

and workshops being erected amongst residential streets. The town gained the reputation of the most polluted of the Potteries towns.⁹⁷

In 1864 Loch ordered that the potworks already present in Normacot were to be removed, or at least remain unoccupied.⁹⁸ Moreover, all applications for money to be laid out on the old cottages in the neighbourhood were declined, as Loch envisaged that ‘none of the existing cottages... will ultimately remain’. Normacot was intended to become a neighbourhood only of respectable houses; a suburb distinct and separate from Longton, with a higher social cachet. As such, the old cottages would not be repaired, as these would not be in keeping with the character of the new estate that was being developed.⁹⁹

Menzies’ initial observations of Normacot in 1865 included comments that a vacant potters’ oven was in a poor condition, but with some little expenditure could be put to use again, to the benefit of the estate.¹⁰⁰ Loch made clear to the new agent that it was not the intention of the estate to re-let vacant potworks in Normacot, and instructed Menzies that the premise and furnace were to be pulled down.¹⁰¹ Loch further declined Menzies’ proposal to convert old stables into cottages in Normacot as ‘there is no saying how soon that land may be required for building purposes.’¹⁰² Thus, in a notable change of policy from the 1830s, the estate was now willing for land in Normacot to be developed, while remaining reluctant to develop the land themselves.

⁹⁷ Fyson, ‘Chartism in North Staffordshire’, p. 29.

⁹⁸ SRO, D593/K1/5/134, George Loch to Fleming, 24.7.1864.

⁹⁹ SRO, D593/K1/5/134, George Loch to Fleming, 24.7.1864.

¹⁰⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/9/41, Menzies to Loch, 15.3.1865.

¹⁰¹ SRO, D593/K/3/9/1, Loch to Menzies, 24.3.1865.

¹⁰² SRO, D593/K/3/9/1, Loch to Menzies, 16.3.1865.

3.5 AGENTS AND TENANTS

Having discussed the agency structure and the role of agents in the urban development of aristocratic estates, it is important to consider how the estates policies' impacted upon the tenants themselves. The agent's attitudes towards the tenantry and role in implementing estate policies will be considered. Attempts will then be made to discern how the aristocratic estate itself was viewed by those living on the land.

As has been demonstrated, agents served as the link between a landowner and his tenantry. They were charged with implementing policies on the local estates. As shown in the previous chapter, the personality of an individual agent, and his relationship with the tenantry, could be important determiners of how estate policy was enacted in practice. The conduct of Trentham agent George Fleming, in his final year as agent, will be contrasted with the attitude of incoming agent George Menzies once he assumed the role. How estate policy, nominally dictated from Scotland or London, was enacted in North Staffordshire, highlights the integral role of the local agent in the management of estates and the development of urban communities.

Fleming's correspondence demonstrates the growing importance of Normacot to the estate. The area received little mention in the correspondence of the 1830s, when most focus was on the village of Trentham. Yet by the 1860s Normacot had come to be central to many of the agent's roles. Although still principally rural, this neighbourhood was earmarked for further development and was becoming more populous as Longton grew. It was the Normacot tenants that caused Fleming the most difficulties both in terms of their conduct, and in their avoidance of rent payments. As with William Lewis before him, Fleming was lenient towards tenants in financial difficulties and afforded them considerable opportunity to pay their arrears. His failure to adequately recover arrears contributed significantly to Loch's determination to replace the agent by 1865.

On the Walsall estate, the Bradford agents' were notably less concerned than the Sutherland agents with the criticisms their policies might attract. The maximisation of profits remained the principal concern for the Walsall development. However, Potter did express some anxiety at the apparent

lack of deference the Walsall tenants demonstrated towards the aristocratic family. The difficulties of translating the close social control landowners were accustomed to on their rural estates into the urban context, was becoming apparent. Agents served as the mediator in these dynamics, and were the public face of the estate. As such, they directly felt the ire of aggrieved tenants, while the benevolent image of the landlord was preserved.

TENANTS IN ARREARS

A significant portion of tenants in arrears were from the Normacot neighbourhood, implying that these were amongst the poorest of the tenantry, or at least those most willing to defy the estate. Fleming showed compassion towards many of these tenants and gave them considerable time to pay. He did not aggressively pursue arrears from tenants he considered to be honest men.¹⁰³ When Legge, a Normacot potter, was deemed too far in arrears to continue, Fleming appealed on the tenant's behalf and advocated allowing Legge to move into a small cottage the estate had determined to pull down. Fleming reported that Legge had paid £12 of the arrears of £43 and promised to pay £1 per month until all was paid off. Moreover as a considerable portion of the £12 already recovered had been earned by Legge's wife's working at a china works in Longton, Fleming appealed for leniency.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, Menzies was lenient towards tenants if they were deemed to be industrious. In his early dealings with tenants, he was sympathetic to appeals for more time, and advocated on their behalf to Loch.¹⁰⁵ However, where tenants were seen to take advantage of the estate's compassion, Menzies acted decisively, while Fleming was often shown to be weak.

Brassington, who leased several premises and cottages from the estate, owed arrears of rent, labour costs and other debts. He repeatedly manipulated Fleming, who was entirely unable to

¹⁰³ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 7.9.1864.

¹⁰⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 25.2.1864.

¹⁰⁵ For example Menzies sought leniency for and told Loch that Fallows was depending on cattle he was fattening for money to meet his arrears, stating 'if you could grant him until Lady Day he will without fail pay the greater of what is now due.' (see SRO, D593/K/3/9/41, Menzies to Loch, 22.2.1865.)

extract payment.¹⁰⁶ Brassington initially claimed poverty to Fleming, who appealed to Loch for leniency stating that ‘although he is willing, he must be poor.’¹⁰⁷ It emerged that Brassington was renting out cottages given to him by the duke to house his agricultural labourers, stating brazenly that this was very profitable. Fleming considered this decision one deliberately ‘calculated to annoy’ the agent.¹⁰⁸ Menzies was comparatively stricter with Brassington, and was unwilling to listen to his appeals.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, valuing hardworking tenants of good character and making allowance when they fell into arrears, those tenants and workers who had demonstrated good service to the estate were given additional consideration, demonstrating that a reciprocal duty of care was felt by the estate.

Workers who had become old or infirm were routinely protected by the estate. In November 1864, Fleming advocated that ‘an old and deserving workman’ should be given a cottage soon to become vacant, as the incumbent tenant was suspected of poaching.¹¹⁰

Fleming further suggested that two other workmen who would ‘be past work very soon, if they are not so already’ should be provided with cottages. One of these men, Fleming stated, had been in the employ of the estate since William Lewis was agent, and should accordingly be given a cottage and three acres of land so he could ‘maintain himself and his wife and pay the rent.’¹¹¹

Under no legal obligation to provide care for elderly workers, such compassion was motivated by a sense of paternalism and a duty of care towards those on their estate, especially the rural tenantry. In the absence of a national provision for the elderly, Fleming often advocated that small holdings should be used for elderly workers believing they ‘do so well to place worn out workmen on’. He believed it would be ‘a great pity’ to allow any such small holdings ‘to be occupied by potters.’¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Brassington, 7.1.1864.

¹⁰⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Loch, 12.2.1864.

¹⁰⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Brassington, 24.2.1864, SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Loch, 26.2.1864.

¹⁰⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/9/41, Menzies to Loch, 15.2.1865, SRO, D593/K/3/9/41, Menzies to Loch, 31.3.1865.

¹¹⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 29.11.1864.

¹¹¹ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 29.11.1864.

¹¹² SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 29.11.1864.

ESTATES' REPUTATION AND MOTIVATIONS FOR LENIENCY

Preserving the reputation of the estate was a consideration of the Trentham agents. The estate was not impervious to criticism from the tenants and threats of legal action, or simply the accusation that they had mistreated tenants, could be powerful motivators for action. In February 1864, Pervin, a garden labourer at Trentham, threatened legal action to secure repairs to his property he claimed he had been promised. Loch, anxious to avoid criticism for the estate, ensured the repairs were quickly commenced.¹¹³

Similarly, they strove to avoid potential embarrassment for the estate through complaints from tenants at their treatment. The estate was prompted into action when the daughter of Banks, a labourer on the estate, had complained that the extension to their cottage that had 'long been promised' had not been forthcoming. Banks' daughter, Fleming observed, was very well respected in the locality and had been heard to comment that the cottage was so small she was required to sleep in the same room as her father and mother. Keen to avoid accusations that the estate was not assisting loyal tenants, and maintained dubious living arrangements, the extension was quickly arranged.¹¹⁴

That the Sutherland estate was anxious to avoid public criticism can be linked to ramifications of their ill-fated Highland Clearance policy earlier in the century. The considerable public odium the family faced following this policy prompted the estate to be wary of being seen to be treating tenants harshly. The potential for criticism as a hardworking tenant's adult daughter having to share a room with her parents as the estate would not build the promised extension, or a gardener needing solicitor's intervention to elicit the much needed repairs to his cottage, would be a considerable affront to the Sutherland estates desired reputation as benevolent, paternalistic landlords.

Annie Tindley identifies a change of policy towards the Scottish tenantry as a result of the negative press coverage the estate received as a result of the Highland Clearances. She suggests that a 'fear

¹¹³ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 25.11.1864.

¹¹⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to George Loch, 25.2.1864.

of attracting unwanted and unfavourable publicity' led to Scottish factors being considerably more lenient on tenants in arrears, or showing insubordination, than might be expected.¹¹⁵ She cites several instances, including where James Loch and the second duke of Sutherland took no further action against rebellious tenants as Loch, Tindley argues, 'saw the necessity for decisive action but was wary from the bitter experiences of the 1810s' of bad publicity and the long term impact of removals.¹¹⁶

Tindley concludes that the Sutherland family's aversion to the negative reaction to the clearance policy meant that 'concern to protect their fragile public image was, by 1851, more important to them than maintaining crofter discipline.'¹¹⁷ This is comparable to the policy change witnessed on the North Staffordshire estate. In the 1860s, the Sutherland agents were notably reluctant to evict tenants from their homes. As demonstrated, successive agents resisted evicting tenants, despite having just cause to do so. Fleming, and later Menzies, did not chase the arrears of 'good' tenants. They did not wish to be seen to be treating loyal, but poor, tenants too harshly. This is in notable contrast to the conduct on the Bradford estate in which tenants in arrears were often given notices to quit relatively quickly.

This instance of Banks' daughter having to share a room with her parents raises parallels with a situation on the Bradford estate in 1843. A clergyman on one of the Bradford estates complained to Lord Bradford that a girl of 16 with typhus was compelled to share a bed with her mother and father.¹¹⁸ The Reverend Cotton charged that the cottages erected by the Bradford estate were too small and completely unsuitable to house a family.¹¹⁹

Where action was taken to quickly negate the complaint on the Sutherland estate, the situation was dismissed by the Bradford estate. Bradford told Cotton that although he lamented the young girl's situation, it was not the duty of the estate to provide expenditure in such cases. Bradford stated that

¹¹⁵ Tindley, *The Sutherland Estate*, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Lord Bradford to the Reverend Cotton, 11.11.1843. Cotton cited that the girl was 14, however, Potter checked and found her to be 16.

¹¹⁹ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, The Reverend Cotton to Lord Bradford, 23.10.1843.

it was his prerogative to build cottages for labourers, as opposed to cottages large enough for families, if he so desired.¹²⁰

Evidently the Bradford estate did not have the preoccupation with preserving their reputation to the same extent as caused evident anxiety for the Sutherland agents. While recognising a social duty of care to the communities on their estates, any sentimentality was kept in check by the necessity of profit making.

Similarly, Peter Potter the younger did not possess the reluctance of the Sutherland agents in evicting tenants in arrears. The Bradford agents were concerned primarily with the preservation of profits rather than a sense of paternalism towards the tenantry, especially with regards to the urban tenantry on the Walsall estate. The Bradford estate did not have pre-existing experience of adverse criticism for estate policies, while also being a comparatively much smaller estate. Without the burden of a national reputation to uphold, profits could be maximised, without consideration of public criticism to the same extent as that of the Sutherland estate.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ESTATES

How the tenants viewed the estate was of varying importance to agents. Even on the Bradford estate, where concern for paternalism was less of a priority, the unpopularity of the aristocratic family could be a cause for concern. Whilst the Bradford estate was less concerned with paternalistic notions towards their urban tenantry in Walsall, in comparison to their agricultural tenants in Weston, this ambivalence was increasingly reciprocated by the tenants themselves. The influx of population into Walsall in the 1850s had ramifications for any bonds of loyalty felt towards the landowner. The increase in the Irish population of Walsall, as with most industrial centres in the Midlands in the 1850s as a result of the Famine, as well as the extension of mining in the areas and associated population migration, meant that many living on the earl of Bradford's estate in Walsall had little previous allegiance to the estate.

¹²⁰ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Lord Bradford to The Reverend Cotton, 11.11.1843.

In March 1866, Lord Bradford's eldest son, Viscount Newport, turned 21. As Cannadine shows, the occasion of the heir to a landed estate reaching his majority was cause for celebration. The tenantry were expected to rejoice at this important moment. When Sir William Ramsden came of age in 1852, Cannadine writes how Huddersfield rejoiced. When the third marquees of Bute reached his majority, Cardiff witnessed a week of celebrations with banquets and street parties.¹²¹

Conversely, in 1866, the Walsall tenantry did not react in the expected manner to Newport's majority and Potter observed that no demonstrations had taken place on the estate. Potter told Bradford that he and his brother John had attempted to ensure that the tenantry celebrated the event; however, 'those who should have taken the initiative' did not respond to the Potters' proposition.¹²² That the event was not enthusiastically celebrated, as Potter expected, suggests ambivalence of the urban tenants towards their aristocratic landowners. Cannadine observed that the tenantry were often inclined to celebrate such events as it afforded an opportunity for a gathering and a carnival atmosphere. This was often capitalised upon by the aristocracy as evidence of their continued popularity amongst the tenantry.¹²³

Potter pleaded that Lord Bradford should not interpret the lack of celebration as the tenantry being 'indifferent' to the family, instead their apathy or 'failure' should be attributed to 'an ill-placed timidity.'¹²⁴ Potter resolved to arrange a dinner party, along with the 'principal agricultural tenants', issuing invitations to the whole of the tenantry, 'giving one and all the opportunity of joining, should they feel so inclined.'¹²⁵ It is notable that agricultural tenants were those entrusted with arranging this, rather than the urban tenantry who constituted the vast majority of the Walsall tenantry. It was evidently assumed these tenants would be less enthusiastic and loyal towards the estate, as well as less trustworthy to help organise such an event.

¹²¹ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 48.

¹²² SRO, D1287/20/5 P/243, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.3.1866.

¹²³ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 48.

¹²⁴ SRO, D1287/20/5 P/243, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.3.1866.

¹²⁵ SRO, D1287/20/5 P/243, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.3.1866.

Potter's reputation with the tenantry and their perception of Lord Bradford presents an interesting dynamic. Acting as the intermediary between tenants and landowner, Potter was ostensibly responsible for resolving disputes whilst always furthering the interests of his employer, allowing Bradford to maintain an air of aloofness from unpopular decisions.

On several occasions Potter was accused by aggrieved tenants of being a difficult and uncaring man. Tenants sometimes demanded to see Lord Bradford personally, believing the aristocrat would be compassionate to their situation. Mrs Durant, tired of Potter rejecting her offer to pay a small portion of her arrears, demanded an interview with Lord Bradford 'to endeavour to induce Your Lordship to close with her offer.'¹²⁶ Similarly, a tenant in arrears claimed he would 'not try to settle the affair myself unless in the presence of His Lordship, which of course I cannot expect.'¹²⁷ Potter routinely rejected demands to appeal to Bradford directly, and absorbed tenants complaints himself. Lord Bradford thus maintained a reputation for benevolence in the eyes of many of his tenants, conversely Potter maintained estate policy and bore the brunt of the tenants' odium.

In November 1852, Potter, on Bradford's orders, threatened legal action if Benjamin Johnson did not pay his arrears. Johnson complained of Potter's 'brutal and cruel treatment', characterising himself as an 'ill, used victim.' Johnson believed Potter was deliberately persecuting him and demanded instead a meeting with Lord Bradford. He believed the aristocrat would be more understanding, stating '[I] cannot think he [Lord Bradford] wished to persecute me in this manner'.¹²⁸ Potter, tired of Johnson's accusations, declined further correspondence with him.¹²⁹

On this occasion, Lord Bradford agreed to contact Johnson directly and allowed the tenant more time to pay off his arrears, which Potter had initially advised.¹³⁰ This served to bolster Bradford's reputation for compassion amongst the tenantry. Bradford's initial reaction to the situation had

¹²⁶ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Potter to Lord Bradford, 16.11.1843.

¹²⁷ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/136/4, Johnson to Potter, 18.2.1851.

¹²⁸ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/137/3, Johnson to Potter, 20.11.1852.

¹²⁹ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/137, Potter to Lord Bradford, 4.12.1852.

¹³⁰ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/137, Potter to Lord Bradford, 4.12.1852.

been to instruct Potter to threaten legal proceedings against Johnson, and only offered clemency once appealed to directly.

Whilst few sources examine the dynamics between landowner, his agents and his tenantry, these relationships have been envisaged by novelists. The dynamics between Potter and Bradford in relations to Benjamin Johnson's plight is, for instance, immediately reminiscent of that between Christopher Casby and his agent in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*. Casby maintained an air of benevolence and aloofness from his tenants while his agent Mr Pancks harrowed the tenants only on the orders of Casby, and very much against his own sensitivities. The agent took 'all the drudgery and all the dirt of the business' while Casby took 'all the profits'¹³¹ So too, Lord Bradford reaped the plaudits of benevolence, whilst the rents were secured by Potter, who endured criticism and acrimony from aggrieved tenants.

Johnson's belief that Lord Bradford would not wish him to be 'persecuted' implies that Potter was acting independently, and in a manner Bradford would not approve if he knew. The belief amongst tenants existed that Bradford, and the benevolent Casby, were being dragged into policies by their unscrupulous agents.¹³²

In *Little Dorrit*, Casby's true nature is revealed when he chastised Pancks for being remiss in collecting the rents, despite Pancks' protests that he had squeezed the tenants dry for rent that morning. Casby insisted Pancks must pressure them for payment again, telling him, 'you are made to do your duty, but you don't do your duty. You are paid to squeeze, and you must squeeze to pay.'¹³³

The fictional Pancks, jaded with his unenviable position, publicly denounced Casby as 'the man who would flay you alive' urging the assemble tenants 'don't look for him in me, at thirty shillings

¹³¹ C. Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, (London, 1857), p. 830.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

In part of a nautical metaphor present throughout the novel, Dickens suggests that Casby, 'the cumbrous Patriarch had been taken in tow by the snorting Pancks, and was now following in the wake of that dingy little craft'.

¹³³ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, pp. 830-1.

a week, but look for him in Casby, at I don't know how much a year!'¹³⁴ Pancks' frustration was also felt by Potter, who requested that Bradford reiterate his approval of Potter's conduct to Johnson, who had 'on many occasions insinuated the contrary'.¹³⁵

However, the analogy with Pancks does not fit Potter neatly, aside from Potter not quitting his post and publically humiliating Bradford in Bridgeman Place. Potter believed in the importance of making an example of defaulting tenants and advocated that legal action must be pursued if the agreed repayments were not met. 'If he be allowed to evade payment,' Potter warned, 'a very bad precedent will be established and such a one as cannot but encourage other tenants to get wilfully and dishonestly into arrear.' Whereas Pancks was the reluctant rent collector, Potter had a ruthless realism that saw him actively pursue arrears.

On the Sutherland estate, where the duke was largely an absentee landowner, the reputation of the chief agent was consciously constructed, as he represented a more palpable source of authority than the duke. This is evidenced in the instructions for Menzies to be seen to be making his own potentially unpopular decisions, rather than being dictated to by Loch. The manner that perceived sources of authority were calculated and constructed is a common theme on aristocratic estates. The relative size of the estates, and distance of the landowner from the implementation of estate policies, dictated how agents were perceived by the tenantry. Loch was the source of authority in North Staffordshire when the duke was absent and his reputation was duly protected. On a national scale, James Loch had earlier in the century borne the brunt of the public odium for the Highland Clearances, despite the enthusiasm of Lord and Lady Stafford for the policy.

Peter Potter the elder and the younger each attracted criticism from tenants, as well as from clergymen whose parishioners they managed. The Reverend Cotton declared that, of all the landed estates with which he was acquainted, 'the worst managed was the Earl of Bradford's'.¹³⁶ Cotton had described the elder Peter Potter as 'certainly not a pleasant man... to transact business with' yet

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 834.

¹³⁵ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/137, Potter to Lord Bradford, 4.12.1852.

¹³⁶ The Reverend Cotton to Lady Bradford, quoted in SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107/A, Potter to Bradford, 25.10.1843.

found him more courteous than the younger Potter from whom Cotton ‘could hardly obtain a civil answer’.¹³⁷

Whether the dissenting tradition of the Potter family contributed to the younger Peter Potter’s apparent lack of respect for the Reverend Cotton, is not clear. It can also be speculated that the clergyman’s evident dislike for successive members of the family was motivated by a distaste for their religious view. Bradford appears to have considered this and observed that Cotton had, ‘manifested for years a great dislike to the Potter family.’ In reiterating his own ‘high opinion’ of the family Bradford referred specifically to the elder Potter as ‘deeply religious’ whilst he later commended the younger Potter for his ‘high principle; both jovial and religious.’¹³⁸ While the elder Potter’s dissent had not impacted upon Bradford’s opinion of him, it is clear that others considered his religious view to be detrimental to his character.

Faced with external criticisms, both Potter and his father reverted to the same defence: that they were answerable only to Lord Bradford. As the younger Potter stated, ‘I [am] answerable only to my employer... to Your Lordship alone [will] I stand or fall.’¹³⁹ A clear belief existed that Lord Bradford would defend the agents’ conduct. Indeed, the younger Potter commented upon his belief that Bradford would not permit his ‘energies to be dampened, or my honest endeavours to fulfil my duty to you as my employer, to be checked’.¹⁴⁰ Their faith was well placed as Bradford invariably defended the Potters.

Lord Bradford himself received criticism for being an absentee landowner, and accusations were made that he could not make his own observations of the Potters’ mismanagement. Cotton chastised Bradford’s lack of knowledge of his own estates and accused him of making ill-informed decisions.¹⁴¹ As shown in Beckett’s work, accusations that absentee landowners were susceptible

¹³⁷ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, The Reverend Cotton to Lord Bradford, 23.10.1843.

¹³⁸ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Lord Bradford to The Reverend Cotton [rough copy], 11.10.1843.

¹³⁹ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107/A, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.10.1843.

¹⁴⁰ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107/A, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.10.1843.

¹⁴¹ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, The Reverend Cotton to Lord Bradford, 23.10.1843.

to manipulation by corrupt and unscrupulous agents were common, especially in the early nineteenth century.¹⁴²

There is an inherent assumption in Cotton's criticism that Lord Bradford would accept the comments of a clergyman, ahead of an agent. Cotton felt that the traditional ties between the clergy and the aristocracy should supersede those of landowner and employee. Bradford angrily refuted Cotton's criticism of his absence and the claim that he acted blindly on an *Ipse Dixit* of his agent.¹⁴³

Whilst maintaining a strong affinity for the Established Church, Bradford supported his agent unreservedly when they faced criticism, demonstrating a loyalty to his agents, which superseded any traditional bonds between the aristocracy and the clergy.

¹⁴² Beckett, *English Aristocracy*, p. 49.

¹⁴³ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/107A, Lord Bradford to The Reverend Cotton [rough copy], 11.10.1843. *Ipse Dixit* (as he asserted), meaning an unsupported statement that rests solely on the authority of the individual who makes it.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The management of the Bradford and Sutherland estates in the mid-nineteenth century demonstrated many continuities from the 1830s. However, important changes in estate policy, as well as the structure of the estate agency, were enacted in the 1850s and 1860s.

The restructuring of the Bradford estate agency in 1861 at the behest of the incumbent agent, serves to highlight the continuing entrenchment of the Potter family in the management of the Bradford estate. While their conduct brought increased efficiency and profitability to the estate, the manner in which they held sway over the management structure, and the essentially hereditary nature of the role of chief agent, calls into question the professionalism of the estate agency, and the continuing systems of patronage that existed. Professionalism of estate management has been shown to have developed in fits and starts throughout the nineteenth century.

Moreover, the first attempts at the systematic development of the duke of Sutherland's land around Longton was an important divergence in policy from the 1830s. Where previously agents had dismissed any approaches to develop their land in this area, by 1864 they began plans for a systematic development. As this policy continued into subsequent decades, the estate introduced stringent measures to ensure that these suburbs maintained the desired character and, importantly, that they remained distinct and separate to the polluted and industrial town of Longton.

This suburban policy was commenced with evident reluctance, in stark contrast to the growth of the earl of Bradford's Walsall estate, which continued unabated under the stewardship of Peter Potter the younger. While the area of Normacot on the periphery of Longton was of negligible importance to the agents of the 1830s, it now occupied the efforts of the Trentham agent as much as other, more established parts of the estate.

Throughout these changes, the importance of agents to the management of aristocratic estates continued. Of the variety of experience witnessed through these two case studies, the role of the agent on a day-to-day basis remains a constant. In particular, the letters of these agents provide an

insight into the daily management of the estates, and the varied and vast role of agents in the development, management and growth of aristocratic estates.

The first attempts of an urban development policy emerging on the Sutherland estate in North Staffordshire, demonstrate the different interpretation of which duties were befitting of an agent on aristocratic estates. On the Bradford estate, successive agents had been actively involved in the urban development of Walsall. Conversely, when the Sutherland estate begun developing its land, the agents were, initially at least, involved in the process only to a limited extent. Great variety existed in the duties of the profession, and generalisations are problematic.

While public sentiment nationally was decidedly more appreciative of the aristocracy than it had been in the decade of the Reform crisis, the Sutherland and Bradford estates faced criticism from their tenantry. Scalded by the earlier backlash to their Scottish policies, the Sutherland estate adopted a decidedly more conciliatory approach to these criticisms than the Bradford estate, unbesmirched by such national criticism, and desiring profits over any sense of paternalism in the urban setting. Moreover, as the population of both towns increased, their composition changed. In the urban setting, the traditional bonds of loyalty and deference to an aristocratic landlord can be seen to start to disintegrate in the mid-century. This process would prove irreversible.

As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the development of the Longton suburbs increased in the 1880s and many of the roles of the surveyor were undertaken by a man employed by the estate in a position more akin to the agents on the Bradford estate. There the 1880s and 1890s saw the development of new areas of the town, with the next generation of the Potter family directing the operations.

4.0 URBANISATION THIRD PHASE 1878-1900

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This third chronological chapter will examine developments on the Bradford and Sutherland estates in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. These decades witnessed considerable growth of both aristocrats' urban estates, following a decade of economic recession.¹ Walsall continued to grow significantly, both physically and in population. After the surge in population in the 1850s as discussed in the previous chapter, the town's population rose steadily during the 1860s and 1870s. A rapid increase was then witnessed in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1881, Walsall had a population of 58,802 which rose to 86,400 by 1901.²

Longton's population had also grown rapidly until the 1870s, when almost 20,000 people lived in the borough.³ However, Longton town council became concerned by the volume of people moving from the town and into newly expanded suburbs outside Longton's boundaries, reducing the town population to 18,615 in 1881.⁴ As a result, the Longton Extension and Improvement Bill incorporated the suburbs of Florence, Dresden and Normacot, along with East Vale, into the boundaries of Longton in 1884. In 1891, the population of the expanded borough was 34,327, reaching almost 39,000 by the end of the century.⁵

In Walsall, urban development continued in many areas of the town to meet the demands of the increasing population. In North Staffordshire, the growth of the suburbs of Florence and Normacot accelerated from 1878, when these developments were prioritised by the Sutherland estate. These areas, previously little more than farms and fields, were transformed by the end of the century into neighbourhoods of planned streets in an organised grid fashion, starkly opposed to the piecemeal

¹ See F. Capie and G. Wood, 'Great Depression of 1873-1896' in T. Cooley and D. Glasner, *Business Cycles and Depressions*, (New York, 1997), pp. 148-9.

² Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 17, pp. 143-5.

³ Jenkins, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 8, pp. 227-8.

⁴ Dobraszczyk, *Normacot: From Forest to Furnace to Suburban Development*, p. 16.

⁵ Jenkins, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 8, pp. 227-8.

and irregular development of much of Longton. This suburban development attracted an influx of population to these areas in the last quarter of the century.

As in previous decades, the role of the agent on each aristocratic estate remained integral, and the importance of individual agents was pronounced. However, the nature of the agents' role changed from the dynamics witnessed in the 1860s. George Menzies remained the Sutherland agent in North Staffordshire and was afforded increased autonomy after the death of chef agent, George Loch, in 1877. In Walsall, George Gybbon Potter replaced his father as Lord Bradford's agent, but conflicting personal and professional interests saw a reduction of the all-encompassing role of Lord Bradford's agent. The level of involvement in every facet of the management of the estate, evident amongst previous agents, was notably absent from 1881.

This chapter incorporates two significant chronological milestones. 1878 witnessed a restructuring of the Sutherland estate agency, and greater prioritisation, and regularisation, of suburban developments. Fifteen years later, in 1893, the sale of the Sutherland estate commenced, held in the context of an acrimonious financial settlement following the death of the third duke the previous year.

As with the preceding discussions of the early and mid-nineteenth century, the present chapter examines the changing agency structure on each estate, heralded in each case by the death of an individual. The importance of personalities to estate management will thus be emphasised. The development of the estates' urban land will be examined, before the role of the agents in managing the tenantry again reveals the importance of individual agents to the growing towns.

David Cannadine suggests that the 'honeymoon period' of calm and mutual admiration between the aristocracy and the towns, which characterised the mid-nineteenth century, was punctuated by outbursts of controversy and criticism intermittently until the 1880s.⁶ He characterises the late 1860s and 1870s as periods of 'hostility and conflict' in which the prevailing public sentiment was

⁶ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 46.

anti-aristocratic, as it had been in the 1830s.⁷ The third Reform Act, pressures for Irish Home Rule, and the establishments of county councils, are cited as being cause and effect of this change of public opinion, while the agricultural depression exacerbated these tensions. Town councils became more self-assured and less reliant on the old order for the appearance of legitimacy. Accordingly, for the first time, the management of great urban estates was exposed to close public scrutiny. Agents from aristocratic estates appeared before committees to contradict disagreeable stories about estate management.⁸

However, by the late 1880s, a rapprochement was reached, and a period of ‘ceremonial importance’ and social prestige began, lasting until the Great War and beyond.⁹ This period was characterised by the instillation of aristocrats as mayors of towns, and chancellors of provincial universities, as town councils came to regard civic pomp, ritual and ceremony as necessary for their raised status and importance. The experience of the Bradford and Sutherland estates in this period serves to both confirm and complicate this summary. The assertion that ‘great reserves of goodwill, tradition and respect for the aristocratic mystique’ were still engrained in the subconscious of town dwellers by the end of the century, will be challenged.

⁷ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

4.2 AGENCY STRUCTURE

GEORGE GYBBON POTTER

By the 1880s, George Menzies remained Trentham agent on the Sutherland estate, following his appointment in 1865. On the Bradford estate, incumbent agent Peter Potter the younger died in March 1881. Potter had desired that his eldest son, also called Peter, would succeed him as Bradford's agent, as he himself had continued the role after his own father's death in 1843. The third Peter Potter, although working in the estate agency in his teenage years, had decided against this as a career, opting instead to become a clergyman. This decision greatly disappointed his father, who reputedly became cool towards his son, with whom he had little in common.¹⁰

Potter's second son, George Gybbon Potter, was keen to continue the family businesses. He became Lord Bradford's Walsall agent and Steward of the manor in 1881, when aged 38.¹¹ An experienced solicitor, Potter worked in the family solicitor's firm in Walsall. He was trained under the guidance of his uncle, John Potter, whom he ultimately replaced as partner in the firm Marlow, Potter and Martens.

Since the 1861 agency restructuring, as detailed in the previous chapter, Lord Bradford's estates were managed largely independently from each other by a subagent for each geographical estate, meaning that George Gybbon Potter had no responsibility for the rural parts. Moreover, alongside undertaking the roles of Lord Bradford's Walsall agent, and being a practicing solicitor, Potter had numerous business interests separate from the Bradford estate.

This reduced the attention he dedicated to the management of Bradford's Walsall estate. Although in many respects a diligent and competent agent, Potter was less integral to the management of the estates than his father and grandfather had been.

His auxiliary business interests rendered Potter essentially a 'part time' agent, especially in comparison with his predecessors. The characteristic control of all facets of the estate management,

¹⁰ Morley, *The Potters of Walsall*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

demonstrated by Peter Potter the elder and replicated by his son, is notably lacking with George Gybbon Potter's agency in the 1880s. Potter delegated considerable responsibilities to subagents or tenants in a manner alien to previous agents. Some of the functions of the Walsall agent were undertaken by George Gybbon Potter's youngest son, Frederick William Potter.

Potter thus had considerably less involvement with the tenantry of Walsall than his predecessors, presiding predominantly over the legal side of the estate management. This included the arranging of building leases in the continued development of the town, which proceeded unabated into the 1880s and 1890s.

By the mid-1880s Edward Griffith, son of the previous Weston agent, began being referred to in correspondence as 'Lord Bradford's chief agent', intermittently with 'Weston agent'. Griffith managed Lord Bradford's rural estates of Weston, Knockin and Hughley, and while ostensibly chief agent, he had no involvement in the management of the urban Walsall estate. Conversely, Potter had little input in the rural estates. This indicates a shift in the role of the agent with an all-encompassing agent in the mould of Peter Potter the elder, and, to a lesser extent, his son, no longer being viable. Evidently the role of agent had become more specialised, with the Bradford agents maintaining a focus on the management of either rural, or urban, landholdings. George Gybbon Potter, a solicitor intimately involved in the arrangement of building leases, had little interest in the rural aspects of estate management, and appears to have left decisions regarding agriculture to the agents on rural estates. This contrasts with the practice on the Sutherland estate where Menzies' professional background was in farming.

Potter's experience as a solicitor saw him provide legal advice to Lord Bradford concerning the management of the estate. Potter negotiated directly with the London solicitor firm Bailey, Shaw and Gillett, providing local information and opinion. In January 1889 Potter advised Bailey Shaw and Gillett of the 'popular furore' that would ensue should the estate commence mining on Bloxwich village green.¹² Potter advised on some legal wrangling that saw Walsall Corporation

¹² WLHC, 59/24 (letter 229), George Gybbon Potter to Bailey Shaw and Gillett, 19.1.1889.

begin work on this land, protecting the public image of the Bradford estate, yet leaving the aristocrat in a position where ‘no-one now can prevent or question his getting the mines’ and giving him the ‘very best spot available for working them.’¹³

Potter himself owned ‘a number of houses’ or sites in Walsall, many in the Birchills area to the north of the town, and was active in the building, funding and erection of these houses. He owned and managed Aldridge village hall, and held several manufacturing premises.¹⁴ Thus, along with his integral role in the continued development of Lord Bradford’s Walsall estate as agent and solicitor, George Gybbon Potter contributed to the growth of the town through personal investments. Parallels can be drawn with his grandfather, Peter Potter the elder, who funded the building of a terrace of houses at Bridgeman Place in the 1830s, alongside his duties as Bradford’s agent. Although that earlier venture was curtailed by a banking collapse, George Gybbon Potter’s building schemes in the 1880s were successful. A solicitor funding house building appears to have been a common phenomenon in the growth of Victorian towns and is discussed by both Dyos and Baer.¹⁵

Potter could be argumentative and abrasive in his business dealings, and strict towards Bradford’s tenants. Yet he also demonstrates compassion and empathy with tenants on occasions, as well as naivety and misplaced trust in business partners and tenants. These instances, highlighted in this chapter, demonstrate the complexity and uncertainty that accompanied any urban development scheme.

GEORGE MENZIES

On the Sutherland estate, George Menzies held substantially more authority by the 1880s than he did at the time of his appointment in 1865. Chief agent George Loch died in 1877, and the vacant position was not immediately filled. For the two years until 1879, affairs at the central estate office

¹³ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 253), George Gybbon Potter to Bailey Shaw and Gillett, 25.2.1889.

¹⁴ WLHC, 59/23 (letter 242), George Gybbon Potter to F. Parkes, 4.10.1886.

¹⁵ H. Dyos, ‘The Speculative Builders and Developers of Victorian London’, in D. Cannadine and D. Reeder (Eds.), *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History by H. J. Dyos*, (Cambridge, 1982), p. 169.

in London were managed by George Scott, a senior clerk, under direction of the third duke of Sutherland himself, while more autonomy was given to the agents on the local estates. The third duke, who had succeeded his father in 1861, became, by the 1880s, notably more interested and involved in the management of his estates than his predecessor. The management of the estate following George Loch's death convinced the duke that he no longer required a central chief agent in the mould of James Loch. Accordingly, the duties of the chief agent were split along functional lines, with the duke becoming more actively involved as an overseer. Sir Arnold Kembell was appointed as Commissioner for the management of the estates from 1879 until 1886, yet Kembell seldom played a significant role in the management of the North Staffordshire estate, which was controlled entirely by Menzies. From 1886 the estate employed no sole chief agent or commissioner.

By the 1890s, Menzies was in regular direct contact with the duke, and implemented the aristocrat's instructions concerning Trentham and Lilleshall. Menzies directed policy towards the tenantry and was entrusted with the continued development of the suburban estates around Longton, as well as the growth of the duke's colliery at Florence. Menzies now fulfilled a position similar to that which the chief agent of the Bradford estates had undertaken for some 50 years. He acted as the permanent representative of the landowner on his estates.¹⁶ Menzies reaped the benefit of earlier professional agents who, both nationally and on the Sutherland estate, laid the foundations for 'complete confidence between owner and agent' that witnessed the substantial delegation of the owner's powers.¹⁷ This was a dynamic witnessed for several generations between successive earls of Bradford and their agents.

Although Menzies can be characterised as confident but controlled in his role in 1865, he thrived with the increased levels of authority afforded to him by the late 1880s. While the estate agency structure fragmented at the top level, in North Staffordshire Menzies' position as the centre of

¹⁶ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 153.

authority was enhanced. No decision was made concerning the North Staffordshire estate without his approval.

The agents on both the Bradford and Sutherland estates were in regular correspondence with a range of subordinate officials, as well as other professionals, including surveyors and solicitors. The nature of these professional networks is worthy of examination, as they present insight into the integral role of agents in aristocratic estate management, and in the growth of modern towns. Moreover, the increased involvement of these auxiliary professions was not evident on the Sutherland estate in the 1830s, the chronological starting point of the present study.

SOLICITORS

Notably more so than in the 1860s, by 1878 a considerable portion of Menzies' correspondence was with various solicitors' firms, locally and nationally. Menzies was in almost daily contact with S. Herbert Cooper of Coopers solicitors, based in Newcastle-under-Lyme, who represented the estate in many local matters. These letters indicate the increased input of solicitors in the management of the Trentham estate, most notably concerning the estate's forays into suburban development. On the Bradford estate first John Potter, and then George Gybbon Potter, acted as the legal representative of the estate, and also had increasing involvement with the daily management of the estate.

That Lord Bradford employed agents who were legally trained is in stark contrast to the Sutherland estate where agricultural acumen, and a recommendation from the chief agent's personal network, was a prerequisite for the position of agent. This meant that the Sutherland estate was required to employ the services of solicitors' firms, whereas the Potters acted in a legal capacity as well as being agents. This indicated the increased professionalisation of the agent's role as specialised skills and professional status were sought by some aristocrats in their agents.

Coopers solicitors offered legal advice to Menzies on many aspects of estate management. They fulfilled an essential role in the granting of building leases on the Florence and Normacot developments, and processed all legal documents, ensuring that all parties agreed on building

regulations. Solicitors advised the duke's agents on potential problems to arise from proposed developments, such as the diversion of existing roads to improve the access to newly erected villas.¹⁸

Solicitors further assisted in negotiations with companies seeking to provide infrastructure to growing towns, or exploit minerals under landed estates. When legal disputes arose with local authorities, Corporations or Poor Law Unions, solicitors were employed to act on behalf of the estate, including to secure utilities such as sewerage, street lights and gasworks. When considering processes of urban development, the contribution of solicitors, working in conjunction with agents and surveyors, should not be overlooked.

On the Bradford estate, the estate's solicitor was entwined with the role of agent in the person of George Gybbon Potter. Although Potter considered himself a professional agent, he cannot be considered as such in the same mould as his predecessors. He often approached the management of the estate from a legal perspective, and delegated many of the daily duties of the agent to subordinates, to a greater extent than had previously been practised.

SURVEYORS

Menzies worked closely with surveyors to a greater degree than in the 1860s. From 1878 John Garrett was employed permanently by the estate as a surveyor and was charged with the supervision of the Florence and Normacot developments. Garret came from Gloucestershire, the son of a shopkeeper, and attended Sedgley Park Boarding School in Dudley. He was aged 28 in 1878, and had been recorded on the 1871 census as a clerk to a timber merchant, suggesting that he did not possess a wealth of experience as a surveyor. Garrett's social background, private education and early employment in administrative roles, contrasts with the agricultural origins of agents on the Sutherland estate, and is more akin to the Potter family, who can be characterised as urban professionals. As will be demonstrated, alongside his duties as surveyor, Garrett fulfilled

¹⁸ See for example, re the diversion of Cocknage Road, SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Cooper to Menzies, 13.9.1878.

many of the roles associated with subagents, further complicating the assumptions of historians as to the social background of agents on aristocratic estates.

Garrett was initially employed by the Sutherland estate as a mining surveyor, reflecting the increased importance delegated to these industrial ventures by the estate into the 1870s. That Garrett was further tasked with designing Queens Park, despite having no formal training as a landscape architect. This highlights the diverse remit of a surveyor for aristocratic estates with multitudes of assets.

Garrett coordinated the development of the Florence estate from the Florence Estate Office, opened in 1878 at 110 Trentham Road. Menzies' exchanges with Garrett were regular but brief. Many of their discussions were held in person at weekly meetings. Garrett's role included the drawing up of maps, valuing land for purchase or sale, and overseeing the particulars of land exchanges. Garrett was an industrious and scrupulous surveyor. In one instance, he halted the laying of sewers on the Florence estate as he did not deem the pipes used to be of sufficient quality, telling Menzies they were the 'most abominable lot' he had ever seen.¹⁹

Menzies instructed Garrett to undertake tasks not directly associated with his profession as a surveyor. He had closer engagement with existing tenants in a manner more akin to an agent than a surveyor. Menzies asked Garrett to negotiate changes of rent with existing tenants, or to make offers to those they were attempting to remove. Garrett acted as Menzies' representative in the Longton suburbs, informing him of local matters arising with buildings and tenants, as well as collecting rents for certain neighbourhoods.²⁰ These auxiliary responsibilities distinguish Garrett from others employed as contracted surveyors, such as John Elliot, whose duties were strictly confined to those befitting his profession.

Garrett held an integral role in the development of the duke's suburbs, and was the first contact for potential or existing leaseholders. Prospective lessees applied to Garrett, who forwarded requests to

¹⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Garrett to Menzies, 16.4.1878.

²⁰ For example see SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Menzies to Garrett, 27.3.1878 and Garrett to Menzies, 30.4.1878, SRO D593/K/3/9/64, Menzies to Garrett. 24.1.1878

Menzies. Menzies then contacted Coopers solicitors who prepared the legal documentation, which was then ratified by the duke. When delays or problems arose, it was Garrett who contacted the lessees.²¹

As discussed in the previous chapter, John Elliot of Marsh Terrace, Newcastle, was employed by the Sutherland estate in 1864 on a commission basis. This arrangement, calculated to minimise the potential risk to the estate, was indicative of the estate's tentative attitude towards suburban development in North Staffordshire.²² By 1878 however, Garrett had been employed as a full-time surveyor to supervise this project, suggesting the estate had embraced its role as developer. Elliot maintained his connection with the estate on a commission basis.

Throughout the 1880s, contact between Menzies and Elliot experienced peaks and troughs, with periods of no contact punctuated by months of close collaboration when Elliott's services were required. The suburban developments near Longton were left entirely to Garrett.

As with solicitors, the involvement of surveyors working alongside estates agents to oversee urban developments demonstrates the importance of these emerging professions to the growth of towns in the nineteenth century. However, Garrett, initially employed as a mining surveyor, quickly found himself in charge of suburban development while acting as a *de facto* subagent and later, a municipal park planner. The professionalisation of specific occupations in nineteenth century towns was evidently a sporadic process. In Walsall, Peter Potter the elder and his son each fulfilled the role of agent alongside that of surveyor on Bradford's estates. From the 1860s, the family further functioned as the estate's solicitors. The three integral occupations in the management of the estate were thus fulfilled by one family of professionals.

SUB AGENTS AND RENT COLLECTORS

On the Bradford estate, with George Gybbon Potter's employment as a solicitor being, arguably, to the detriment of his agency duties, subagents and rent collectors increased in importance. Potter's

²¹ For example see SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Garrett to Menzies, 19.6.1878.

²² SRO, D593/K1/5/134 [Out-letters of George Loch], George Loch to Duke of Sutherland, 26.7.1864.

son, Frederick William Potter, was employed as a subagent in Walsall, while John Chidley a tenant in Butts Road, collected the rents of Bradford's tenants in the Reeds Wood area, in the north of the town, as well as collecting the tithes for John Potter. Potter employed Chidley, to fulfil a variety of tasks previously associated with that of a subagent, including the management of tenants, accounting and clerical work.²³

Chidley was further employed by George Gybbon Potter, independently from the Bradford estate, to handle enquires and advertise for tenants for the several properties and manufacturing premises Potter owned.²⁴ Potter charged Chidley with finding people to utilise these premises, telling him that he would 'make very easy terms' so that an interested manufacturer might have 'an easy road to fortune!'²⁵

In his capacity, independent from the Bradford estate, Chidley regularly missed rent collection days, infuriating Potter. In November 1889 Potter complained that the collection had again been missed, and chastised Chidley for his failure to keep to the 'simple rule' of sending a weekly note about the collections. With evident exasperation, he demanded 'for about the 100th time' that this be done each Saturday.²⁶

While Chidley was not listed in the 1880 Trade Directory for Walsall, and was evidently considered somewhat incompetent by Potter, by 1896 he appears to have considered himself to be of relatively exalted status. His entry in the directory describes himself as, 'house agent and registrar for births and deaths... local collector of poor rates and of assessed and income taxes for Walsall No. 3 district'. He further described himself as the 'general district rate collector' for Rushall, Great Barr and Aldridge, and the 'vaccination officer' for Aldridge sub-district, Butt Road and Borough Offices.²⁷

²³ WLHC, 59/23 (letter 80), George Gybbon Potter to John Chidley, 5.10.1885.

²⁴ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 217), George Gybbon Potter to Messers Griffin, 3.1.1889.

²⁵ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 129), George Gybbon Potter to John Chidley, 11.7.1888.

²⁶ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 402), George Gybbon Potter to John Chidley, 19.11.1889.

²⁷ Kelley's Directory of Staffordshire and Shropshire [1896].

Potter also employed a tenant, Thomas Smith, as a rent collector for properties he owned in Cannock. Smith had been given the responsibility as a condition of Potter withdrawing Smith's notice to quit.²⁸ Entrusting a tenant evidently unable to pay his own rent, with collecting the rents of others, appears foolish, and, indeed, Smith proved unreliable. In December 1888 Potter complained that he had received 'no rents for October or November' from Smith.²⁹

The practice of employing tenants as rent collectors was not commonly used by Potter's predecessors in the Bradford agency. Both Peter Potter the elder and younger routinely collected the rents themselves, albeit the volume of tenants was considerably less in the 1830s than the 1890s. Until 1861, this included the rents for the rural estates, at considerable distances from Walsall. Problems with rent collectors was not uncommon, and, in 1856, Potter the younger recorded that all Walsall garden rents had been lost for the previous two years as a result of 'the collector having decamped with the money.'³⁰

George Gybbon Potter's use of rent collectors even in his reduced role as agent only for Walsall, could be conceived as a result of his conflicting responsibilities as an agent, a solicitor and an independent property owner. At a time when the professional agent dedicated to one aristocratic estate was becoming the norm across England, Potter opted for, and had been allowed to continue, a much reduced role that frequently clashed with his other professional and business commitments.

²⁸ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 195), George Gybbon Potter to Thomas Smith, 5.12.1888.

²⁹ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 195), George Gybbon Potter to Thomas Smith, 5.12.1888.

³⁰ SRO, D1287/1/31/G/131, Rental of the Estate of the Right Hon. Earl of Bradford at Walsall, see note of Peter Potter the younger SRO D1287/1/32/G/158

4.3 AGENTS WITH LANDOWNERS

The involvement of landowners in the management of their estates followed opposing trajectories in the 1880s. Aged 61 in 1880, the third earl of Bradford was relatively active in business, yet by the end of the decade, he had considerably reduced his involvement in estate affairs. Potter regularly informed Walsall societies that the earl's advanced age rendered visits to the town impractical.³¹ Conversely, from the mid-1870s, the third duke of Sutherland became discernibly more active in the management of his estates. Indeed, the duke's agents feared he was pursuing too many separate projects. Although his enthusiasm was laudable, his judgement was lacking. George Loch issued monthly warnings to the duke when he received the accounts, but was unable to curb the duke's expenditure, most notably on his Scottish reclamation project, and industrial pursuits.³²

Menzies, along with Colin Mackenzie an accountant based at Stafford House, expressed concern about the duke's industrial investments in Staffordshire, notably with Great Fenton Colliery of which the duke was a large stakeholder. Against all advice, by March 1878 the duke determined to alter the mortgage arrangements and invest more of his own capital in the colliery. Mackenzie was particularly critical and condescending of the duke's policies. Several agents agreed that the duke was making an error of judgement, with Mackenzie stating, 'Of course we would all like best to see him let well alone... we all think he has too many eggs in one basket as it is.'³³

It was expected that the duke would pursue his own course of action, ignoring contrary advice.

Thus the agents concentrated on how to best negate the potential loss to the estate, should the duke 'insist on doing something'.³⁴ Mackenzie instructed Menzies to advise the duke with the aim of minimising loss to the estate, concluding that 'the question is not what is absolutely the best thing to be done, but what is the best thing to advise in the whole circumstances'.³⁵ Thus, while agents often had a greater understanding of how to utilise the assets of an estate, if the landowner had

³¹ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 322 and 323), George Gybbon Potter to Charles Keyte, 8.8.1889.

³² These ill-advised policies, and the great expenditure dedicated to them, are discussed in Tindley, *The Sutherland Estate*, pp. 35-46.

³³ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64 [separate file], Mackenzie to Menzies, 15.3.1878.

³⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64 [separate file], Mackenzie to Menzies, 15.3.1878.

³⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64 [separate file], Mackenzie to Menzies, 15.3.1878.

determined on a particular course of action, it was the duty of the agent to minimise the risk of the aristocrat's decision even while recognising that a mistake was being made.

The third duke's increased involvement in estate affairs caused additional problems for agents, as he insisted on counter-signing all building leases granted by the estate. Documents therefore had to be sent to him, and returned, before the lessee could commence building. An insistence on ratifying routine decisions, whilst simultaneously pursuing an aristocratic lifestyle, caused considerable delays. In January 1880, the duke went on holiday to Egypt for three months, leaving unsigned numerous deeds and leases required to complete transactions.³⁶ Menzies told Coopers solicitors that although the delays were unfortunate, there was little that could be done about it whilst the duke was away.³⁷

Despite Menzies' relaxed attitude, Cooper was frustrated by the estate's insistence that routine matters be signed by the duke, rendering the estate powerless in the aristocrat's absence. Regarding an agreement with a canal company, Cooper told Menzies that 'it would be a serious thing for this company to await the Dukes return' and warned of the financial ramifications for the estate.³⁸ From a legal standpoint, the duke's signature was not necessary in such a 'matter of form' and Cooper explained pointedly that it was accepted practice that solicitors assent to such routine matters 'in order to avoid delay which might otherwise arise.'³⁹ To resolve this matter, Menzies asked the Marquis of Stafford, the duke's heir, to assent to the agreement, demonstrating that an aristocrat's approval was still considered essential, despite Cooper's assertions that this was not a necessary practice. That such delays were regularly caused, suggests that the estate's practices, even in the 1880s, cannot be considered fully professionalised.

³⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, S. Herbert Cooper to Menzies, 22.1.1880.

³⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, S. Herbert Cooper to Menzies, 24.1.1880.

³⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, S. Herbert Cooper to Menzies, 25.1.1880.

³⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, S. Herbert Cooper to Menzies, 25.1.1880, SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, S. Herbert Cooper to Menzies, 2.2.1880, SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, S. Herbert Cooper to Menzies, 14.4.1880.

For the subsequent months of 1880, the solicitors regularly sent lists of documents awaiting the duke of Sutherland's signature. These were dealt with only when the duke returned, on the 14 April, almost three months later.

The levels of involvement of aristocrats in the management of their estates, varied between individual landowners, as well as between estates. The third duke of Sutherland demanded more input than his predecessor had desired. He enthusiastically pursued policies of improvement and industrial activity, while the second duke had focussed his attention on the development of the ancestral houses and gardens, and would not entertain industrial activities on the estates. This demonstrates the scope for great variations in aristocratic involvement on estates. However, although the duke's signature was formally required, Menzies made many of the decisions on the estate, and the duke's consent was a formality in most instances. On the Bradford estate, as during previous decades, the landowners did not have any considerable involvement in the management of their urban estates, and consented to the Potters acting in their best interests.

4.4 AGENTS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENTS

OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS

WALSALL

The late 1870s had witnessed a depression in the demand for housing in Walsall, as a result of the wider national economic depression. In this context, Peter Potter the younger strove to curb Lord Bradford's eagerness to purchase more land for building plots, fuelled by the profits the estate had accumulated from this policy. In 1878, Potter warned that the 'present very slack demand for building land' meant that Bradford's instruction to purchase more land was unwise, as finding a lessee swiftly would prove difficult.⁴⁰ Evidently, on occasions, the landowner was the most enthusiastic for urban development, necessitating the agent to discourage this in light of his greater awareness of market forces.

However, by the mid-1880s, demand for housing increased, and the subsequent twenty years witnessed considerable development on Lord Bradford's land in Walsall. Lord Bradford granted building leases in both pre-existing streets and those newly created on the estate. Hundreds of houses were planned, and built, on these building plots, the majority on 99 year building leases which held conditions that upon the completion of the term, the land and any houses or buildings erected thereon, would revert back to the Bradford estate.⁴¹ The below OS map (figure 9) demonstrates the results of the growth of the town up until 1886. The Chuckery area, on the eastern side of the town remains undeveloped until the 1890s, as discussed below.

⁴⁰ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/161, Peter Potter to Lord Bradford, 8.6.1878.

⁴¹ For one such example, see SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/1, Building agreement between Edward Gybbon Potter acting for the Right Honourable Earl of Bradford and William Cox of Walsall, saddler, 28.8.1901.



Figure 9: OS Map of Walsall, 1886.⁴²

Extensive building continued in the Pleck area to the west of the town, with building leases granted in Ida Road, Pleck Road and Wilbraham Road. A lease was also granted for a new school, and offices, in Ida Road in 1903. The Birchills area to the north of the town witnessed considerable development, with Farrington Street being laid, and Dalkeith Street seeing a vast number of new houses erected. The area was also provided with a school and a chapel in 1900, built on land leased from Lord Bradford.⁴³ Birchills was becoming one of the most densely populated and poorest areas

⁴² SRO, D1287/M/713

⁴³ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 226/3335/1.

around the town. This had been recognised as early as 1845 when Peter Potter the younger noticed that Walsall's wealthier inhabitants tended to live in the centre of the town whilst in the north-west, the inhabitants were 'nearly all poor, being for the most part mechanics and miners.'⁴⁴ As with the majority of towns, as the nineteenth century progressed and suburbs were formed, many of the wealthiest inhabitants departed the centre of Walsall to live in villa residences on the town's periphery. As will be discussed below, the Bradford estate sought to capitalise on this social trend, as well as in providing cheap houses for the periodic influxes of working classes to the town.

To the east of the town centre, the area known as The Chuckery was greatly expanded. Several new streets were laid in this area, and a new school was built on Chuckery Road. Many of these new streets had thematic names including Florence Street, Lumley Road and Moncrieffe Street, named after female member of the Bridgeman family, while Tong and Kinnerley Streets represented geographic links to the earl's Shropshire estates.

Finally, to the west of the town centre, the area north of Palfrey saw some development of the streets initially laid in the 1850s and 1860s with John Tibbett's agreeing to build 36 houses in Earl Street in 1893.⁴⁵ Other leases in this area were granted in Countess Street, Charles Street and Queen Street.

FLORENCE AND NORMACOT

Meanwhile, on the duke of Sutherland's estates, the development of the Spratslade area, commenced in 1864, continued slowly. In the early 1870s, the name Spratslade was dropped in favour of 'Florence', in honour of the duke's eldest daughter. An unintentional continental theme thus emerged in the southeast of the Potteries, with the suburbs of Florence and Dresden growing alongside each other. While James Loch had reacted scathingly to the Longton Freehold Society's

⁴⁴ SRO, SRO D1287/12/3, Peter Potter to Lord Bradford, 1.12.1845.

⁴⁵ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 192/3010/13.

choice of name, remarking ‘Dresden!!! What provoked such a name in such a place’, no such scorn was appropriated to the choice of Florence for the estate’s new Potteries suburb.⁴⁶

The Florence development consisted of a triangle of land encompassing some 300 acres. Trentham Road formed the western boundary, while Grosvenor Road (later renamed Lightwood Road) and Belgrave Road formed the north-eastern and southern boundaries respectively.

As with areas of the Bradford estate in Walsall, these streets were given thematic names. Many of the streets were named after the duke’s Scottish estates such as Dunrobin Street and Golspie Street or given family names including Leveson Street and Cromartie Street. Conversely, streets laid on the Dresden estate were dedicated to liberal politicians including Russell Street and Peel Street, in keeping with the reforming ideals of the society’s founders. Ricardo Street, running parallel with Cobden Street, was named after the Liberal Member of Parliament for Stoke-upon-Trent, John Lewis Ricardo.

As on the Bradford estate, and commonly on many aristocratic estates, the building plots at Florence were offered on 99 year building leases. This was in contrast to the freehold basis common elsewhere in Longton and in Dresden.⁴⁷ The initial purchasers of building plots came from a cross section of Longton’s business community, including builders, estate agents and pottery manufacturers.⁴⁸

The largest building plots were to the west of the estate, on Trentham Road, and were explicitly reserved for ‘villa residences.’ This was indicative of a deliberate policy by which larger, more respectable houses, were built along the boundaries of the estate, the parts that could be seen from the main roads, whereas the interior of the developments were densely populated with terraced and cheaper houses. This gave the best possible impression of the estate to those passing through, whilst simultaneously maximising profitability.

⁴⁶ SRO, D593/K/1/5/69, James Loch to the Reverend John Hutchinson, (n.d.).1.1852.

⁴⁷ Dobraszczyk, *Florence: The Duke’s Suburb*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

In the first decade of development, progress was slow. Although rows of houses were built in the west of the estate, only a third of the land between Leveson Street and Belgrave Road was initially sold as building plots. Much of the area proposed to be leased, remained unbuilt by 1883, with the whole of the north and east of the area undeveloped. Land in this area was accordingly let out by the estate as allotments to people in Longton.

The below map (figure 10) shows the modest progress of the Florence development by the 1883 Longton Extension and Improvement Bill. In the subsequent image (figure 11), Dresden is shown to be fully developed, while the land for the proposed park to be donated to the town by the duke of Sutherland is outlined.



Figure 10: Map of Florence, 1883.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ SRO, D593/H/3/163, Annotated map on proposed Longton Extension Bill, 1883.



Figure 11: Map of Dresden and surrounding area, 1883⁵⁰

From this inauspicious start, building in Florence gathered momentum, due in part to the increased priority it was afforded by the estate from the late 1870s when it was considered one of the principal projects on the North Staffordshire estate. The Florence Estate Office was opened on Trentham Road in 1878, and surveyor John Garrett was employed to oversee the development.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, Normacot, to the east of Florence, had slowly developed in a piecemeal fashion from the 1840s. However, from 1880 until 1914, development in this area

⁵⁰ SRO, D593/H/3/163, Annotated map on proposed Longton Extension Bill, 1883.

followed a systematic grid of streets of building plots, similar to those seen in Florence. This must be considered a separate phase from the earlier development of Normacot, and also coincides with the opening of the Florence estate office and the employment of Garrett.

In Normacot, terraced houses were built in successive streets running vertically between Chaplin Road and Belgrave Road. To the east of this area, a series of terraces were built on the north side of Meir Road by 1881, and occupied by skilled pottery workers, including a china decorator and pottery dipper.⁵¹ Thirty-two houses in Lennox Road, to the west of Normacot, were constructed to house the employees of the recently opened Florence Colliery. By 1891 many of these were occupied by miners and other pit workers.⁵² The below map (figure 12) shows the extent of the Normacot development by 1883.

As with the developments in Florence, land fronting principal roads forming the boundaries of the estate were reserved for more substantial houses, while terraced houses occupied the majority of the interior. The Normacot development must be considered a success inasmuch that the streets envisaged in the initial 1864 plan had largely been built by 1912, before house building was halted entirely in 1914, coinciding with the outbreak of war.

⁵¹ Taken from 1881 census.

⁵² Taken from 1891 census.



Figure 12: Map of Normacot, 1883.⁵³

AGENTS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENTS

On both the Bradford and Sutherland estates, agents played an important role in overseeing urban developments. However, while George Gybbon Potter was instrumental in the continued growth of Walsall, George Menzies' involvement in the development of the Longton suburbs was mostly delegated to the surveyor John Garrett. Although Menzies had more input than his predecessor,

⁵³ SRO, D593/H/3/163, Annotated map on proposed Longton Extension Bill, 1883.

George Fleming, even by 1880 urban development did not fall within the remit of the Sutherland agent's duties.

Agents and surveyors dealt with diverse types of urban developer. These included builders taking a large number of leases to erect entire streets, and also individuals seeking to build a single house for themselves. The building and development process encountered many problems, and, by its very nature, was filled with uncertainty. The 'scamping' of poor quality housing, and the bankruptcy of developers or builders, were common concerns. The manner in which these problems were addressed by the agents of each estate will be examined here.

On the Bradford estate, George Gybbon Potter was immersed in the continued development of Walsall. As agent for the Bradford estate, he encouraged the granting of building leases whenever possible. Yet he also oversaw development of the town as an individual businessman. Potter owned, in his own words, a 'number of houses' in the town, many on Bradford land, and sought to build more in the 1880s and 1890s.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Potter reflected on the success of recent building projects and in 1899 informed the fourth earl of Bradford that ground rents had increased by almost £700 in two years due to the new houses that had been erected.⁵⁴ Potter outlined ambitious plans for future developments, including new roads in the Chuckery district, and a 'good building estate at the Pleck'.⁵⁵ Upon Potter's sudden death in 1900, he was replaced as Walsall agent by his son Frederick William Potter, who oversaw the proposed Chuckery and Pleck developments envisaged by his father.

George Gybbon Potter was characteristically candid when explaining to Lord Bradford his methods for developing areas of the estate. He detailed how, when beginning development in an area, he encouraged individuals to take building plots at a low rate to spark interest before he began to lay roads. He found that 'if people see building going on they soon follow suit.' It was essential, he

⁵⁴ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/183, George Gybbon Potter to Lord Bradford, 7.7.1899.

⁵⁵ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/183, Potter to Lord Bradford, 7.7.1899.

believed, to ‘get a sheep through the gap’, safe in the knowledge that many would soon follow and take a building leases at a more advantageous rate to the estate.⁵⁶

As was his father and grandfather before him, Potter was astute in his development of the Bradford estate, and offered advice to the Weston agent Edward Griffith, on ascertaining the maximum value for building land. He insisted that land should be leased and sold by the square yard, rather than by plot or other variation, and stipulated how he would not allow ‘any shorter term than a 99 year lease at least’, as ground rents represented such good securities for landowners.⁵⁷

Potter recognised that the value of land ‘varied immensely according to position’, and a piece of land adjoining an important road could be let at twice the money of another plot only a few paces away.⁵⁸ This highlights the necessity of ensuring that important roads ran through Bradford land, something which was first keenly implemented by Peter Potter the elder in the late 1820s with the building of Bradford Street.

Once streets were laid and houses built on the Bradford estate, Potter strove to secure improvements to the neighbourhoods, and, wherever possible, to induce Walsall Corporation to pay for them. In November 1888 Potter requested that street lighting be erected on Reeds Wood Lane at the expense of the Corporation, as ‘the public use it much at night and there are many houses.’⁵⁹

The roads on the estate had been built, improved and repaired, at the ‘considerable’ expense of Lord Bradford and his lessees, rather than by the Corporation. As such, Potter was furious when Corporation workmen damaged the footpath in front of these houses by using the road ‘without contributing anything to the making of it’ and demanded compensation for the estate.⁶⁰

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEVELOPER

⁵⁶ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/183, George Gybbon Potter to Lord Bradford, 7.7.1899.

⁵⁷ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 351), George Gybbon Potter to Edward Griffith, 24.9.1889.

⁵⁸ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 351), George Gybbon Potter to Edward Griffith, 24.9.1889.

⁵⁹ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 182), George Gybbon Potter to J. R. Cooper, 7.11.1888.

⁶⁰ WLHC, 59/24 (letter 182), George Gybbon Potter to J. R. Cooper, 7.11.1888.

H.J. Dyos demonstrates that the scale of the operation of housing developers in Victorian London varied considerably. He contended that around one third of all house builders in London in the last quarter of the nineteenth century built only one or two houses in Dyos' sample years. While building firms existed, the majority could be considered to be small or only medium sized operations. Between 1840 and 1870 Dyos found about 80 percent of building firms built six houses or fewer a year, and that hardly any built more than 50.⁶¹

In the London housing boom of the late 1870s and 1880s, Dyos observed that the proportion of housing being built by larger firms rose, with 3% of the firms in London being responsible for building 40% of the total number of houses. However, the small and medium sized firms continued to make up the majority of those building houses, with 60% building fewer than six houses a year.⁶²

A smaller study of Walsall in the 1890s reveals similar trends.⁶³ Lord Bradford, through his agents, leased out land in the town to developers on 99 years building leases. These building leases, catalogued by the author as part of the Collaborative Doctoral Award, detail the names and occupation of the lessees, alongside the number of houses they agreed to erect on Bradford's land. Removing those developers whose leases detailed an indeterminate number of buildings, such as 'several houses', analysis was undertaken of some 74 individuals who built 728 houses on the Bradford estate in Walsall between 1893 and 1904.

As with Dyos' study of London, the majority of house builders were small scale developers. In the period studied, 38% of the individuals taking building leases from Lord Bradford built only one or two houses, a higher proportion than the third Dyos found in London. These small-scale developers built 6% of the houses on the Bradford estate in the period.

⁶¹ Dyos, *Speculative Builders*, p. 145.

⁶² Dyos, *Speculative Builders*, p. 145.

⁶³ Methodology: The following analysis is drawn from a database compiled by the author of the Walsall building leases held in the Bailey, Shaw and Gillett solicitors' papers of the earl of Bradford at Staffordshire Record Office, catalogued by the author as part of the CDA. The database includes building leases from the years 1893-1904, as these are the most complete sets in the collection. Five individuals were removed from the database as leases in their name detailed the building of houses in qualitative measures such as 'several houses'.

Medium scale developers, defined here as those building more than two, but less than ten houses, constituted 32% of house builders in the period, erecting 19% of the total houses built on the estate. Therefore, While Dyos' small and medium categories made up 60% of the developers in London, in this case study of Walsall their proportion is higher, with 70% of those studies building less than 10 houses.

Of the remaining, larger-scale developers, who built three-quarters of the houses on the estate, three individuals must be separated out, as they built on a significantly larger scale than the remainder. Enoch Evans, a solicitor, John Abel Crow, a builder and William Cox, a saddle manufacturer, built, between them 222 houses, 30% of the total built on the Bradford estate in the period examined.

Evans built a total of 69 houses in the south and west of the town in Weston Street, Scarborough Road and West Bromwich Road in 1899 and 1900.⁶⁴ John Abel Crow built 76 houses between 1898 and 1904 many in the Chuckery area, including Florence Street, Moncrieffe Street and Tong Street, as well as 16 houses in Dalkeith Street, in the Birchills area to the north of the town.⁶⁵ Finally, between 1899 and 1901 Cox was instrumental in the development of streets in the Chuckery area, building 55 houses in Moncrieffe Street, a further 20 houses in Kinnerley Street, and two in Lumley Road.⁶⁶

Whether these three individuals were part of building firms, as discussed by Dyos, is unclear from the leases. However, Crow's brother, Alfred Crow, also a builder, took a lease from Lord Bradford in 1904 to erect 8 houses in Moat Road. The same year, John Abel Crow took leases to build 10 houses in that road, suggesting the possibility of a joint venture.⁶⁷ Moreover, two of the leases John Abel Crow took were joint leases with Henry Tomlinson, a builder. Tomlinson himself took a

⁶⁴ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 184/2574, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 184/2597, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 226/3335/2

⁶⁵ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 80/1005/14, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 228/3359/8, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/3, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/4.

⁶⁶ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/1, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/5, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 80/1005/16.

⁶⁷ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 177/2469 [Alfred Crow], SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 177/2472 [John Abel Crow], D1287/BSG/Box 177/2474 [John Abel Crow].

further two leases on his own, to erect twelve houses in Florence Street and Tong Street.⁶⁸ These relationships warrant further study, as do the particulars of Evans and Cox's building arrangements, in order to further discern the nature and dynamics of house building in nineteenth century provincial towns.

Aside from these three anomalously prolific developers, the largest proportion of houses built, 45%, were erected by developers taking leases for between 10 and 50 houses. Many of these built a large number of houses in a single street. Amongst these Walter Checketts, a builder and stone mason, was a prominent developer in the Pleck area and in 1893 took a building lease for 9 houses in 'a new road out of Forrester Road' which was to be named Checketts Street. Later, in 1904 and 1905, Checketts took a further three building leases from Bradford to build 17 houses in Lumley Road.⁶⁹ In 1893, John Tibbets, a gas fitting worker, built 36 houses in Earl Street, specified on the lease as 'a new street.' The following year, Alfred Bebb, a tea merchant, built 26 houses in the adjoining Countess Street.⁷⁰

In order to ascertain the social class of those taking building leases from Lord Bradford, these lessees have been separated into broad occupational classes. Extensive analysis of the social structure of Walsall is not the objective of this thesis, and the following categories are necessarily broad and imperfect.⁷¹ While Trainor includes builders in his 'craftsman and service operator' category, they are deliberately taken separately here from other craftsmen, in order to highlight their significance in taking building leases directly.

The largest occupational group taking building leases from Lord Bradford were those from the broad category of manufacturers and craftsmen, with 30% of developers falling into this category.⁷²

⁶⁸ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 177/2478/10, SRO D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/9.

⁶⁹ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 192/3010/3, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 94/1195/3, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 177/2471, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 177/2473.

⁷⁰ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 192/3010/13 [Tibbets], SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 1/2/1-2 [Bebb].

⁷¹ The basis for these broad categories is informed loosely from Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, pp. 385-389.

⁷² The broadest category utilised here is that of manufacturer and craftsmen. These occupations have been included together, owing to the nature of the economy of Walsall, which was largely comprised of small scale workshops producing metal and leather goods. A categorisation of occupations as skilled or unskilled,

These men built 36% of the total number of houses erected. Builders represented the second largest group taking building leases, constituting 16% of lessees. These men built a disproportionately large 32% of the houses on the estate, demonstrating that builders tended to take leases to erect several properties simultaneously, often in the same street. Whether the houses erected by builders on the Bradford estate were custom built for specific tenants, or erected purely on the speculation of future demand for housing, is unclear from the leases. However, as is discussed below, all lessees were bound by strict covenants as to the quality of houses built on the estate, which acted as a deterrent to in scrupulous builders wishing to build poor standard houses quickly and cheaply.

Smaller, yet not insignificant, numbers of merchants and lower professionals also took building leases from Lord Bradford: 12% of those taking leases can be categorised as merchants and dealers, while 11% were lower professionals including solicitors and mining engineers. A sizable proportion of those taking leases were individuals employed in the sale of alcohol, including inn keepers and licenced victuallers, who constituted 9% of the total leaseholders.

The management classes of manufacturers represent a negligible proportion of those taking leases, representing only 4% of the total, while upper professionals are almost entirely absent. This analysis thus suggests that the availability of building leases offered by the Bradford estate in the 1890s were considered an attractive opportunity primarily for the upper rungs of the working classes in Walsall, those with skilled occupations in manufacturing. The majority of these took only one or two leases from Lord Bradford, in most cases to build a home for themselves. Evidently, the higher echelons of society did not consider the leases offered by Bradford attractive, although a handful did take leases to erect villa residencies on the peripheries of the town.

While the majority of those taking lease from Lord Bradford were men, a notable number of women also took leases from Lord Bradford. Of these, some were widows, presumably investing money left by their husbands, but many had employment of their own. In 1893, two spinsters,

or any deeper attempt to breakdown the manufacturing and crafts included into specialisations, would have added little to the nature of the analysis undertaken.

Laura Taylor and Clair Dainty, recorded as ‘co-partners as drapers’ took a joint lease to build two houses in Queen Street. A milliner, a grocer and a lithographer’s wife each took leases to erect small numbers of houses on the estate. Adeline Sheldon, a spinster, took a lease with her brother, Edward Sheldon, a saddle manufacturer, to erect 6 houses in Tong Street in 1903. However, Mary Lynex, was undoubtedly the most active female developer in the town. The wife of a builder Alfred Lynex, she is recorded as the sole leaseholder on land on which 30 houses and a shop were built between 1897 and 1904.⁷³

On the Sutherland estate, as on the Bradford estate, the majority of applicants to Garrett in the 1880s sought to erect only one or two houses. Large scale developers were in the minority, yet they made an important contribution to the growth of the estate. John Burrell, an architect and surveyor from Blyth Bridge, was one of the first developers on the Florence estate, taking several leases from the duke of Sutherland in 1865. Burrell took a mortgage of £1,000 from the Longton Mutual Permanent Benefit Society and laid-out ‘The Crescent’ on the west side of Trentham Road. He built two semi-detached villas named ‘Holly Villas’ on Trentham Road, and subleased the rest of the building plot to other developers.⁷⁴ These prestigious houses were occupied by professionals, including a political agent, the rector of Longton, a bank manager and the Medical Officer for Health for Longton.⁷⁵

In 1878, George Anson took a lease for seven large adjoining building lots in Normacot, and submitted an ‘immediate plan’ for their development.⁷⁶ Aston negotiated a lower price with Garrett and Menzies to take a large number of plots and begin building immediately.⁷⁷ However, by the 1890s, Anson’s ‘immediate plan’ had not been brought to fruition.

⁷³ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 177/2466, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 191/2681/3, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 192/3010/8, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 191/2681/2, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 177/2465.

⁷⁴ Dobraszczyc, *Florence: The Duke’s Suburb*, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Taken from 1871 census.

⁷⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Garrett to Menzies, 31.7.1878, SRO, D593/H/3/156, ‘Plan of property adjoining the town of Longton in the parish of Trentham belonging to the Duke of Sutherland, as laid out for building purposes’, SRO D593/K/3/9/64, Garrett to Menzies, 31.7.1878.

⁷⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Garrett to Menzies 31.7.1878.

Regardless of whether the developer sought to erect one house, or fifty houses, the role of the agent in the process remained integral. In Walsall, Potter conducted much of the negotiations of a lease with the potential lessee, while on the Sutherland estate, Garrett was integral throughout the development process from discussing the initial arrangements and negotiations with the potential lessee, through to confronting the numerous problems that could occur over the course of a development. On both estates, the agents were responsible for ensuring the developers erected houses to the specification, and the time frame, outlined in the building leases.

While the majority of applicants sought to erect terraced housing, applications were made on both the Bradford and Sutherland estates to erect more respectable houses and villas.⁷⁸ On the Bradford estate, certain plots were explicitly reserved for the building of villas. Gorway Road, the residence of generations of the Potter family since Gorway House had been built by the estate in 1828, continued to be one of the most desirable neighbourhoods for the town's elite. Those taking a lease from Lord Bradford to build a villa, were often individual developers building only one property for themselves.

In Florence, the Sutherland estate consciously developed a neighbourhood exclusively of villas. By 1880, plans were formulated to create a park on the duke's land to the south of Dresden. Accordingly, Garrett planned high class villas to be built, which would benefit from being situated with a view of the park.⁷⁹ To ensure houses on the Sutherland estate, rather than those erected by the Freehold Society in Dresden, benefited from the increased value and desirability, the estate reserved land for building plots between Dresden and the site of the proposed park. Park Road was laid, and the existing Cocknage Road was realigned.

Forty-five building plots were laid out on the north side of Park Road, on both sides of Cocknage Road and along Trentham Road. To make these plots more attractive to wealthy purchasers, these plots were offered for sale on 300 year building leases, instead of the 99 year leases offered in

⁷⁸ SRO, D593/H/3/86 'Property of Duke of Sutherland in Florence as laid out for villa residences', [1880]

⁷⁹ Dobraszczyc, *Queens Park, Longton*, p. 2.

Florence and Normacot.⁸⁰ The tree-lined roads were designed to be between 50 and 60 feet wide, compared to streets elsewhere in Florence, where streets were between 24 and 36 feet wide.⁸¹ However, the demand for these villas proved negligible, and only eight plots were sold by the estate by 1891. The initial occupants included professionals and pottery owners.⁸²

PROBLEM SOLVING IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: SCAMPING AND REGULATIONS

While urban development could be lucrative for aristocratic estates, the process regularly presented problems for the estates agents, who oversaw these developments in the towns. Prevalent issues were developers seeking to erect cheap and poor-quality housing on the estate, and the high rate of bankruptcy befalling developers and builders. Such problems were innate in the uncertain environment of urban development, and the agents had to formulate strategies to negotiate this unpredictable landscape.

In the initial stages of the development of Florence and Normacot, the Sutherland estate did not implement standard regulations for the housing to be built. Regulations for builders and developers leasing plots were settled in each individual case by the agent and the solicitors. Specifications and prohibited activities had to be specifically mentioned by the agents in the lease. This led to inconsistencies in the quality of the houses built, and left the estate open to the erection of poor quality housing, sometimes described as ‘scamping’ or ‘jerry building’.

Charles Shaw was one of many to chastise the builders of slums, condemning ‘the Hell Hole’ in Burslem as a ‘stupid creation of folly and greed’ where cheap houses were crowded into a narrow area ‘irrespective of the health, life or character of its denizens.’⁸³ Shaw, writing retrospectively about his childhood, is representative of the moralising trend which condemned slums, and, often, their inhabitants. The public fascination and revulsion of slums can be considered to have peaked in

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2, p. 17.

⁸² Taken from 1891 Census.

⁸³ Shaw, *When I was a Child*, [1903], (Sussex, 1977), p. 121.

the early 1880s, and is epitomised in the Reverend Andrew Mearn's pamphlet *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* of 1883.

The erection of housing cheaply and quickly, with substandard materials, is examined by Dyos, who suggests that 'speculative builders' were often blamed for the 'palpable mistakes' in the layout and growth of nineteenth century London. There exists a strong oral tradition that speculative builders created 'cobweb houses' that quickly became slums.⁸⁴

Dishonest builders, portrayed as the 'artful dodger of the suburbs' were believed to be prevalent, and rumoured to be engaged in cost and time saving practices such as the building of walls without footings, the mixing of mortar without cement, and the installation of water systems with a 'lethal acquaintance' with sewerage arrangements.⁸⁵ Yet Dyos found little substantial evidence to support such claims. Aside from a notable article in *The Builder* in 1889, in which a man describing himself as 'one of the wise men who builds houses for fools to live in' provided detailed descriptions of his methods, Dyos argues there is little mention of the 'jerry builder' in contemporary news. He suggests that the term was not common until the 1870s.⁸⁶ 'jerry building' is certainly not a term utilised by Potter on the Walsall estate, while a search of British newspapers between 1860 and 1890 returns an average of nine mentions per year, suggesting the phenomenon may be one extrapolated by historians.⁸⁷

Dyos argued that the proportion of the building trade that could be classed as scamping, or jerry building, was low. Similarly, William Baer suggested that the premeditated slighting of materials by the unscrupulous jerry builder was not common. He instead argues that poorly built houses were often the result of inexperienced workers, when skilled labour was in short supply, while the use of low cost materials was in proportion to the low incomes of those buying the houses being built.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Dyos, *Speculative Builders*, pp. 173-4.

⁸⁵ Dyos, *Speculative Builders*, p. 174.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁸⁷ A Search on the British Library's website for nineteenth-century newspapers returns 270 hits on 'jerry building' 1860-1890.

⁸⁸ W. Baer, 'Is Speculative Building Underappreciated in Urban History?', *Urban History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, (August 2007), p. 313.

Baer, like Dyos, defends the much maligned speculative builder, arguing that their developments were much better planned than they are given credit for.⁸⁹

Yet, in the initial stages of the Florence development, Menzies had cause to complain of being ‘scamped’ by an unscrupulous builder. The most notable example of this was the building of ‘Ladycott Terrace’, a block of 16 back-to-back houses with a shared privy, erected in Leveson Street in 1867. However, these were the only back-to-backs erected on the duke’s estate, suggesting that the agents’ and surveyors’ attempts to preserve the perceived ducal character were successful, as they were largely able to reject applications to build very cheap and unsuitable housing on this new estate.

The absence of building regulations occasionally saw important clauses or specifications inadvertently omitted from building leases. However, in most instances, Coopers solicitors informed Menzies if any of the ‘usual clauses’ including insuring the buildings, restrictions upon the use of the land for noxious trades or sale of alcohol, had been omitted.⁹⁰

From 1878, a printed set of building regulations was issued by the Florence Estate Office with each building lease. These specified the value of each house to be built on each plot, and gave the estate strict control over every aspect of the developments. Menzies explicitly stated in 1883 that these regulations had been introduced as a result of buildings being ‘scamped’.⁹¹

These regulations enforced standards on house building and sanitation. Developers were to submit a ‘detailed specification’ and plan of all buildings to be erected on each lease for inspection and approval by Menzies ‘before the commencement of any building whatsoever on this estate.’ The

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁹⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Coopers to Menzies, 15.8.1878, SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Menzies to Cooper, 31.8.1878.

⁹¹ Menzies to Special Committee on Longton Extension and Improvement Bill, 18.4.1883, Dobraszczyc Florence, pp. 16-7

estate reserved the right to repossess the land if the lessee failed to carry out the development in terms of the building lease.⁹²

All bedrooms and living rooms in houses built on the estate were to be a minimum of 12 feet by 9 feet, all outside walls were to be no less than 9 inches thick, and every second cottage built must have at least three bedrooms. Regulations ensuring the provision of satisfactory sanitation in any new houses had to be observed, and developers were provided with instructions on the construction of privy pumps and chamber plans.⁹³

Finally, the regulations expressly stipulated that no 'nuisance' or 'any kind of manufacture is to be carried on.' The premises were not to be used 'in any way whatsoever whereby the same may become a nuisance to the adjoining building or to the neighbourhood.' The opening of any public houses, or the selling of any form of alcohol on the estate, was explicitly prohibited. Although villas were considered distinct from more modest housing, they were regulated in a similar manner and the estate extended their building regulations to the more respectable houses erected.⁹⁴

On account of the standards enforced by the agents and surveyors on the new developments, the houses constructed in Florence and Normacot after 1878 were of relatively good standard. They each had their own separate privies and back yards as well as wash-houses and coal-houses, which were either attached to the main structure, or located immediately behind the yard.⁹⁵ It must be noted however that, although the Potteries towns are considered to have exhibited 'some of the worst features of housing' in industrial areas, they were among 'the more fortunate' towns in terms of housing standards.⁹⁶ Indeed, although Longton was regarded as having 'the largest amount of poor housing' in the Potteries, back-to-back housing remained uncommon.⁹⁷

⁹² SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/1, Building agreement between Edward Gybbon Potter acting for the Right Honourable Earl of Bradford and William Cox of Walsall, saddler, 28.8.1901.

⁹³ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/1, Building agreement between Edward Gybbon Potter acting for the Right Honourable Earl of Bradford and William Cox of Walsall, saddler, 28.8.1901.

⁹⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Garrett to Menzies, 30.1.1880.

⁹⁵ Dobraszczyc, *Florence: The Duke's Suburb*, p. 13.

⁹⁶ Cited in Fyson, 'Chartism In North Staffordshire', pp. 29-30, Jenkins, V *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 8, pp. 113-116.

⁹⁷ Fyson, *Chartism In North Staffordshire*, p. 29.

Similar printed regulations controlling urban developments had been in place on the Bradford estate from at least the 1850s, although these omitted the restrictions on alcohol and noxious trades.⁹⁸ By the end of the century, each building lease on the Bradford estate in Walsall was accompanied by a signed agreement, which specified the building specifications and the upkeep that was required on any houses erected. Failure to adhere to these conditions was deemed grounds for the estate to terminate the lease, and assume control of the land, and any properties erected thereon. The upholding of these conditions was to be controlled and inspected by the estate's agent. The building agreements specified the number of houses to be built, their value, and the time frame for completion.⁹⁹ The quality of the buildings was regulated, with the building contracts stipulating that 'the Materials of all sorts and kinds to be good and substantial; the Bricks in the fronts to be of the best kind; the Timbers to be of sufficient Strength and Stiffness; and all Buildings to be completed and finished in a substantial and workmanlike Manner... together with such proper and sufficient Common Sewers, Drains, Vaults, Flagging and Paving'. Ultimately, builders could not deviate from the plans and elevations which the estates surveyor had approved.¹⁰⁰

Once the houses were erected, the lessees were bound to maintain the properties regularly for the duration of the lease, and were to regularly 'Paint the Buildings... as well as the outside and in the inside thereof, and to do and perform all Repairs, and uphold and keep the Whole of the Premises continually in good Repair and Condition during the said term... to the like satisfaction of the said Surveyor'. The responsibility of ensuring the stipulations of the agreements were upheld, fell to the estate's agent 'to determine and direct'.¹⁰¹

The belated increase in awareness of the need for public health improvements, further impacted upon urban developments. The 1875 Public Health Act imposed regulations on the minimum width

⁹⁸ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 192/3009/1 is an early example from the 1850.

⁹⁹ For example, see SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/1, Building lease between Lord Bradford and William Cox, 28.8.1901, 'The lessee shall erect and build... fifty five houses at a cost of no less than £130 per house twenty of such houses to be completed within the space of one year from the date hereof'.

¹⁰⁰ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/1, Building lease between Lord Bradford and William Cox, 28.8.1901.

¹⁰¹ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/1, Building lease between Lord Bradford and William Cox, 28.8.1901.

of new streets being built, which induced Potter to consider that any land purchased must be wide enough to allow the building of streets ‘of a statutable width’.¹⁰²

An estate’s attitude towards urban development of its land could be either an enthusiastic drive for profits, or a more nuanced balancing of rental yield, and the maintenance of a sense of duty and prestige. It was the agent’s duty to implement the landowner’s ideology into the urban developments, ensuring that the streets and houses erected were befitting of the reputation of the aristocrat.

BANKRUPTCY AND FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

House building could prove lucrative for developers. Yet agents on both the Bradford and Sutherland estates encountered numerous instances of developers experiencing financial difficulties, which historians have demonstrated to be characteristic of the developing urban landscape. Baer identifies bankruptcy as a threat for housebuilders transcending historical time and place, while Dyos found the rate of bankruptcy to be high in his study of Camberwell, south London.¹⁰³

Menzies’ correspondence with Coopers solicitors indicate that several of the Florence estate lessees found themselves unable to continue with the development. Indeed, in October 1878, Coopers sent Menzies a list of 22 defaulters. In these cases, all documents were ready for completion, but the individuals had not yet taken up the leases as they had not as yet secured sufficient capital.¹⁰⁴

When Herbert Povey of Longton was declared bankrupt in August 1878, Cooper indicated that the lease would now revert back to the duke of Sutherland. The estate was entitled to seize Povey’s property to recover the value of up to one year’s rent if owed.¹⁰⁵ While urban development was

¹⁰²SRO, D1287/18/32 K/161, Peter Potter to Lord Bradford, 8.6.1878.

¹⁰³ Baer, *Speculative Building*, p. 302.

¹⁰⁴SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Cooper and Menzies, 24.10.1878.

¹⁰⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64, Coopers to Menzies, 7.8.1878.

undoubtedly lucrative, it presented considerable problems, both for estates, and for individuals and firms taking building leases.

The nature of Walsall's building economy meant that the financial difficulties of a developer or builder, could have ramifications for several building projects. There were a limited number of builders and firms in the town, which meant that many developments were reliant on the flow of capital from another project. A trade directory for 1880 lists only 18 individual builders and firms in Walsall.¹⁰⁶

Independently from his role as Bradford's agent, George Gybbon Potter personally invested considerable capital in house building in Walsall. Dyos shows that solicitors funding urban development through loans to speculative builders was common in Victorian London.¹⁰⁷ Potter's involvement indicates that the same was true of Walsall. Moreover, at least six solicitors took leases from Lord Bradford between 1893 and 1904. Enoch Evans, as discussed above, was the most prominent of these. William Thompson, a solicitor from Dudley, took a lease to build an unspecified number of houses in Pleck Road, Walsall, in 1898.¹⁰⁸ Potter encouraged clients, notably widows, to invest their money in house building on the Bradford estate.

Funding urban development carried financial risk for investors as Potter's business dealing with Henry Knight, a Walsall builder, demonstrates. Agents could become embroiled in developers' financial difficulties. Knight had been Potter's tenant, and the solicitor invested his own capital in advances on mortgages to fund house building by Knight. Furthermore Potter, through his role as solicitor, advised clients to invest in Knight's buildings. By April 1886, Knight had built six houses in Farringdon Street which had been mortgaged for £550 by Miss Pratt of Wolverhampton. Potter informed Pratt that Knight was about to build five more houses in the same street, 'a little better

¹⁰⁶ *Kelly's Trade Directory of Staffordshire*, [1880]

¹⁰⁷ Dyos, *Speculative Builders*, p. 169.

¹⁰⁸ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 184/2574, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 184/2597, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 226/3335/2, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 228/3359/6.

than the other six... [and] a little enlarged'. He encouraged her to lend the builder a further £500, assuring her that this would be a sound investment, as the other houses were all well let.¹⁰⁹

When Knight experienced financial problems, Potter invested more of his money in the builder, stating that he 'thoroughly trusted' Knight. Potter also endorsed bills from his clients with Knight expressly as he 'wanted to keep him on his legs' as the builder was useful to Potter in 'many ways.'¹¹⁰ By June 1886 Knight owed money to Potter, and to the contractor Henry Boys, money that he evidently had no intention of repaying. Upon realising Knight would not honour his debts, Potter admitted that he had misjudged him, as the builder did not 'appear to be the man he has turned out to be.'¹¹¹ Whilst losing his own investments, Potter had to repay the money lost to investors for whom he had endorsed cheques, as he was determined to protect his own professional reputation in the town.¹¹²

The dispute intensified as Knight had informed Boys that Potter had agreed to a guarantee of £200 in the case of Knight failing to complete the building work. Potter vehemently denied offering such a guarantee.¹¹³ Potter was keen that his and Boys' personal business deals with Knight should not become embroiled with 'Lord Bradford's agency matters' which Potter stressed to Boys had nothing to do with Knight's account.¹¹⁴ Boys undertook numerous developments for the Bradford estate, as well as for Potter, demonstrating the balancing-act Potter played between his responsibilities as Lord Bradford's agent, and his own personal business dealings. These were complicated by the involvement of the same builders and contractors in both of these spheres of responsibility.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ WLHC, 59/23 (Letter 183), George Gybbon Potter to Miss Pratt, 2.4.1886.

¹¹⁰ WLHC, 59/23 (Letter 242), George Gybbon Potter to F. Parkes, 4.10.1886.

¹¹¹ WLHC, 59/23 (Letter 250), George Gybbon Potter to Henry Boys, 29.10.1886.

¹¹² WLHC, 59/23 (Letter 242), George Gybbon Potter to F. Parkes, 4.10.1886.

¹¹³ WLHC, 59/23 (Letter 250), George Gybbon Potter to Henry Boys, 29.10.1886.

¹¹⁴ WLHC, 59/23 (Letter 211), George Gybbon Potter to Henry Boys, 10.6.1886.

¹¹⁵ See BSG leases for evidence of this.

For example, Potter wrote to Boys in his role as Bradford's solicitor, on behalf of himself and his brother, imploring that Boys 'fulfil your covenant to build upon the Wolverhampton Road' and pay appropriate royalties to Lord Bradford. (WLHC, 59/23 (Letter 211), George Gybbon Potter to Henry Boys, 10.6.1886.)

To clear his debt, Knight was instructed by Boys to build houses that the latter had been contracted to erect on Lord Bradford's land.¹¹⁶ Boys subsequently struggled to secure lessees for the houses he had already erected, reducing the royalties paid to Lord Bradford for the land, and inducing delays to building further houses he had been contracted to erect on Bradford's estate. Thus, the limited numbers of builders and contractors in the town meant that separate building projects became interlinked. Financial uncertainty, or individual unscrupulousness, impacted upon numerous development projects. Such was the complex and tangled web of 'speculative' development in nineteenth century provincial towns.

The two estates had contrasting approaches towards industry on the estates. Leases granted by the Bradford estate in Walsall regularly contained applications for warehouses, manufactories or workshops. Agents have permission for these premises to be built, even if the application was in the midst of residential housing. This was never the case on the Sutherland housing development, which witnessed a clear distinction between the residential and the industrial. While in the 1860s the Sutherland estate was hostile to industrial premises on the estate, the opening of the Florence colliery, to the south east of the housing development, represents a notable departure from this. By the early 1880s, this enterprise was considered to be of increasing importance for the estate.

Menzies met weekly with the colliery manager, Charles Bromley.

Garrett devised a plan for a 'Colliers Village' of 48 terraced houses near to the colliery. While this never came to fruition, the estate built 32 houses in Lennox Road in Normacot, which were intended to be occupied by those working at the colliery.¹¹⁷ Menzies impressed upon the duke the growing importance of the colliery. He justified paying an inflated price to secure a house for Bromley near the colliery, which Menzies considered 'a most desirable result' as Bromley's 'daily presence... [was] becoming more and more needful.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶WLHC, 59/23 (Letter 211), George Gybbon Potter to Henry Boys, 10.6.1886.

¹¹⁷ Dobraszczyk, *Florence: The Duke's Suburb*, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64 [separate file], Menzies to Duke of Sutherland, 16.2.1878.

In urban and suburban development it was the agent, to a considerable degree, who shaped the character and nature of urban developments. Although a central policy upon the desired character of the estate was imposed from above, it was to the local agent that the specifications of individual houses came for approval. Agents could determine which class of houses were most appropriate, and likely to be profitable in certain areas of an estate. Menzies, along with Garrett, devised the specification for the building regulations, which detailed the character of activities undertaken on the estate, and the types of houses that must be erected thereon.

4.5 AGENTS AND TENANTS

On both the Bradford and Sutherland estates in the 1880s, the relationships between agents and tenants were notably different than in previous decades. In North Staffordshire, Menzies managed tenants with an increasingly firm hand, while on the Bradford estate Potter delegated much of his responsibilities with tenants to subordinates.

The duke of Sutherland afforded his agent considerable autonomy. Menzies removed tenants, chose replacements, and dictated terms of tenancy, without seeking approval of other estate officials.¹¹⁹ Misbehaviour was not accepted, and examples were made of tenants transgressing from the estate's moral code. Although not lacking compassion, Menzies was notably less sympathetic towards tenants than his predecessors. Conversely, Potter had limited involvement with rural tenants, and, due to other business commitments, had little engagement with the Walsall tenantry. Instead, his son, Frederick William Potter, took on some of the duties previously fulfilled by the Walsall agent.

Britain, along with much of Europe and the United States, suffered an economic depression in the 1870s which some economic historians suggest continued in Britain well into the 1890s.¹²⁰ As well as affecting businesses, this depression had a devastating impact on agriculture, and ended the 'golden age' of agriculture. Grain prices collapsed in the face of cheaper imports from America, while stock and dairy produce also suffered from foreign competition.¹²¹

This depression impacted considerably upon agricultural tenants in Staffordshire, many of whom were unable to pay their rent. Tenants lamented that for several years they had 'struggl[ed] on hoping for better times but each succeeding year is getting worse.'¹²² Tenants could see 'no

¹¹⁹ See the case of Ogle. Menzies informed the duke of his selection of the new tenant and informed him of the concessions and terms agreed upon, SRO, D593/K/3/9/64 [separate file], Menzies to Duke of Sutherland, 13.4.1878.

¹²⁰ Capie and Wood, *Great Depression of 1873-1896*, pp. 148-9.

¹²¹ F. Thompson, 'The Second Agricultural Revolution, 1815-80', *Economic History Review*, vol. 21, (1968), pp. 62-77.

¹²² SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Birks to Menzies, 14.2.1880.

prospect of any improvement' as every kind of farm produce was fetching a lower price leading farmers to 'tak[e] the bread out of each other's mouths'.¹²³

Sir Frederick Pollard observed in 1883 that agricultural tenants and landlords had a close personal relationship, not replicated in the urban setting. This relationship continued due to mutual responsibilities and customs, amongst which was the reduction of rent in bad agricultural years.¹²⁴ While under no legal obligation to reduce rents, it was common practice for reductions of 15 or 20 percent to be made to leave the tenant 'answerable only for so much as the farm seems fairly capable of paying'. In return, the landlord expected deference and compliance from his tenantry in a variety of matters.¹²⁵

In February 1881, Edward Griffith, agent for the Weston estate, impressed upon Lord Bradford the need to reduce the rent of struggling tenants. While he believed that asking tenants to describe their financial difficulties would 'invite colourable statements' he advocated that Bradford reduce the rent for those tenants paying 'higher than a considerate landlord would desire'.¹²⁶ As urban tenants were not considered to be as severely impacted by the economic depression as the rural tenants, accordingly George Gybbon Potter did not advocate a reduction in their rents.

On the Sutherland estate, Menzies was less sympathetic toward tenants in arrears than Griffith, and did not advocate a reduction. In March 1878, Menzies threatened a tenant named Ogle, with eviction unless he paid his outstanding arrears, as well as for the following six month period in the next week.¹²⁷

Menzies confided to the duke that if Ogle was compelled to give up the farm 'at once' it would re-let again quickly. This demonstrates that, despite suggestions of paternalism and loyalty to tenants,

¹²³ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Birks to Menzies, 14.2.1880.

¹²⁴ F. Pollock, 'The Land Laws', Document 228 in H. Hanham (Ed.), *The Nineteenth Century Constitution: Documents and Commentary*, (Cambridge, 1969), p. 289.

¹²⁵ F. Pollock, 'The Land Laws', Document 228 in Hanham, *The Nineteenth Century Constitution*, p. 289. The 'various matters' where compliance was expected included shooting rights, free passage to the hunt and political support.

¹²⁶ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/172, Griffith to Bradford, 14.2.1881.

¹²⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64 [separate file], Menzies to Duke of Sutherland, 22.3.1878.

the fundamental factor in estate management was economic. When there was a dearth of prospective tenants, those in arrears were often allowed to remain, while the estate attempted to secure as much of the outstanding debt as possible. Ogle owed half a year's rent which, when compared with other tenants on the estate in the 1830s and 1860s, was not unusual. For Menzies, the opportunity of replacing the tenant took precedence over allowing Ogle to get out of debt. The tenant ultimately succeeded in paying the money he owed, yet was still removed.¹²⁸

Menzies received numerous requests for aid from struggling tenants in the early 1880s. His responses, although often sympathetic, did not provide practical assistance. In 1880 Thomas Birks lamented that successive bad years had left him struggling to feed his family and pay his rent to the estate. He appealed to Menzies to secure assistance from the duke.¹²⁹

While Menzies sympathised with Birks' struggles, he stated that he could not help, as the duke was currently on holiday.¹³⁰ He instead offered Birks the comfort that there was 'every reason to believe that we are now at the bottom of the wave of depression' and that he expected to see 'some improvement very speedily, and I trust it will come in time to save us yet.'¹³¹ Thus, while pecuniary assistance was secured by Lord Bradford's agent in the form of rent reductions, the Sutherland agent could provide little more for their tenants than optimistic assurances of better times.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MISBEHAVIOUR OF TENANTRY

On rare occasions, disputes with tenants, or former tenants, with grievances over their treatment by the estate, could escalate to provoke threats or even actual violence. The management of these tenants was often dictated by the personalities of the respective agents, more than the directions of the landowner. Menzies management of Charles Snape in 1880, and Potter's conduct in the protracted dealings with Henry Bloxham throughout the 1880s, indicate that despite the economic

¹²⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64 [separate file], Menzies to Duke of Sutherland, 11.4.1878.

¹²⁹ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Birks to Menzies, 14.2.1880.

¹³⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Menzies to Birks, 18.2.1880.

¹³¹ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Menzies to Birks, 18.2.1880.

and social policies directed by landowners, individual agents in the towns were integral to estate management.

Charles Snape, a Trentham tenant, was given notice to quit his cottage in March 1880. In revenge, he took to ‘destroying the place’ by cutting down trees and branches ‘simply for the sake of destroying trees.’ Menzies, outraged at this act of ‘wanton mischief’, demanded that Coopers pursued Snape for any ‘direct or indirect’ punishment possible, both to punish him, and ‘as a warning to others.’¹³²

Menzies admitted that the trees Snape damaged were ‘of no great value’. His motivation in taking legal action was calculated to show all tenants that such dissent would be met in the harshest manner. Snape was found to be in arrears of £1.10s which Menzies instructed Coopers take legal action to recover.¹³³

The case of ‘Duke of Sutherland v Snape - rent’ was heard at Longton Court House and Menzies provided account books to prove the debt.¹³⁴ Snape, who had also had his employment terminated by the estate, failed to pay the fine issued by the magistrates, and faced a prison term. Menzies pragmatically told Coopers that it would be ‘worse than useless’ to have taken the matter to court and then to ‘let the conviction go for nothing’, and instructed them to ‘let the law take its course’. He prophesied, incorrectly, that Snape would pay rather than go to jail.¹³⁵

Menzies’ persistence in pursuing Snape led to a jail sentence in respect of the ‘wanton mischief’ and the need to secure a debt of £1.10s. The agent took a firm stance against misbehaviour and determined to send a clear ‘warning to others’ about the consequences of indiscipline.¹³⁶ Menzies did not refer to the duke of Sutherland, or to superior officials in this matter, taking full authority

¹³² SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Menzies to Coopers Solicitors, 16.3.1880.

¹³³ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Menzies to Cooper, 6.4.1880.

¹³⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Coopers Solicitors to Menzies, 23.4.1880.

¹³⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Menzies to Cooper, 28.5.1880.

¹³⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/9/66, Menzies to Coopers Solicitors, 16.3.1880.

himself. This belligerent attitude contrasts sharply with that of previous agents who had been careful to appear compassionate, and were reluctant to remove tenants except as a last resort.

On the Bradford estate, Potter demonstrated compassion towards a disgraced tenant, yet his actions were characterised by a professional pragmatism. Since his eviction from the estate, Henry Bloxham accused Bradford of ‘cruel persecution’ and demanded compensation.¹³⁷

Bloxham became increasingly hostile and made repeated threats on Lord Bradford’s life. Griffith believed that Bradford, his family and ‘anyone connected with the estate’, were not safe while Bloxham was at liberty as there was ‘no knowing what the man may do... or when he may do it’.

¹³⁸ Indeed, upon being told that no amount of intimidation would be effective in eliciting compensation from the estate, Bloxham replied, ‘no, nothing will intimidate you lot but powder and shot.’¹³⁹ He claimed his associates were ‘waiting to see Lord Newport in West Bromwich and the decree is passed that he is to be shot.’¹⁴⁰

Suitably concerned, Potter, on behalf of Walsall solicitors firm Marlow and Potter, advised that it would be ‘desirable’ if Bloxham could be ‘put somewhere where he could be looked after’ but warned that ‘any attempt to do so which might be traced or attributed to His Lordship or His Lordship’s agents would be very undesirable’.¹⁴¹ Bloxham was duly briefly imprisoned.

In December 1888, Bloxham’s wife made renewed pleas for assistance. Mrs Bloxham had regularly appealed to Bradford claiming to be ‘destitute’ with ‘nothing to depend on’. A handwritten note from Bradford on the envelope of one such request notes that these were ‘declined’.¹⁴² However, Potter revealed himself to be more compassionate, and more pragmatic, when the matter was referred to him by Griffith.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/178/2, Bloxham to Bradford, 25.11.1886.

¹³⁸ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/173/2, Griffith to Bradford, 12.9.1882.

¹³⁹ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/173/3, Notes from James Thomas, clerk at Weston Estate Office, sent to Lord Bradford, 12.9.1882.

¹⁴⁰ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/178/4, Memo written by James Thomas, clerk at Weston Estate Office, 29.11.1888.

¹⁴¹ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/173/6, Marlow, Potter and Martens Solicitors to Griffith, 16.9.1882.

¹⁴² SRO, D1287/18/32 K/173/1, Joseph Standish to Lord Bradford, 16.6.1882.

¹⁴³ WLHC, 59/24 (Letter 202), George Gybbon Potter to Mrs Bloxham, 11.12.1888.

Potter surmised that the possible solutions for the estate were ‘either to get him imprisoned for using threats or to soften him by some concession.’¹⁴⁴ He advocated that a small weekly allowance be afforded to Mrs Bloxham, who might then control his recklessness. As the allowance was to be paid to Bloxham’s wife, ‘the appearance of blackmail would be avoided.’ Potter appreciated that Bloxham’s ‘mad recklessness’ could not be ‘controlled through fear’, yet insisted that the Bradford estate must not be seen to be susceptible to blackmail.¹⁴⁵ Potter promised to help the family, and in May 1889 attempted to secure employment for Bloxham. He characterised him as ‘honest and reliable’ to a prospective employer in Cannock, a statement at odds with his previous assessment of Bloxham as a ‘madman’ who had committed ‘scandalous conduct’.¹⁴⁶

Potter perhaps felt Bloxham had been harshly treated by Bradford. He certainly advised him to make a definite appeal of specific grievances, rather than sweeping demands for compensation. Securing employment for a troublesome former tenant was calculated to pacify him before his protestations caused any more damage to the reputation of the estate.

These instances highlight the importance of individual agents in estates’ management of their tenants. The authority invested in Menzies and Potter allowed them to act as they saw fit in managing tenants, without deferring to their employers. Landowners often had ‘complete confidence’ in their agents and delegated many of their powers to these men. The personalities of the individual agents thus had considerable ramifications for the tenantry.¹⁴⁷ The centralised social and economic policies of the landowners form only part of the narrative of the management of aristocratic estates. How the local agent interpreted or manipulated these policies on the ground

¹⁴⁴ WLHC, 59/24 (Letter 201), George Gybbon Potter to Edward Griffith, 11.12.1888.

¹⁴⁵ WLHC, 59/24 (Letter 205), George Gybbon Potter to Edward Griffith, 13.12.1888.

¹⁴⁶ WLHC, 59/24 (Letter 276), George Gybbon Potter to Henry Hart, 14.5.1889, WLHC, 59/24 (Letter 201), George Gybbon Potter to Griffith, 11.12.1888, WLHC, 59/24 (Letter 243), George Gybbon Potter to Griffith, 8.2.1889.

¹⁴⁷ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, pp. 153.

was of more significance for the development of towns, and on the lives of the tenants living on the estate.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Perhaps the most notorious example of this phenomenon concerning the Sutherland estate is that of Patrick Sellar, the Sutherland family factor accused of some of the worse instances of removing tenants from their homes during the Highland Clearances.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Cannadine suggests that the 1870s and 1880s witnessed periods of sporadic hostility towards the aristocracy. These punctuated the calm and mutual respect of the mid-century, and came before the period of social prestige and ceremonial importance of the late Victorian and Edwardian epochs. This interpretation is epitomised by Henry Bloxham's proclamation to Bradford's agents that, 'the days of Landlordism are gone' and continuing that 'they have done with them in Ireland and we are going to commence in England now.'¹⁴⁹ He commented on the 'socialistic wave' that was rising in the country, adding that 'no one man has done more to give that wave its Tidal flow' than Lord Bradford.¹⁵⁰

Bloxham's ire was aimed exclusively at the aristocrat and his conduct, whereas the actions of Potter as his agent were praised. Bloxham talked of Potter as a 'reasonable man' for whom he had 'the highest respect'. Indeed, Bloxham asked that Bradford give Potter 'absolute power to confer with me and so bring this matter to a final end.'¹⁵¹

This is a reversal of earlier perceptions when Bradford's agents were admonished for not allowing the benevolent Lord Bradford to hear their appeals, which they were convinced the aristocrat would be sympathetic to.¹⁵² By the late 1880s, some tenants recognised that the actual, rather than ceremonial, importance of aristocrats was negligible, while the role of professional agents gained increased respect. In practice, the efficiency and diligence of agents, and other professional members of the Potter family, had long rendered Bradford's input unnecessary on the Walsall estate.

George Gybbon Potter was notably less involved, competent and committed to estate management than his predecessors, Peter Potter the elder and younger. He distanced himself from the tenantry to

¹⁴⁹ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/178/4, Memo by James Thomas, clerk at Weston Estate Office, 29.11.1888.

¹⁵⁰ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/178/5, Bloxham to Lord Bradford, 16.8.1890. This was, according to Bloxham, by Bradford 'ruining a honest working man, confiscating his property, and finally turning his wife and children beggars upon the road.'

¹⁵¹ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/178/5, Bloxham to Lord Bradford, 16.8.1890.

¹⁵² This is best seen in Benjamin Johnson's complaints of the younger Peter Potter's 'brutal and cruel treatment' in 1852, which he could not believe Lord Bradford would condone. (SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/137/3, Johnson to Potter, 20.11.1852.)

a far greater degree than they did. Although both the previous Walsall agents had employed subordinates to assist them with managing the estate, they still had a considerable level of contact with the tenantry, and neither deferred responsibility to the extent that George Gybbon Potter did.

This reduced involvement in estate matters on the part of George Gybbon Potter is likely to be as a result of his separate involvement in several other business commitments in Walsall. Peter Potter the elder and younger each had numerous separate business ventures whilst they served as agent, that did not deter from their commitments to Bradford estate to the same degree.

However, the final decades of the nineteenth century were important in the urban development of Walsall, and Potter played a significant role in this, both through his professional connection with the Bradford estate, and his personal business and property portfolio. Potter was enthusiastic about urban development and was ambitious in his plans for building projects on the Bradford estate. He made a significant contribution to the urban landscape of Walsall and his plans were continued by his son who assumed the Walsall agency after his father's sudden death in 1900.

The third earl of Bradford was supportive of the continued development of his urban estate. Indeed, on occasions, the aristocrat was keener to begin building projects than was his agent, who had to highlight the economic impracticalities of this in the late 1870s. This enthusiasm for further urban development towards the end of the nineteenth century is in contrast with the duke of Sutherland's decision to sell much of the Florence estate in 1893, ending the estate's brief and tentative forays into urbanisation.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, George Menzies had managed the North Staffordshire estate with minimal intervention from superior estate officials. His role, notably more so than that of his predecessors, was more akin to the autonomy that Potters enjoyed in the management of the Bradford estate. He acted, in many respects, as the permanent representative of the landowner on his estates.¹⁵³ Menzies' decisions and priorities had considerable impact upon the lives of the Sutherland tenants in North Staffordshire. In the daily management of the estate, it was Menzies,

¹⁵³ F. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1963), p. 152.

rather than the duke of Sutherland or his officials in London, who the tenantry considered the most relevant source of authority, and who controlled the development of the suburbs of Florence and Normacot.

The position of authority in all aspects of estate management afforded to Peter Potter the elder in Walsall in the 1830s, was thus replicated on the Sutherland estate with George Menzies by the end of the century. Conversely, on the Bradford estate, while George Gybbon Potter maintained a considerable involvement in the urban development of the Walsall estate commenced in the 1830s, by the end of the century the position of chief agent, as earlier undertaken by Peter Potter the elder, was no longer considered viable for one man. The role and duties of agents on aristocratic estates did not follow linear trajectories, and the involvement of agents in the management of the estates varied due to the personalities of individual agents, and their relationships with their landowners. As will be demonstrated in the subsequent thematic chapters, alongside their role in the physical growth of towns, agents on aristocratic estates impacted significantly upon the social development of towns throughout the nineteenth century.

5.0 RECREATION ON ARISTOCRATIC ESTATES 1830-1900

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the chronological approach of the preceding chapters, this chapter adopts a thematic approach by examining the role and policies of landowners in the provision of recreation on their urban estates throughout the nineteenth century. It examines the character and variety of recreation in the Potteries and the Black Country throughout the nineteenth century, before focussing specifically on the towns of Longton and Walsall. The role aristocratic landowners played in the provision and utilisation of sport on their urban estates will be examined, and the decisive impact of their agents in the social development of towns will be highlighted.

The manner in which people spent their spare time, and the facilities that were available or prohibited for these purposes can be considered an essential component in the social development of towns. As Joseph Strutt wrote in 1801, ‘in order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the sports and pastimes... prevalent amongst them’.¹ So too, if we are to assess the impact local landowners had on the development of towns, their attitudes towards, and provision of space and facilities for, recreation must be analysed.

As the owners of large areas of land in developing towns, the attitudes and policies of the local aristocracy are integral to the provision of leisure space and facilities in towns. Where local corporations often had little open space to offer for the leisure of its citizens, the willingness or reluctance of landowners to allow their land to be utilised for recreation was significant. The policies of the landowners were carried out in practice by their agents, rendering the role of the agent in the provision of spaces for leisure one of considerable importance.

This examination will focus on several areas of ‘recreation’ as it was understood throughout the nineteenth century. These include ‘traditional’ recreations, sometimes classed as ‘plebeian’ or

¹ Strutt cited in Cunningham, *Leisure and Culture*, p. 337.

‘sports of the common people’ by landowners, the prevalent occurrences of ‘recreation at work’ and the culture of public houses and alcohol will be discussed in some detail. Indeed, as much of working-class leisure was either centred on the public house, or was explicitly opposed to that culture, attitudes towards pubs and alcohol will be considered in some detail here. These traditional categories of recreation were often considered disapprovingly by those in authority. A struggle towards encouraging ‘rational recreation’ amongst the masses emerged. This included public parks and arboretums, as well as organised sports and can be witnessed on both the Bradford and Sutherland estates.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of secondary literature concerning recreation, before compiling a short summary of the culture of leisure in the districts of the Potteries and the Black Country. This provides context for the examination of the attitudes of the Sutherland and Bradford estates, towards popular recreation, and the instrumental role of their agents in implementing the estates’ social policies.

5.2 SECONDARY LITERATURE

It is necessary to consider the terms 'leisure' and 'recreation'. Hugh Cunningham is amongst the most prominent historians to examine eighteenth century leisure cultures and the availability of time for pursuit of these. He defines the parameters for leisure as 'the time which is left over after work and other obligations have been completed'. Several problems and qualifications are appended to this definition, including occurrences of 'recreation at work' and what should be included in 'other obligations'. If leisure is time in which people could choose what they did, household and family commitments combined with other societal 'obligations' meant that some groups, most notably working-class women, may have had no leisure time at all.² Evidently a clear division between 'work' and 'leisure' is not possible in many cases.

The purpose of 'recreation' has been suggested as the necessity to 're-create' a person for life after work. As such, theoretically, recreation was only necessary for those that worked, again excluding many sections of society. Such a narrow view of the benefits of recreation was not universally shared and recreation was justified for its own sake, and for the social and physical benefits it could provide.³

The importance of leisure to the individual is subject to debate. Cunningham argues that historians have underappreciated the importance of leisure, suggesting that people increasingly found their identities, both collectively and individually through leisure, rather than through conventional identifiers such as religion. Cunningham argues that a demand for more leisure time can be seen consistently throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such was the importance of free time that there came a point at which people would sacrifice higher wages in favour of shorter hours.⁴

However, his supporting evidence relies on highly individual examples and speculation. Much of his research contradicts this, and demonstrates that economic necessity dictated that higher wages

² Cunningham, *Leisure and Culture*, p. 279.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 338-9.

were the fundamental concern of the majority of workers. Increased leisure time was a considerably lesser priority. While Cunningham overstates his case, by the end of the nineteenth century most adults did have some degree of time off per week when they were not formally at work. Although the pursuit of leisure was personal, individuals' choice of activities was constrained by material circumstances and the availability of facilities.⁵

This thesis focuses on urban leisure culture. This can be divided into activities participants pay for in a role as spectator or audience and activities where the participants were the prime agent in generating leisure activities. In the latter category, the pub was the most significant institution. Aside from the consumption of alcohol, many clubs and teams were organised, or linked, to a local pub. Alongside team sports, these included less obvious activities such as brass bands, choirs, flower shows and pigeon fancying events. With many of these activities, adult males were the main participants.⁶

Several historians have identified a change in working class recreation and the decline in 'traditional' and sometimes violent popular recreations common in the earlier nineteenth century such as bull baiting or cock throwing. Towards the end of the century, an increase in the commercialisation of recreation was witnessed, and a 'mass culture' emerged, with music halls and professional sport becoming popular and profitable.

James Walvin accounted for this change by emphasising urbanisation as the catalyst. He highlights the lack of space in urban areas combined with the decline of traditional events such as communal street football and the repression of 'cruel sports'.⁷ The increase in people working in factories, and the need for discipline that this brought is considered influential in the decline of violent sports. This is an argument Peter Bailey concurs with and that Emma Griffin resurrected in 2005 to argue

⁵ Cunningham, *Leisure and Culture*, p. 289.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁷ R. Morris, [Book Review], *Urban History*, Vol. 7, (May 1980), p. 131.

that the lack of factories in the 'West Midlands' was responsible for the persistence of blood sports in that region, in compassion to Yorkshire and Lancashire.⁸

However, Robert Morris challenges this, highlighting that by 1830, when many of these changes to leisure were underway, factory work was only common in sections of the textile industry. Indeed, even by 1851, the factory labour force was a minority in most urban populations, negating the factory as an explanation of changes in leisure use. Morris contends that urbanisation did have a major role in the changes in leisure, but as the process provided the mass population which became targeted by the commercialisation of leisure. Urbanisation further explains the great variety of leisure activities that emerged.⁹

The development of parks in urban areas has received attention from historians including Hazel Conway and George Chadwick, providing context for the analysis of the opening of parks on aristocratic estates. Public parks developed an important place in Victorian towns and cities towards the end of the nineteenth century. They became recognised as healthy places in cities increasingly blighted by smoke and pollution. They were the 'lungs of the town', and a place to escape from the factory and the street.¹⁰ They were also seen as a preservation of small areas of towns from the constant urban development. As the *Handsworth News* reported in 1887 upon the opening of its local park, 'to all it means the preservation of a large and important plot of land from the ravages of the speculative builder'.¹¹

Additionally, parks could be utilised as a measure of social control.¹² Parks offered opportunities for 'rational recreation' including sports and walking, as well as educated the masses through appreciation of horticulture or trees. Parks could theoretically be used to spread middle class values and behaviour to the working classes, even if rules and regulations were often ignored.¹³

⁸ Morris, [Book Review], *Urban History*, Vol. 7, (May 1980), p. 131, E. Griffin, *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1830*, (Oxford, 2005), pp. 146-50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁰ J. Stobart, 'Identity, Competition and Place Promotion in the Five Towns', *Urban History*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (August 2003), p. 178.

¹¹ *Handsworth News*, 1887.

¹² Stobart, *Identity, Competition and Place Promotion*, p. 173.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Aristocratic estates, as owners of large areas of land in emerging towns, often had an important role to play in the provision of open spaces for use as public parks.

In his examination of public parks in the Potteries, Jon Stobart argues that municipal parks were intended to serve a dual purpose: both as a public facility and as cultural capital for the towns' elites. They had to be practical as spaces of recreation and serve as an escape from the pollutions of towns, while simultaneously being fashionably designed and sufficiently grand to achieve the 'civic boosterism' the elite desired.¹⁴

These competing purposes impacted considerably upon the form and use of the park. The design of Hanley Park, Stobart argues, spoke volumes to the elites of the pottery towns, but less to the ordinary workers for whom it was ostensibly laid out. However, the park achieved its aim of civic boosterism and place promotion, as Hanley had 'clearly outdone its neighbours in the scale, grandeur and tastefulness of its park.' The town reportedly now compared itself with regional centres in the Midlands and North West, as opposed to the neighbouring pottery towns of North Staffordshire.¹⁵

The issue of 'social control' by elites in society is present throughout this thesis, not least in their control of leisure. Robert Storch identifies middle class attempts at moral reform and social control of leisure in the industrial north of England. Impulses to reform and impose their interpretation of morality was, Storch argues, conditioned by a need to preserve a stable pattern of civil and moral order, an order 'congenial to local elites' in a 'fluid and turbulent' urban context.¹⁶ Storch identifies a rhetoric of 'fear and loathing' by elites in regards to the urban masses based on their fears of the modern city's vulnerability for 'chaos and destruction'. Elites feared the potential of the urban

¹⁴ Stobart, *Identity, Competition and Place Promotion*, pp. 180-1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-1.

¹⁶ R. Storch, 'The Problem of Working-Class Leisure. Some Roots of Middle-Class Moral Reform in the Industrial North: 1825-50' in A. Donajgrodzki (Ed.), *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (London, 1977), p. 138.

masses once they left the structured atmosphere of the factory and the supervision of their employers.¹⁷

There has been little study of the role of aristocratic landowners in the provision or control of leisure facilities. It is recognised that landowners played an integral role in the provision of municipal parks and Conway demonstrates that aristocratic families often owned the land that was either sold, or less commonly, donated to the towns for use as a public park. However, the considerations and priorities of these landowners, and the actions of their agents in the process, have rarely been examined.

The landowners discussed here had both rural and urban estates, allowing an examination of the contrasting attitudes towards recreation in the traditional rural setting and the newer urban environment. By examining recreation in the period from 1830s to the end of the nineteenth century, continuities and changes can be identified and accounted for.

¹⁷ Storch, *The Problem of Working Class Leisure*, p. 138.

5.3 AN OUTLINE OF RECREATION IN THE POTTERIES AND BLACK COUNTRY

ST MONDAY AND BLOOD SPORTS

There were many similarities in the recreations prevalent in the Potteries and the Black Country. Each were characterised by fighting, drinking and blood sports, while the enjoyment of ‘recreation at work’ was common. Charles Shaw’s memoir of his childhood and early working life in the Potteries in the 1840s highlights the ‘fun and folly, [and] wild momentary abandonment’ of activities whilst at working including drinking, fighting and ‘debating’.¹⁸ The owners of works were unaware or often unconcerned by these activities. Any amount of revelry, corruption or cruelty was allowed to continue, as long as the week’s full work was completed.¹⁹

Shaw’s account suggests the practice of taking an extra day off a week, often called ‘St Monday’, was prevalent. In the Potteries, ‘hundreds of work people never did a day’s work for the first two days of the week.’ Laxity abounded and drinking and idleness were ignored by employers and supervisors.²⁰ The existence of ‘St Monday’ has been described as ‘that most characteristic of Black Country institutions.’²¹ George Barnsby suggests that little work was done in the domestic trades on Mondays as this was traditionally the day that work was taken to warehouses and new materials were collected from the masters by those in trades such as nailers, chainmakers and locksmiths.²² Miners and some metal trades appeared to have also adopted this tradition.²³ It was therefore on Mondays that ‘most social activities’ were reportedly arranged for, although Barnsby does not elaborate on what these included. He does, however, observe that important working-class demonstrations, notably the May 1832 march to Newhall Hill in Birmingham and the Black Country Chartist march in 1842 were both held on Mondays.²⁴

¹⁸ Shaw, *When I Was A Child*, chapter 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, chapter 20.

²¹ G. Barnsby, *Social Conditions in the Black Country, 1800-1900*, (Wolverhampton, 1980), p. 41.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Pugilism and blood sports, often fuelled by alcohol, were common amongst colliers and potters in North Staffordshire, according to Shaw. James Greenwood's 'expose' *Low Life Deeps*, details an organised fight between a bull-dog and a dwarf supposedly witnessed by the author in Hanley in 1881. According to Greenwood, the dwarf, 'Brummy' knocked out the bull-dog in the 11th round.²⁵

The prevalence of fighting and blood sports was replicated in the Black Country and was the focus of much of Emma Griffin's research. Griffin emphasised the continuance of bull-baiting and other blood sports during wakes weeks in the Black Country towns, arguing that there was a 'unique attachment of the inhabitants of the Black Country to this ancient pastime'.²⁶

Shaw was utilised uncritically as a principal source for Griffin's 2005 study, *England's Revelry*, and his motivations were not considered. Shaw belittled the sophistication of the Potteries to fortify his explanation of the weakness of their labour organisation in comparison to the factory and mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Accordingly, Shaw highlighted the supposed backwardness and brutality of workers in North Staffordshire, while his 'Whiggish' account emphasises the development of society from the 1840s to sixty years later. As such, Shaw's narrative emphasises the primitive nature of 1840s society. As such, Griffin does not consider that Shaw's biography might have exaggerated the prevalence of shocking or entertaining customs, of which blood sport is an important example.

In the extensive volume of correspondence examined for this study, including letters of landowners, subagents, tenants and clergymen on rural and urban estates, there is no mention of any activities considered 'blood' or 'cruel' sports. While this does not signify that such sports did not take place in Walsall, as evidence of them can be found in local newspapers, it suggests that they were not as common as Griffith argues.

ALCOHOL

²⁵ J. Greenwood, *Low Life Deep*, (London, 1876), chapter 1.

²⁶ Griffin, *England's Revelry*, pp. 146-50.

Public houses were essential components for urban working class leisure. These were the venue for a wide variety of leisure activities. The prevalence of the pub as the heart of the community is evident in both the Potteries and the Black Country. Nationally, the 1830 Beer Act and the associated 'Beer houses' were important for the great increase of drinking establishments in urban centres. The Beer Act is described by historian of the Potteries, Meryvn Edwards, as one of the most 'anti-establishment, egalitarian, people friendly legislative measures' of the nineteenth century. It was established to encourage growth in the pub trade and agricultural industry as well as combating the negative moral and health effects of the 'gin craze'. The consumption of wholesome beer was promoted vigorously.²⁷ Peter Potter wrote before the passing of the proposed Act in April 1830 that the national feeling was 'decidedly favourable to the projected measure; both in a pecuniary and moral view of the case'.²⁸

The Act allowed any rate payer to sell beer from his home for an annual fee of two guineas. Beer houses were only required to close between 10 pm and 4am on weekdays, with stricter hours of operation on Sundays. Fines of £20 were charged to bestsellers found to be selling wine or spirits.²⁹ In 1834, Longton and Lane End had 20 public houses and 60 beer houses. Other Potteries towns were similarly well served by beer houses, Hanley and Burslem having 91 and 82 respectively.³⁰ Shaw, in keeping with his moralising agenda, claimed that 'beerhouses abounded [and] drunkenness was a prevailing vice', rendering the chronic poverty 'more bitter and ghastly'.³¹

Temperance movements, advocating an abstinence from alcohol, had some degree of support in Staffordshire. Temperance Associations and Halls were established in several towns.³² Many of these opened or flourished in the forty years after 1870, suggesting that this was the peak period of the Movement, as with the national trend. Brian Harrison suggests that temperance ceased to be a

²⁷ M. Edwards, *Stoke on Trent Pubs*, (Gloucestershire, 2014), p. 6.

²⁸ WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1752), Potter to Piggott, 3.4.1830.

²⁹ Edwards, *Stoke on Trent Pubs*, p. 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

³¹ Shaw, *When I Was A Child*, chapter 4.

³² Temperance Halls and Associations were present in several North Staffordshire towns and villages including Hanley, Newcastle, Silverdale and Fenton.

live political issue after the Great War and societies accordingly dwindled in strength and influence.³³

In Longton, an unsectarian 'Working Men's Temperance and Christian Mission' had been built in Normacot by 1890, while the Sutherland Arms beerhouse in Dresden was converted to a temperance hall by the newly formed Working Men's Club in 1873. Despite organising various activities, the membership began to decline and in 1882 the Hall was reopened as a Liberal Club.³⁴

Walsall had a division of the Sons of Temperance Society and the Walsall Temperance Association built a Hall in Freer Street in 1867. This Hall was also utilised for public meetings, lectures and concerts.³⁵ The Temperance Movement in Walsall was more coherent than in the disjointed Potteries towns where it is unclear how many people were actively involved in the movement. In Walsall, with active clergy participation, a Gospel Temperance (Blue Ribbon Army) Mission in 1882 saw some 10,000 people take the pledge.³⁶

The prevalence of Temperance Halls in the Potteries suggests that, for a period at least, the idea of moderating or abstaining entirely from alcohol had a certain degree of popularity in the region. The presence of temperance halls and societies in many of the towns and villages in North Staffordshire indicates some level of opposition to the focus of the pub as a centre for working class leisure. However, that several of these halls quickly ceased to operate in their intended capacity, notably the Temperance Hall in Dresden which lasted less than a decade, suggests that the influence of temperance societies in the area should not be overstated.

Important variations of how energetically managed, and how appealing the alternative activities offered were to the local working classes were key determinants in the success or failure of a temperance hall. The failure of a temperance hall should not be seen as a lack of support for temperance as an ideal, nor as a mass return to insobriety. The working classes who were intended

³³ B. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*, (London, 1971), p. 387.

³⁴ Jenkins, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 8, pp. 276-307.

³⁵ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, pp. 242-3, p. 248, 251-3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

to be the patrons of such halls wished, fundamentally, to be entertained in the time they could call their own for leisure. If the activities offered by a temperance hall were not sufficiently appealing, the establishment would soon cease to hold their interest and support.

However, not all leisure was centred on alcohol and violence. An intriguing alternative is offered in a study of working-class gardening in Walsall. Cathy Schling recognises that an industrialising Black Country town is ‘an unlikely setting for the practice of horticulture’, yet argues that a gardening culture did exist amongst Walsall’s working class.³⁷ Schling accepts that the number of active gardeners in the town was perhaps small, as many in the town were ‘too poor, too badly housed and worked too many hours’ for gardening to be a ‘practical proposition’.³⁸ Nonetheless, the successful establishment of a Florist Society in 1880 and newspaper evidence of an increasing number of local gardeners attending the society’s shows suggests horticulture was a pastime for at least some in the town.³⁹

Such studies highlight the great variety of leisure and provides depth to our understanding of the Black County as comprising smoky industrial towns, whose occupiers were rarely out of the pubs. Schling comments on the prevalence of working-class autonomy, notably in the establishment of the Horticulture Society, despite the patronising and sceptical observations of the middle class press.⁴⁰

Although Schling does not explicitly consider it so, the role of the local landowner is essential in the provision of space to garden in urban settings. In Walsall, the earl of Bradford is demonstrated to have rented out gardens throughout the 1820s and 1830s, which provided an income of £35. In 1820 there were 34 tenants paying rents of between 10s and £2 per annum for these gardens.⁴¹ Schling speculates, based on evidence from other Black Country towns, that although some of

³⁷ Schling, *Working-Class Gardening in Walsall*, p. 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴¹ SRO, D1287/1/31/G/131-161, Rental Books of the Bradford Estate.

these gardens would have been used to grow food, others might have been used for pleasure and family leisure.⁴²

The Bradford estate rental books show that in 1836, the amount of garden rent dropped dramatically, to half that of the previous year.⁴³ Schling correctly attributes this to the land being required to be leased out in building plots, as the second half of the 1830s witnessed a considerable increase in the amount the estate received from building leases.⁴⁴

The trend of declining garden rents and increased income from building leases continued into the 1850s. There is no more garden rent recorded after 1857, with a note in the rent book for that year stating that ‘Nearly all of these gardens are now let on building leases.’⁴⁵

This sacrifice of space previously used as gardens for urban development demonstrates that, once it became apparent that great income could be derived from urban development, Lord Bradford was willing to dispense with land previously used as gardens by his tenants. On the rural estates, where green spaces were abundant, Bradford proposed a scheme to provide plots of land for the ‘deserving and industrious poor’ in order that they could grow food and keep a pig.⁴⁶ No such provision was made for the numerous poor of Walsall. Ultimately the Bradford estate was willing to provide space for gardens up until the point that such land could be used by the estate more profitably.

⁴² Schling, *Working-Class Gardening in Walsall*, p. 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, appendix 4.

⁴⁴ SRO, D1287/1/31/G/131, Rental income in 1834 was £391, by 1840 this figure was £689.

⁴⁵ SRO, D1287/1/32/G/158.

⁴⁶ Schling, *Working-Class Gardening in Walsall*, pp. 36-37.

5.4 ALCOHOL ON ARISTOCRATIC ESTATES

A consideration of the attitudes and policies towards public houses and alcohol by the Bradford estate can be seen as representative of their attitude towards the Walsall estate generally. Peter Potter the elder abhorred the prevalence of alcohol on the estates, was critical of supposed drunkards and favoured temperance amongst the tenants. In Walsall, the agent's actions displayed a begrudging acceptance of public houses as the predominant form of leisure. A distinctly more aggressive policy was adopted by Potter on the rural estates, suggesting the closer control of rural tenants than in the urban environment of Walsall.

This analysis is supported by John Rule's assertions concerning differing levels of power and social control exerted in 'open' or 'closed' villages. In a 'closed' village, characterised by a concentration of landownership by a paternalistic head of society, measures of social control and authority were stronger than in 'open' villages where more widely dispersed landownership denied such clear authority.⁴⁷ In the rural villages of his estate, Lord Bradford and his agents implemented considerable levels of social control, including over the consumption of alcohol. In urban Walsall there was an acceptance that such social control would be difficult to replicate. Similar distinctions are witnessed on the Sutherland estate where agents primarily sought the close control of the workers and tenants of Trentham, more so than in the suburbs of Longton. It was not considered a viable objective to address or change the moral character in the urban setting.

Potter's views of the corrupting nature of alcohol are rendered abundantly clear throughout his correspondence. His response to a request to subscribe to a Friendly Society aptly demonstrates this. Friendly Society members contributed subscriptions to a mutual fund and were then entitled to receive money from the fund in times of financial need. Such meetings were often held as social gatherings at which the subscriptions could be paid. Walsall reportedly had more friendly societies than any other town in Staffordshire.⁴⁸ Potter was supportive of friendly societies in general,

⁴⁷ J. Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850*, (New York, 1986), p 162

⁴⁸ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, p. 253.

believing that when patronised by a respectable or influential person, they could be ‘exceedingly beneficial’ to members.⁴⁹

However, upon discovering that the meetings of the new Friendly Society would be held at a public house, Potter refused to contribute. He believed that, if such societies were held in public houses they would ‘produce no actual benefit to the poor’. On the contrary, they would ‘beget in them a habit of attending such places’ and promote ‘drunkenness and bad principles among the working classes’.⁵⁰ He scathingly believed such societies were mostly promoted by a Public House keeper ‘doubtless for interested motives’.⁵¹

He believed alcohol often led to riots, as demonstrated in neighbouring Willenhall in April 1834. Here, Potter claimed, the ostensibly mundane election of a new clergyman by parishioners had led to the town being gripped for several weeks in ‘drunkenness and riot of every kind’.⁵² As such, in the preparations for celebration of the coronation of Queen Victoria in June 1838, Potter advised strongly against plans to ‘afford a dinner or other refreshments to the poor’. His objection was on the grounds that providing alcohol for the poor would lead to disorder, telling Lord Bradford that he ‘never knew a scheme of that kind that did not end in drunkenness and riot and debauchery of every kind’. He insisted on providing food only for children, predicting that ‘much excess and consequent misery’ would thus be avoided.⁵³

Potter’s suggestions that riots would occur were common whenever discussing large assemblies of people, be it for recreational or political purposes. Indeed ‘riots and debauchery of every kind’ appears to have been somewhat of a stock phrase for the agent and was applied to various, sometimes trivial, occurrences.⁵⁴ In a similar manner, Trentham agent William Steward appears to

⁴⁹ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/95, Potter to Lord Bradford, 23.4.1834.

⁵⁰ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/95, Potter to Lord Bradford, 23.4.1834.

⁵¹ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/95, Potter to Lord Bradford, 23.4.1834.

⁵² SRO, D1287/18/16 K/98, Potter to Lord Bradford, 22.4.1837.

⁵³ SRO, D1287/11/3 K/26, Potter to Lord Bradford, 6.6.1838.

⁵⁴ Some instances that Potter used the term ‘riot’ include; ‘riotous and ruinous excesses’ regarding the poor in Lancashire cotton towns (Potter to Bradford, 26.6.1829), ‘riots and debauchery’ regarding the effects of the 1830 Beer Act (Potter to Piggott, 2.4.1830), ‘riotous mob’ to describe a Lancashire vestry meeting, (Potter to Bradford, 27.7.1833), ‘a most riotous and disgraceful election... drunkenness and riot of every kind’ regarding the election of a new clergyman in Willenhall, (Potter to Bradford, 22.4.1837, ‘drunkenness and

have been overly concerned with the likelihood of ‘mobs’ emerging at Trentham, again both in recreational and political contexts. The historian must therefore be mindful of shifting lexical meaning and be wary of blindly applying a modern interpretation of such terms to nineteenth century correspondence.

Potter considered public houses as the haunts of disreputable characters and radicals. In the 1832 parliamentary reform campaigns, Potter characterised the public houses of Walsall as the only places offering the reformer Thomas Attwood substantial support, demonstrating the low esteem he held for such places.⁵⁵ A devoutly religious man, Potter saw intemperance as the antithesis of religion. In his attempts to persuade Lord Bradford to restore a chapel on the Lancashire estate, Potter suggested that an improved church and an active Minister would greatly benefit a neighbourhood ‘too much occupied in Sabbath breaking in the neighbouring public houses.’⁵⁶

Potter was quick to identify tenants and other individuals he considered drunkards and occasionally recommended the termination of their tenantry.⁵⁷ In a disagreement between the estate and a vicar, Potter referred repeatedly to the vicar’s intemperance, citing this as the reason for his objectionable conduct.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, several pubs existed on the Bradford estates. In most instances, although Potter was personally opposed to the consumption of alcohol, he rarely actively attempted to close or regulate the public houses in his professional capacity. When he did take such action, it was invariably in rural settings.

Recreation on the Sutherland estate was consciously structured to keep worker and tenants away from alehouses. Most notably under the agency of James Loch, the Leveson Gower tenants were strictly controlled and the presence of a great house in Trentham decisively affected the social

riot and debauchery of every kind’ and ‘productive of much riot and disorder’ both regarding coronation celebration arrangements (Potter to Bradford, 6.6.38 and 15.6.1838.)

⁵⁵ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 5.6.1832.

⁵⁶ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/94, Potter to Lord Bradford, 4.6.1833.

⁵⁷ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/94, Potter to Lord Bradford, 11.4.1833, SRO, D1287/18/26 K/95, Potter to Lord Bradford, 10.12.1834.

⁵⁸ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/94, Potter to Lord Bradford, 27.7.1833, SRO, D1287/18/16 K/98, Potter to Lord Bradford, 22.4.1837.

climate of the parish.⁵⁹ The Sutherland family were active supporters of temperance amongst their tenantry and prevented or inhibited the consumption of alcohol on their estates. This suggests notions of paternalism and desires for social control over the tenantry. Such temperance was not enforced on the Bradford estates, either rural or urban. Public houses and beershops were prohibited in the parish of Trentham as well as on their other English estates. The traditional beer allowance to agricultural labourers was abolished in Shropshire, to be replaced by wages in lieu.⁶⁰ In the 1830s, workers at Trentham played quoits in the courtyard of the Hall, a pastime Loch expressly approved of and encouraged as it kept the workers within his sights and away from the alehouses.⁶¹ Similarly, the opening of Trentham Hall grounds to the public on Sundays was explicitly calculated in the hope that walking in the grounds would stop local people from frequenting alehouses.⁶² Even towards the end of the century attempts to control recreation were evident. Upon the opening of the teetotal Sutherland institute in Longton in 1894, the fourth duke instructed his agents to implore the Bulls Head public house in Hanford to close. These efforts were unsuccessful, but an agreement was reached that the landlady would not serve any of the Trentham Hall servants.⁶³

PUBLIC HOUSES ON RURAL ESTATES

The Shropshire village of Preston-upon-the-Weald-Moors, site of the Preston Hospital almshouses, was one area of the estate that Potter attempted to actively prevent drunkenness. On several separate occasions, Potter took steps to prevent alcohol licences being granted in the village and to control and ultimately close a beerhouse. Such actions were never attempted on the Walsall estate.

As early as the 1820s, measures were being taken to remove public houses from the village. In 1826 Potter remarked that a house on the estate had previously been let as a public house until the

⁵⁹ Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 11, p. 235.

⁶⁰ Richards, *Uses of Aristocracy*, p. 70, E. Richards, 'The Social and Electoral Influence of the Trentham Interest, 1800-1860', *Midland History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Autumn 1975), pp. 112-4.

⁶¹ Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 11, p. 251.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 250, SRO, D593/K/3/19, Lewis to Loch, 31.5.1833.

⁶³ Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 11, p. 250.

estate 'exerted [its] influence' to prevent a renewal of the licence. Such exertions were 'happily successful' as a 'Pothouse in such a retired rural village' was a 'complete nuisance'.⁶⁴

In 1830, Potter sought to close a recently opened beerhouse in the village. He claimed this beerhouse was causing an 'intolerable nuisance' and daily witnessed 'disgraceful and scandalous scenes' including 'fighting, drunkenness, swearing, obscene conversation [and] the abuse of people passing by.'⁶⁵ Potter took it as his 'duty' to 'take measures' to shut this beerhouse, believing such behaviours would have a 'pernicious effect upon the morals of the children belonging to the Hospital, and under my care'.⁶⁶

The beerhouse was owned by Mrs Colley, a beneficiary of the Preston Hospital Charity, and occupied by her son. Potter pressured Colley to influence her son to close the beerhouse, threatening that she would be 'struck off the list of pensioners' at the alms-house should she not comply.⁶⁷ A more conciliatory approach was also attempted, as Potter offered her a 'fair and even liberal price' should she sell her house to the estate.⁶⁸

However, Potter's threats and coercions were unheeded by Colley and he reported to Lord Bradford that his 'endeavours' to shut the public house had 'hitherto failed'.⁶⁹ He consulted the Reverend Mr Bird of Preston regarding the beerhouse and their 'failure so far in effecting its removal' before seeking legal measures to legal prevent Colley's son from obtaining a licence.⁷⁰ Potter was confident that the Magistrates would settle in their favour if necessary, 'for the sake of the peace and moral character' of the village of Preston.⁷¹ In this course of action Potter and Bird were presumably successful as there is no further mention of the Beer House in Potter's correspondence.

⁶⁴ SRO, D1287/12/3 K/230, Potter to Lord Bradford, 20.5.1826. 'Pothouse' referred to a small tavern or public house.

⁶⁵ WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1853), Potter to Mrs Colley, 19.8.1830.

⁶⁶ WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1853), Potter to Mrs Colley, 19.8.1830.

⁶⁷ WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1853), Potter to Mrs Colley, 19.8.1830.

⁶⁸ WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1853), Potter to Mrs Colley, 19.8.1830.

⁶⁹ WLHC 59/21 (Letter 1907), Potter to Lord Bradford, 5.1.1830.

⁷⁰ WLHC 59/21 (Letter 1906), Potter to the Reverend T. Bird, 4.11.1830.

⁷¹ WLHC 59/21 (Letter 1906), Potter to the Reverend T. Bird, 4.11.1830.

Before the systematic suburban development of Sutherland land around Longton from 1864, these areas were predominantly rural in character. The Sutherland estate took over and subsequently closed several existing public houses on their estate. The Star and Garter Inn in Normacot was purchased and closed down by the duke in the 1840s. The previous owner was allowed to remain in the property, which was converted into a farm.⁷² A similar fate befell the nearby Furnace Inn which had been a public house since 1620. The estate allowed the public house to continue on their land, and the landlord of the pub was employed to collect rents from the neighbouring cottages.

However, in the early 1830s the duke bought the Furnace Inn and exercised stricter control over the tenants, due in part to the occurrences of bull baiting and other blood sports in the vicinity of the Inn during the Lane End wake weeks. By 1847, the erection of Normacot Parish Church was taken as an opportunity to close the Inn and convert it to a parsonage.⁷³

Similar motivations provoked the closure of the Red Gate Inn on Trentham Road by the duke in 1859. The estate had assented to the existence of this public house until it reportedly became notorious as a venue for bull-baiting, dog-fighting and other blood sports. The duke's agents moved swiftly to take control of the building and shut it down. The estate determined to maintain ownership of the pub in the hope of receiving a 'good offer' for it, and the licence was renewed until at least 1865.⁷⁴ Indeed, agent George Fleming actively tried to sell the pub in 1864 to Joseph Williams, of the Ashwood Tavern in Wood Street, Longton. This sale was not completed, yet Fleming decided to keep the pub for the estate for another year, until it was converted into a residential property.⁷⁵

Financial considerations also saw the estate retain the Roebuck Inn in Newcastle-under-Lyme which was once described by Lord Torrington as 'one of the most savage, dirty alehouses' he had ever entered.⁷⁶ In 1864 Fleming advised that should the pub be well run, it could become one of the

⁷² Dobraszczyc, *Normacot: Forest, Furnace and Suburban Development*, p. 10.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Loch, 21.8.1864.

⁷⁵ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Glover, 31.8.1864.

⁷⁶ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 8, pp. 8-15.

best and most profitable pubs in the town.⁷⁷ When the existing tenant entered financial difficulties, the estate briefly took over the management of the pub until George Loch suggested it would be desirable for the Roebuck to be sold than remain in the duke's hands. This consideration was financially motivated rather than for moral stipulations.⁷⁸ These instances from the 1860s demonstrate that the estate was not opposed to profiting from the sale of alcohol, provided the establishments were a suitable distance from Trentham Hall. Thus, a suggestion that alcohol was uniformly opposed by the estate is too simplistic and unduly extrapolates from the strict policy enforced in Trentham.

PUBLIC HOUSES ON URBAN ESTATES

While contacts with the local clergy and magistrates were used to enact the will of the Bradford agents with regards to the sale of alcohol on the rural estates, the same vigour was not undertaken in Walsall. While there were many unruly and violent beerhouses in Walsall, and despite Potter's personal objections to alcohol, on the urban estates, his policy towards public houses was decidedly pragmatic.

Potter was supportive of the passing of the Beerhouse Act in October 1830, actively allaying subagents' fears of the negative effects of the act. Potter believed the increase of establishments selling beer would be beneficial to the urban estates of Bolton and Walsall as the 'Sots [habitual drunkards] would be more dispersed' and therefore 'less riot and debauchery' would ensue.⁷⁹ Potter conversed with 'many Publicans' about the matter, implying that despite his moral reservations about their trade, he was on friendly terms with pub landlords, at least in a professional capacity. The sale of beer appears to have been acceptable to Potter, but its purchase to excess was condemned.

Potter was further willing to overlook his objections to pubs and alcohol when they could be utilised for political means. In the 1837 parliamentary elections in Walsall, Potter received

⁷⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to Loch, 25.2.1864.

⁷⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/9/1, Loch to Menzies, 26.5.1865.

⁷⁹ WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1752), Potter to Piggott, 3.4.1830.

assurances from Richard Lynex, who rented a public house in Rushall Street from Lord Bradford, that he would vote for Potter's favoured candidate, the Conservative Charles Smith Forster. Lynex was further provided money by Forster's Committee 'to be spent in treating his voters', a common practice in elections.⁸⁰

Such use of a public house on the Bradford estate was accepted by Potter whilst it served his and Lord Bradford's political views. Indeed, Potter maintained that such practices were within the 'rightful use of [a proprietor's] possessions'.⁸¹ Only once Potter discovered that Lynex had voted for the opposing, Liberal candidate, Francis Finch, he implored Lord Bradford to evict Lynex from his pub for his 'shameful and traitorous conduct'.⁸²

Peter Potter the younger, upon succeeding as chief agent upon his father's death, did not share the same indignation about alcohol. Although the younger Potter advocated the sale of several pubs on the Bradford estates, these sales were recommended for financial reasons, with no moral judgement upon the establishments. In at least one instance, one of Potter's subagents entered into an auction to buy a public house on Lord Bradford's account, a purchase for which he was afforded up to £700.⁸³ This suggests that the estate not only acquiesced to public houses on their estates, but actively sought to such establishments if deemed profitable.

Although some degree of social control was initially possible for the Sutherland estate in rural and village settings such as Trentham, it became less feasible once increasing numbers of tenants migrated to urban centres where old ties of deference were diffused.⁸⁴ In their aristocratic suburbs, caught between the distinctly rural and the obviously urban, enforcing social control was complex.

By 1878, stringent building leases had been introduced to regulate the development of the dukes' suburbs of Florence and Normacot. As with Trentham, no public houses or beer shops were to be

⁸⁰ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/194, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1837.

⁸¹ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/194, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1837

⁸² SRO, D1287/18/21 K/194, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1837

⁸³ WLHC, 59/22 (Letter 18348), Potter to Lord Bradford, 7.5.1857. The pub, The Castle in Castle Bromwich, was purchased by another bidder for £705.

⁸⁴ See Rule, *Labouring Classes*, pp. 160-3.

allowed on the new estates.⁸⁵ Although the earl of Bradford enforced similar building regulations on his Walsall estates, there was no prohibition of public houses or beer shops.⁸⁶ While these stipulations could indicate an attempt by the duke's agents to extend their social control to the new suburbs, the Florence development was primarily a commercial venture. As such, the prohibition of pubs can be considered an attempt to prevent the potentially damaging effects of such establishments to the duke's land, while making the leases more appealing to prospective middle class residents and developers.

Indeed, that the estate ultimately assented to the opening of the Dunrobin Hotel at the extreme northwest corner of the Florence development, the furthest point from Trentham Hall, suggests that securing developers for building plots and maintaining a positive reputation for the new suburb were the principle motivators, rather than paternalism towards the tenantry. Named after the Sutherland family's Scottish ancestral castle, the Dunrobin served as a select eating and drinking establishment, and accommodated the many societies formed by the estate's residents. The Hotel further provided space for recreations distinctly aimed at attaining middle class respectability for the suburb, including a bowling green and lawn tennis club.⁸⁷

The existence of a large number of pubs on the boundaries of the duke's suburban estate highlights that any landowner's aspirations for replicating social control could be circumvented by the owners or occupiers of adjoining lands. As well as in Longton itself, the Dresden estate, owned by Longton Freehold Society, quickly witnessed the establishment of a remarkable number of pubs and beerhouses. Several, including the Lord John Russell on Trentham Road, were directly on the boundary with the Sutherland development. Thus, any desire to prevent Florence tenants from frequenting pubs would have been infeasible.

⁸⁵ George Menzies to the Select Committee on the Longton Extension and Improvement Bill, 15.4.1883, in Dobraszczyk *Queens Park, Longton*, (2011) p. 3.

⁸⁶ See for example SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 14/200/1, Building lease between Lord Bradford and William Cox, 28.8.1901.

⁸⁷ Dobraszczyk, *Florence: The Duke's Suburb*, p. 18.

As Storch suggested, ideas of deference, ‘local and personal – the paternalist – basis of social control’, which had existed in Trentham, could not feasibly be replicated as urbanisation advanced.⁸⁸ While the sale of alcohol was prohibited in Queens Park, donated to the people of Longton by the duke in 1888, this stipulation was quickly negated by entrepreneurial publicans. Recognising the opportunity to sell beer to the park’s large numbers of visitors, several pubs opened on the boundaries of the duke’s estate. By 1907, there were eight beerhouses or public houses in the vicinity of the park. Many of these explicitly advertised themselves as being ‘on the way to the Queen’s Park’.⁸⁹

Landowners and their agents’ approaches towards public houses were pragmatic. They often objected not to the consumption of alcohol, but to the continuation of forms of leisure deemed detrimental to the reputation and moral character of the estate. This is demonstrated by the closure of public houses on the Sutherland estate only once they became notorious for blood sports. Should pubs remain free from blood sports, profitable and a suitable distance from Trentham, they were allowed to continue.

Rural and urban divisions are stark in attitudes towards pubs. Trentham village and the ‘retired, rural village’ of Preston were deemed by their respective landowners as unsuitable locations for beerhouses. However, on urban estates near Longton and Walsall, where the moral character of the surroundings was not considered a priority, agents were distinctly less concerned with controlling leisure.

Even where traditional deference remained strongest, the increasing outlets for the consumption of alcohol hampered the practicalities of control of leisure. Significantly, by the 1860s quoits was still a popular pastime amongst workers, but it was now played on a pitch at the Trentham Inn rather than the courtyard at Trentham as in the 1830s.⁹⁰ Paternalistic social control was no longer feasible.

⁸⁸R. Storch, *The Problems of Working Class Leisure*, p. 138.

⁸⁹ Advertising poster for Daisy Bank Hotel, reproduced in Dobraszczyc, *Queens Park, Longton*, p. 18.

⁹⁰ Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 11, p. 251.

The compromise of preventing only their employees from being served in the Bulls Head in Hanford from 1894 epitomises this aristocratic pragmatism.

5.5 OTHER RECREATIONS ON ESTATES

Whilst much of the recreation undertaken on aristocratic estates falls into the categories of pubs or parks, various other forms of recreation were also popular. These included fetes, feasts, excursions and organised sports. A Walsall Public Recreation Society was established in 1856 to organise and promote leisure activities in the town, and its development was of some interest to Lord Bradford's agent. However, the younger Potter believed there was a 'general want of interest in it felt by the inhabitants' and he predicted that the society would quickly cease to operate entirely.⁹¹

Feasts and fetes were held for the tenantry on significant occasions, such as the birthdays of landowners and their heirs. These celebrations were more common on the rural estate than in Walsall. As mentioned previously, in 1866 Potter noted the lack of celebration in Walsall to mark Lord Newport, eldest son of Lord Bradford, reaching the age of 21. Potter and his brother hastily arranged a dinner with the 'principal agricultural tenants' of the Walsall estate to mark the occasion. The invitation was extended to all tenants to attend 'should they feel so inclined.'⁹²

This further highlights the distinction between urban and rural estates. In the rural setting, a family celebration was observed considerably more enthusiastically than in Walsall, suggesting a loosening of traditional social bonds in the transition from rural to urban estates. Harold Perkin contends that the landed gentry's power was founded on the social control of their tenants and villagers, which necessitated 'customary treats and charity for the loyal and deserving'.⁹³ Although John Rule recognised that this paternalism continued in the 'long habits of obedience and deference' amongst village populations, this was contrasted to urban society structure.⁹⁴ Indeed, the suggestion in 1866 that the few Walsall agricultural tenants would arrange the celebratory dinner, and the other tenants could attend if they felt inclined implied that Potter anticipated that the latter would not attend in great numbers.

⁹¹ WLHC, 59/22 (Letter 17564), Potter to Lord Bradford, 4.7.1856.

⁹² SRO, D1287/20/5 P/243, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.3.1866.

⁹³ Perkin, quoted in Rule, *Labouring Classes*, p. 161.

⁹⁴ Rule, *Labouring Classes*, pp. 161-2.

Lord Bradford was occasionally approached to sell land or lease land for use for recreation. The financial benefit to the estate was paramount in Potter's deliberations on accepting such proposals, but the effect of the proposed activity to the respectability the estate was also evaluated.

Motivations of group or club applicant were invariably treated with suspicion. In November 1830, Peter Potter the elder allowed Bolton subagent George Piggott to let an acre of land for use as a bowling green 'provided the applicants are respectable people'. He was cautious about the proposal and insisted that the parties should be 'expressly named, and be jointly and severally bound' to the terms to protect Bradford's property.⁹⁵

While an entirely different proposition to the opening of a sports club, the reputation of the estate was a factor in Potter's response to the Walsall Board of Guardians attempt to purchase land to 'provide the Paupers with garden and recreation ground' in 1859.⁹⁶ Potter had financial objections to the proposition, believing the proposed site was too valuable to the estate, but his primary contention was for the potentially detrimental effect to the value of Bradford's existing property in the area. He lamented that applications for leases in the proximity of the workhouse were already in reduced demand and insisted that if the land were sold for an exercise yard, the Guardians 'ought to be compelled to build and maintain a wall around the plot sufficiently high to screen the paupers from view.'⁹⁷

As Cunningham highlights, in the second half of the nineteenth century increased availability of affordable rail travel allowed many people to spend leisure time outside of their towns. While seaside towns experienced the highest increase in visitors, substantial numbers visited countryside destinations. The Kendal and Windermere Railway, built in 1846, afforded access to the Lake District. Subsequent lines extended to Coniston, Keswick and Cockermouth in the following decades. There was opposition to the building of railways in an area of such natural beauty, with William Wordsworth lamenting 'Is there no nook of English ground secure from rash assault?'⁹⁸

⁹⁵ WLHC, 59/21 (Letter 1913), Potter to Piggott, 8.11.1830.

⁹⁶ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/143, Potter to Lord Bradford, 14.6.1859.

⁹⁷ SRO, D1287/18/28-30 K/143, Potter to Lord Bradford, 14.6.1859.

⁹⁸ W. Wordsworth, 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', [1844].

Landowners were prominent opponents, and Lord Bradford, who owned an estate at St Catherine's, near Windermere, staunchly objected to the proposed Windermere and Ambleside railway in 1887.

The agents of several landowners met in January 1887 to coordinate their joint opposition to the proposed line. Bradford further took additional individual legal opposition, claiming his land would be 'prejudicially affected.'⁹⁹ He and other landowners were quick to declare that while visitors of 'all classes' should be allowed 'reasonable access' and enjoyment of the beautiful scenery, the existing lines were sufficient for this purpose. The planned extension would serve only to damage five miles of 'the choicest scenery in the Lake District'.¹⁰⁰ Such was the extent of landowner's influence that the proposed line was never built.

GEORGE GYBBON POTTER AND ORGANISED SPORT

In the late nineteenth century, George Gybbon Potter's correspondence provide considerably more detail of his personal leisure pursuits than those of his father and grandfather. These were unmistakably the activities of the professional middle class. By the 1870s, organised sport was increasing in popularity. Unlike his predecessors, Potter lived outside of Walsall in Aldridge, a village four miles to the northeast. Here he owned and managed the Village Hall, which hosted several societies meetings, as well as educational lectures. Potter himself regularly gave talks and presentations on various aspects of photography.

Potter further owned a field in the village which he permitted the local Cricket Club, of which he was periodically president, to utilise. However, this space was expressly not to be used as a recreation space for all villagers, only respectable members pursuing suitable activities. Potter forcefully objected to local boys using his field as the 'common playground of the village' and demanded that the Cricket Club erects signs and fences warning of prosecution should any games be played on the field. Potter attempted to compel the police to patrol the area and threatened that if 'energetic measures' were not taken by the Cricket Club, he would withdraw their use of his

⁹⁹ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/177/1, Griffiths to Lord Bradford, 25.1.1887.

¹⁰⁰ 'Resolution', included in SRO, D1287/18/32 K/177/4, Gatey to Griffith, 25.1.1887.

field.¹⁰¹ These demands were assented to, yet the following year Potter withdrew the use of his field recommending that the Cricket Club should become ‘self-supporting’.¹⁰²

In his capacity as Bradford’s Walsall agent, Potter was stringent with the provision of leisure facilities in the town and in several instances actively restricted public access to open spaces. In 1889, Potter advised Bradford’s London solicitors on the practicalities of commencing drilling for mineral exploitation to the detriment of Bloxwich village green, despite the ‘public furore’ this would raise.¹⁰³ Potter proposed legal wrangling that would see Walsall Corporation first break ground on this land and thus bear the inevitable public odium, protecting the public image of the estate. The manner of this would leave Lord Bradford in a position a month later where ‘no-one now can prevent or question his getting the mines, while further ensuring he had ‘the very best spot available for working them.’¹⁰⁴ The use of the Green as a valuable space for public recreation was secondary to the profits to be made for the estate.

Financial considerations, coupled with social respectability had a similarly detrimental impact upon the use of Bradford land as football pitches at the Chuckery to the north-east of Walsall town centre. Here, the estate initially provided space for football teams to play. However, their attitude changed when neighbouring residents complained about the noise. Walsall’s first football club, Walsall Town, was formed in 1873 and by 1882 there were 30 clubs in the town, several of whom played at the Chuckery’s twelve pitches.¹⁰⁵ Walsall Town merged with Walsall Swifts, who played on the adjacent pitch and in 1892 the team entered the national football league.¹⁰⁶

The popularity of their games quickly increased and were soon attracting some 2,000 spectators.

Residents on the nearby ‘upmarket’ Sutton Road complained to Potter who subsequently served the

¹⁰¹ WLHC, 59/23, George Gybonn Potter’s Private Letter Book, vol. 2, (letters 36 and 37), Potter to Mr Warren, 12.6.1885.

¹⁰² WLHC, 59/23, George Gybonn Potter’s Private Letter Book, vol. 2, (letter 172), Potter to Mr Warren, 18.3.1886, WLHC, 59/23, George Gybonn Potter’s Private Letter Book, vol. 2, (letter 52), Mr Warren to Potter, 7.7.1885.

¹⁰³ WLHC, 59/24, (letter 229), George Gybonn Potter to Bailey, Shaw and Gillett, 19.1.1889.

¹⁰⁴ WLHC, 59/24, (letter 253), George Gybonn Potter to Bailey, Shaw and Gillett, 25.2.1889.

¹⁰⁵ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, p. 253.

¹⁰⁶ S. Inglis, *Football Grounds of Britain*, (London, 1996), p. 376.

football team with an eviction notice in April 1893.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, Walsall Cricket Club were allowed to continue to play at the Chuckery until 1909 when they relocated to the suburban Gorway area, suggesting the Sutton Road residents did not object to the continuation of this more respectable sport.¹⁰⁸ The football team relocated to a ground on West Bromwich Road which opened in September 1893.¹⁰⁹ The playing fields at the Chuckery were soon developed into streets and housing plots after the football team were evicted. Moncrieffe Street, Lumley Road and Florence Street were erected directly on the site of the Chuckery Grounds.¹¹⁰

That the two most successful football teams in Walsall played on an open space owned by Lord Bradford indicates that, even if it was passive, the landowner played a substantial role in the provision of land for the playing and watching of sport in the town. That the team was evicted once residents objected and twelve sports pitches were sacrificed for housing developments indicates the relatively low priority that sport provision held for the estate. The estate had little interest in hosting spectator sports when profits from building leases could be realised.

Walsall Town Swifts new ground at West Bromwich Road was short lived. Access and rent disputes saw the team move in 1896 to Hillary Street outside the town. The West Bromwich Road ground was also quickly built upon.¹¹¹ Club historian Mike Bradbury was unable to ascertain who owned the land on which the team played in West Bromwich Road. Between 1897 and 1900, immediately after the team's eviction, Lord Bradford granted building leases for the erection of 46 houses and a schoolhouse on West Bromwich Road. This suggests that it was likely Bradford owned the land on which the football team had played on, and that it was built upon by the estate once the team had been forced to leave.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ M. Bradbury, *The Birth of the Saddlers*, (Birmingham, 2013), p. 191.

¹⁰⁸ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, p. 253.

¹⁰⁹ Inglis, *Football Grounds of Britain*, p. 376.

¹¹⁰ Greenslade, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 17, p. 253, Bradbury, *Birth of the Saddlers*, p. 191.

¹¹¹ Inglis, *Football Grounds of Britain*, p. 376, P. Smith and S. Smith, *The Ultimate Directory of English & Scottish Football League Grounds 1888–2005*, Second Edition, (London, 2005), p. 144.

¹¹² SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 47/574/6, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 226/3335/2, SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 228/3359/9.

5.6 PARKS AND ARISTOCRATIC GROUNDS

Arguably the most significant role aristocratic landowners played in the provision of recreation for towns was in the donation or sale of land, or use of their own grounds, as public parks. The gardens at Trentham Hall represented one of the principal destinations for leisure for the people of the Potteries when their access was permitted. Trentham gardens stood in sharp contrast with much of the landscape of North Staffordshire. As Lord Ronald Gower observed, while nothing was ‘less suggestive of beauty’ than the ‘miserable, squalid and unclean’ Potteries, within a couple of miles lay ‘this wonderful garden of Trentham, gay with hanging woods, mirrored in its still lake.’¹¹³ Gardens had existed at Trentham since the 1630s and were extensively redeveloped from 1833 in an Italian style by architect Charles Barry.¹¹⁴ Upon their reopening, head gardeners from other estates, landed gentry and people of ‘good character’ were allowed to visit the gardens upon written application.¹¹⁵

From the early nineteenth century, some parts of the park and woods, although not the formal gardens, were open to the public on Sundays and holidays. Visitors from across North Staffordshire flocked to Trentham daily during the Potteries Wakes weeks, until the late 1840s when the grounds were open only on the final Thursday, the extremely popular ‘Trentham Thursdays’. In August 1848, an estimated 30,000 people visited the gardens on the final Thursday of the wakes weeks, many utilising the new railway station at Hem Heath.¹¹⁶

The estate steadily relaxed its restrictions on which groups would be permitted to enter the gardens on days other than Sundays and holidays. The judgement of who was deemed ‘respectable’ was delegated to the agent William Steward by 1856. Steward was anxious when large crowds were admitted to the park and feared a mob might form.¹¹⁷ Similarly, although servants at Trentham were allowed to play cricket in the grounds, games against visiting teams were prohibited under the

¹¹³ Lord Ronald Gower, quoted in Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p. 15.

¹¹⁴ Gregory, ‘The Historic Gardens of Trentham’, p. 85.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹¹⁶ Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 11, p. 241.

¹¹⁷ Gregory, ‘The Historic Gardens of Trentham’, p. 91.

fear this could lead to ‘mobs in the park’.¹¹⁸ This fear of crowds indicates the suspicion and fear elites had for the masses’ potential for chaos once they were away from the structure and supervision of the workplace.¹¹⁹

By the mid-1860s, the estate had found it ‘necessary’ to ‘put a stop entirely’ to the admission of groups to the gardens. As George Fleming told one applicant, this rule would not be rescinded as ‘were one party allowed to come’ there would be ‘no end’ of applicants.¹²⁰ Despite this rejection, one month later Fleming permitted children and their teacher from a Wesleyan Sunday School in Tunstall to visit the park.¹²¹ Evidently the ban on groups was flexible and ‘respectability’ remained at the discretion of the agent.

The Trentham ‘outs’ were ‘the greatest and brightest holiday of the year’ for Potteries’s children. Charles Shaw reminisced at length about the ‘astonishing greenery of field and wood’ and of ‘breath[ing] the inspiring air... so fresh compared with what had been left behind.’ The value of these annual visits for children and workers in the Potteries is evident. The opportunity for escapism indicates the integral role the local aristocracy could play in the provision of space for recreation. Additional significance was placed on these ‘outs’ as the setting for the initiation of romantic links between visitors. Shaw muses that, ‘on no green spot in England have more kissing-rings been formed than in Trentham Park’. These young people ‘without intending it, kissed themselves into courtship and marriage’ creating lasting social bonds ‘first formed... under the trees at Trentham Park’.¹²²

While Shaw no doubt overstates his case, such opportunities for mixed-gender recreation were rare. Although this phenomenon will not be expanded on further here, as working class recreation was largely centred on the male-dominated public house, visits to parks and open spaces may have provided opportunity for individuals to meet future partners. Much as others have emphasised the

¹¹⁸ Gregory, ‘The Historic Gardens of Trentham’, p. 91, Tringham, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 11, p. 251.

¹¹⁹ Storch, *The Problems of Working Class Leisure*, p. 138.

¹²⁰ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to John Evans, 21.5.1864.

¹²¹ SRO, D593/K/3/8/15, Fleming to William Cooper, 28.6.1864.

¹²² Shaw, *When I Was A Child*, chapter 21.

significance of public houses in peoples social lives, so too parks and open spaces - often owned by the aristocracy - could have a lasting impact.

QUEENS PARK, LONGTON

The establishment of public parks in both Longton and Walsall highlights the essential role aristocratic landowners played in the provision of such spaces. Queen's Park opened in July 1888 on land donated by the duke of Sutherland, while in 1884 Lord Bradford provided land for Reedswood Park in Walsall, for a nominal fee.

Public parks are identified by Jon Stobart as one component of the competition between the autonomous Potteries towns for status and civic pre-eminence. Parks and other spaces and buildings including libraries, town halls, public baths or market places were often built with 'more than half an eye' on neighbouring towns and used as a form of 'civic boosterism' and expression of place.¹²³

With Queens Park, Longton became the first Potteries town to gain a public park. The town's elites portrayed this as a testament to their cultural and civic attainment and competence.¹²⁴ Longton's mayor, the potter John Aynsley, revelled in the opportunity to declare the gates of the new park open for all people of the Potteries, not just those of Longton.¹²⁵

Hanley's elites saw this as an embarrassment for themselves. While the necessity for a public park in Hanley had been expressed since at least the 1840s, only the opening of Queen's park acted as an impious for action. Hanley mayor Michael Huntbach was conscious not only that no town in the country of 'the size and importance of Hanley' was without a public park, but that the town had been pre-empted by Longton, their smaller neighbour.¹²⁶ Land was quickly acquired and work on

¹²³ Stobart, *Identity, Competition and Place Promotion*, pp. 167-8, 172, 180-1.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Stobart, *Identity, Competition and Place Promotion*, p. 173.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

Hanley park started in 1892.¹²⁷ Parks were important signifiers of cultural capital in the Potteries, evidently, ‘being first was important – not being left too far behind was vital.’¹²⁸

The duke of Sutherland and his agents were instrumental in the opening of Queen’s Park. By 1880 the duke had reserved land to the south of the Florence and Dresden developments for a public recreation ground for his Florence tenants.¹²⁹ In 1886, following the inclusion of Florence, Dresden and Normacot in the borough of Longton and under the mayoralty of John Aynsley, the duke offered 45 acres of land to the people of the Borough.¹³⁰

This gift was accompanied by a donation of £500 worth of bricks from the duke’s Blurton tiler and the services of the duke’s surveyor and Florence agent John Garrett to oversee the park’s development. Garrett, initially employed as a mining surveyor, had soon been charged with overseeing the Florence development, demonstrating the multiple and overlapping roles surveyors and agents fulfilled on aristocratic estates. The duke evidently assumed that Garrett’s experience in surveying mines suitably qualified him to survey housing developments and park renovations.

The park was opened with a ceremony reportedly watched by thousands of people on 25 July 1888. It was named ‘Queen’s Park’ to commemorate the Golden Jubilee the previous year. Longton’s mayor thanked the duke for the generous gift of ‘the People’s Park Recreation Ground’ as well as for his continued interest in the Borough and spirited development of Florence.¹³¹ The mayor’s reference to a ‘recreation ground’ echoed Menzies interpretation of the use of the space, as conveyed to the select committee on the Longton Extension Bill in 1883. However, as historian Andrew Dobraszczyk argues, once the park was opened, it was ‘not viewed as a place in which to play’.¹³²

¹²⁷ The first and smaller part of the park opened in July 1894, which Stobart suggest was planned to deliberately pre-empt the opening of Burslem Park in August of the same year. The larger part of Hanley park did not open for a further three years. Stobart, *Identity, Competition and Place Promotion*, p. 173.

¹²⁸ Stobart, *Identity, Competition and Place Promotion*, p. 173.

¹²⁹ Menzies to House of Commons Select Committee on the Longton Extension Bill, 1883, in Dobraszczyk *Queens Park, Longton*, (2011) p. 3.

¹³⁰ Duke of Sutherland to Aynsley, quoted in Dobraszczyk, *Queens Park*, p. 3.

¹³¹ Farmer’s Celebrated Almanac of Longton, [1890], quoted in Dobraszczyk, *Queens Park*, pp. 4-5.

¹³² Dobraszczyk, *Queens Park*, p. 10.

The borough's Park Committee determined that dogs, bicycles and tricycles were to be prohibited in the park, while no provision would be made for football or cricket and no swings or children's facilities would be provided. Sixty cast iron notices ordered people to 'Keep off the grass' [*sic*]. Instead, the park was seen as a 'formally organised space' decorated with trees and shrubs, in which people were intended to sedately promenade. Rules and regulations were displayed and strictly enforced by park superintendents.¹³³

Local bands were permitted to play music in the park, including on Sundays from 1896, but their programmes were to be submitted for approval by the chairman of the Parks Committee. 'Secular music' was explicitly excluded from such concerts and dancing on the grass was banned. Religious groups protested at Sunday concerts and the temptation they presented for children attending Sunday school. The concerts were further criticised for attracting crowds of people from outside the Borough. The Committee assented to the performances on the condition that they were described as 'sacred concerts.'¹³⁴

The park's regulations and provisions aptly demonstrate the ideal of 'rational recreation'. At least one Longton alderman believed it was 'Incumbent on the Corporation' to provide for the 'rational and reasonable enjoyment of the people, even on Sunday afternoons'. The council believed that providing recreation opportunities would be preferable to allowing people to 'follow their own inclinations' as to how they spent their time.¹³⁵ This demonstrates a change of attitudes of the role of town councils by the end of the nineteenth century and the recognition of the importance of recreation in urban areas.

Despite the regulations and lack of facilities, the park remained very popular. In 1890 an estimated 10,000 people attended the park on Sundays while the *Staffordshire Advertiser* observed that 'on a bank holiday... all roads lead to Dresden from the six towns.'¹³⁶

¹³³ Longton Borough Council minutes; 6.9.1888 and 6.6.1889, quoted in Dobraszczyk, *Queens Park*, pp. 10-12.

¹³⁴ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 5.3.1897.

¹³⁵ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 5.3.1897.

¹³⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 21.5.1910.

REEDSWOOD PARK AND WALSALL ARBORETUM

Walsall similarly did not gain a public park until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1869 there existed some indignation that Lord Bradford's agents would not allow the lease of Common or 'Lamma' Land in the town for use as a public park.¹³⁷ The *Walsall Free Press* expressed disbelief that such a proposition was not assented to, highlighting that the proposal stipulated that the park would not be used for political or religious gatherings and posed no threat to the stability of the town.¹³⁸ The newspaper lamented that neighbouring towns had open spaces for public use, and even Bloxwich, much smaller than Walsall, had a village Green. Yet Walsall had 'not one inch of ground' on which its many inhabitants could 'breathe the pure air, or refresh their wearied eyes upon the green sward.'¹³⁹

It was the local landowners, Lords Bradford and Hatherton, whom the *Free Press* believed had a responsibility to provide open spaces for the town. They supposed these noblemen, with extensive rent rolls in the town, had failed to provide parks due to misinformation on the 'state of affairs'. Should 'some kind friend', presumably the local agents of absentee landowners, inform the noblemen of the need necessity of parks, they surely would not hesitate to provide suitable land.

There can be no doubt the lack of open spaces in Walsall had not escaped Bradford's attention. While he rarely visited the town, the contrast with rural Weston-under-Lizard could not have gone unnoticed. Moreover, on his Lancashire estate, land was leased for parks in several townships as early as 1854, indicating his awareness of their necessity on urban estates. By implying that land had not been donated by the aristocrat as he was unaware of the demand for it, the newspaper absolved Bradford of any guilt, passing the blame for his oversight to his agents, who supposedly vetoed the lease of the Lamma lands.

The *Free Press* hoped Walsall would imminently have two public parks, each donated by Bradford and Hatherton respectively. Appeals were made to the landowners' vanity and legacy, the

¹³⁷ *Walsall Free Press*, 14.8.1869, See Correspondence in SRO, D1287/BSG/box 205/3120.

¹³⁸ *Walsall Free Press*, 14.8.1869.

¹³⁹ *Walsall Free Press*, 14.8.1869.

newspaper suggesting such donations would do more to perpetuate the names of the noblemen than ‘the most magnificently designed and sublimely sculpted marble or monumental brass.’¹⁴⁰ While the direct effect of this appeal was perhaps negligible, 15 years later Walsall gained two parks; Walsall Arboretum donated by Hatherton and Reedswood Park leased by Lord Bradford.

WALSALL ARBORETUM

Walsall Arboretum opened as a public space in July 1884, but had not been initially intended as a public park. Arboretums were ‘spaces intended for the growth and study of representative varieties of trees and shrubs’ and were founded in a number of Victorian towns. They epitomised the pursuit of rational recreation and urban sanitary reform.¹⁴¹

The site of Walsall’s Arboretum, in the north of the town, had formerly been limestone mines belonging to the Walhouse family, ancestors of Lord Hatherton. By the 1840s, mining had ceased as the pits were prone to flooding. The flooded pits became popularly known as Hatherton Lake and were informally used for boating, swimming and ice skating.¹⁴² However, this was not a safe venue for leisure and in 1845, John Harvey, mayor of Walsall, drowned while swimming in the lake. Another man subsequently drowned during the search for the mayor’s body.¹⁴³

In 1871, Hatherton leased ‘14 acres and 24 perches’ of which ‘7 acres and 18 perches were covered with water’ to the newly formed Walsall Arboretum and Lake Company. Two years later the Arboretum was formally opened by Lady Hatherton. For an entrance fee and additional rental costs visitors could enjoy the Arboretum’s two lakes, lodges, boat house, bandstand, tree-lined promenade, croquet lawns and cricket pitch.¹⁴⁴

Despite this range of decidedly middle-class activities, the Arboretum did not prove as popular or profitable as the shareholders had envisaged. The lack of activities for children, poor facilities and

¹⁴⁰ *Walsall Free Press*, 14.8.1869.

¹⁴¹ S. Daniels, P. Eliot and C. Watkins, ‘The Nottingham Arboretum (1852): Natural History, Leisure and Public Culture in a Victorian Regional Centre, *Urban History*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (May 2008), p. 48.

¹⁴² M. Glasson, *Walsall Through Time*, (Gloucestershire, 2014), p. 70.

¹⁴³ SRO, D1287/15/1 K/56/2, Potter to Lord Bradford, 12.8.1845.

¹⁴⁴ Glasson, *Walsall Through Time*, p. 70.

the bad condition of the planting were blamed and by 1876 the Company had liquidated and their lease surrendered to Lord Hatherton.¹⁴⁵

By 1884, Walsall Corporation bowed to mounting public pressure and purchased the site as a freely accessible public park. Hatherton was paid £4,000 for his expenses. Any expectation that this ‘people’s park’ would allow for entertainment for the masses were short lived. As with Queen’s Park in Longton, activities were strictly regulated and within a year safety concerns saw the Corporation prohibit boating, fishing and skating on the lake. Nevertheless, great numbers utilised the park. A Jubilee concert held at the arboretum in 1887 was well attended and on Whit Sunday the following year some 10,000 people reportedly visited the park. An 1892 extension to the arboretum provided space for a greater range of activities, including play areas for children.¹⁴⁶

REEDSWOOD PARK

Local rivalry, a powerful impetus for the opening of parks in the Potteries, also manifested in Walsall. It is unlikely a coincidence that the same year Hatherton’s Arboretum became a free public space, Lord Bradford provided Reedswood Park for the town to enjoy. For landowners, a reputation as being less benevolent and generous than their rivals could prove powerful motivation.

The Reedswood Park site was, by the 1870s, a derelict mining area near Birchills in the north of Walsall. From the mid-nineteenth century, Birchills had grown into one of the most densely populated and industrialised area of the town. As early as the 1850s there had been suggestions that Walsall Corporation should purchase land at Reedswood from Lord Bradford to create a recreation facility. These early ideas, ridiculed as the conversion of desolate mining ground riddled with spoil heaps, were condemned as an ‘idiotic folly’.¹⁴⁷

By the late 1870s, with the Arboretum providing the opportunity for paying customers to access open spaces, a renewed campaign was undertaken to secure a recreation space for the populous

¹⁴⁵ Glasson, *Walsall Through Time*, pp.72-3.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁷ *Walsall Observer*, 23.1.1853.

north of the town. The Reverend March passionately appealed to Walsall Corporation to purchase and convert Reedswood into a public park, highlighting the ‘wretchedness’ and ‘misery’ of the people of Birchills and of the ‘darkness, danger, dirt and degradation’ of their neighbourhood.¹⁴⁸

In 1879 Lord Bradford offered to sell to the Corporation 53 acres of land at Reedswood which, to Bradford’s ‘great surprise’, they rejected.¹⁴⁹ Bradford was convinced of the potential value of the park to the town, which would be ‘fraught with such manifest advantages to the inhabitants of Walsall, especially to those residing on the northern side of the Town.’¹⁵⁰ The Corporation were reluctant to embark on such undertaking, which Potter suggested was resultant from the town surveyor grossly overestimating the ‘outlay’ of reclamation costs and conversion of the wasteland into a recreation facility. Potter believed the surveyor’s estimate of over £4,500 was ‘far, very far, beyond what would be required.’¹⁵¹

Ultimately, an agreement was reached and in 1884, Lord Bradford was reported as offering the land to the town as a gift, for a nominal fee. The Corporation hoped Reedswood could become a ‘smiling paradise’ for the people of Birchills.¹⁵² In 1899, two additional pieces of land comprising 10 acres and some mines were leased by Bradford as an extension to the park. This 999 year lease cost the Corporation £60 per year and afforded Lord Bradford a royalty of 3d per tonne of any coal retrieved from the mines.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Address to the Town Council by Reverend March and others, *Walsall Observer*, 29.6.1879.

¹⁴⁹ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/169/2, Peter Potter the younger to Wilkinson, 11.8.1879.

¹⁵⁰ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/169/2, Peter Potter the younger to Wilkinson, 11.8.1879.

¹⁵¹ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/169/2, Peter Potter the younger to Wilkinson, 11.8.1879.

¹⁵² *Walsall Observer*, 29.6.1879.

¹⁵³ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 7 /51/1-3, Lease of land at Reedswood, Lord Bradford and Walsall Corporation, 1899.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The popularity of parks in Walsall and Longton demonstrate the significance of local aristocratic estates in the provision of open spaces for growing towns. They further highlight the struggle local Corporations faced to provide space for townspeople if the assent of landowners was withheld.

That in 1872 over two thirds of land in Staffordshire was owned by large landowners starkly emphasises this difficulty.¹⁵⁴ The duke of Sutherland was perhaps the only individual rich enough and with a large enough estate to donate 45 acres for use as a park for the people of Longton. The motivation of improving the value and status of newly erected villas on Park Street was surely secondary to genuine altruism. That Walsall Corporation accepted an offer to lease desolate mining ground, requiring extensive and costly reclamation, as a site for a park from Lord Bradford highlights the scarcity of land available to local authorities in the absence of generous donations.

As *Walsall Free Press* had recognised in 1869, towns were entirely reliant upon landowners for recreation spaces. As Shaw, anti-aristocracy throughout his memoir, begrudgingly conceded, if it was necessary for there to be a duke of Sutherland to enable thousands to visit the grounds at Trentham then ‘may the Duke live forever.’ He sarcastically added that the ‘simple bliss’ afforded to Potteries children must bring the aristocrats ‘some happy moments even in spite of the heavy cares of vast wealth and property.’¹⁵⁵

Landowners’ assent and predispositions could be integral to townspeople’s access to the countryside. As attempts to extend access to the Lake District showed, while championing the use of the outdoors for the ‘pursuit of health, recreation or pleasure’, Lord Bradford’s support for such pursuits stopped short of encroachment on the choice scenery near his Lake District retreat.¹⁵⁶

While towns’ elites had long pontificated on the merits of recreation for the masses, only in the final quarter of the nineteenth century was action widely taken to provide this. As the duke

¹⁵⁴ Cahill, *Who Owns Britain*, p. 256.

¹⁵⁵ Shaw, *When I Was A Child*, chapter 21.

¹⁵⁶ SRO, D1287/18/32 K/177/1, Griffiths to Lord Bradford, 25.1.1887.

recognised in his speech at the opening of Queen's Park, such spaces were now seen as necessary for 'those who toil much indoors and in a smoky town.'¹⁵⁷

Other changes were also emerging. While the duke and his agents were integral in the provision of recreation space, the use of Queen's Park was determined by Longton Borough Council. The paternalism for the moral wellbeing of the population, including the duke's tenants in Florence, had passed from the landowner to the council.

The manner in which aristocratic estates sought to control leisure was affected by several considerations. The estates attitude towards alcohol was especially pragmatic. Ultimately, on both estates, the leisure activities tenants pursued was of secondary importance for agents than the effects these had on the reputation and 'moral character' of the estate. Public houses were often allowed to operate until they became notorious for unpalatable activities detrimental to the estates reputation.

Rural and urban differentiators impacted upon the perception of which activities threatened the estates' moral character. In the rural villages beerhouses were problematic while on urban estates they were expected. Traditional bonds of deference and social control were diluted, while the availability of public houses on the peripheries of estates negated any latent desire for social control. Although such rural-urban divisions were significant, financial considerations were often the primary concern of aristocratic estates. Florence and Walsall were commercial ventures for the landowners. Although they may have felt some sense of duty and paternalism towards the tenants on these estates, this was not as prevalent as that of the 'closed' rural villages considered their traditional bastions of social control.

The Bridgeman family had only held Walsall since 1802, while Florence was an entirely new venture for the dukes of Sutherland in the 1860s. As such sentiments of local and personal ownership and responsibility that the families had for their ancestral seats of Weston and Trentham, as well as the aristocratic prestige of villages such as Preston-upon-the-Weald Moors with its alms-

¹⁵⁷ Duke of Sutherland, quoted in Dobraszczyk, *Queens Park*, p. 3.

house, was absent. The leisure pursued by tenants on the Walsall and Florence estates was of comparatively less concern for the estates. A public house was built in Florence despite these being ostensibly prohibited and land in Walsall used for the playing of sports or use as gardens was quickly sold if the more profitable option of urban development emerged.

Regardless of the landowner's priorities or intentions, the access to open spaces, albeit limited and regulated, was highly valued by the townspeople. Thousands visited the newly opened parks in Longton and Walsall in the 1880s while the gardens at Trentham represented a green haven to escape the smoke and dirt of the Potteries, if only for one day a year. Despite his later cynicism, it was the duke of Sutherland's grounds at Trentham more than any other space that Charles Shaw associated with the best times of his childhood.

Time for leisure activities was undoubtedly valued by the working classes in the nineteenth century. However, the agents' correspondences consulted for this chapter warn against overstating its importance. Although discussions of leisure are evident throughout the period 1830-1900, it is only in the last quarter of the century, most notably with George Gybbon Potter, that leisure activities are discussed with great regularity. This is consistent with the assessments of Hugh Cunningham who observed that leisure activities became a greater priority for the working classes towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Attitudes towards leisure are useful in analysing the role landed estates played in the development of towns. The priorities of the estate and the conflicting desires for social control or pure commercial benefit are significant and revealing. The prism of recreation demonstrates the attitudes of estate towards urban dwellers when they were not in the structured and supervised work environment. Attitudes of fear, compassion or indifference symbolised their wider interpretation of their role in the modernising processes of urbanisation and industrialisation which they simultaneously profited from yet feared could advent their own decline.

In the development and implementation of landowner's policies towards the provision of recreation, the estates' agents were integral. Most notably on the Walsall estate, policies were

devised and implemented by Peter Potter and his descendants. While Lord Bradford had little interest in the town, the Potters were intimately involved in Walsall's growth, including its social development. While agents' importance to the physical expansion of towns has been demonstrated in the preceding chronological chapters, the supplementation of this with analysis of the impact of the estates social policies adds further to our understanding of the impact of agents on the lives of the towns' inhabitants. As is demonstrated in the final chapter, agents influence further impacted on the politics of the towns, to a significant degree.

6.0 POLITICS AND UNREST IN STAFFORDSHIRE, 1830-1900

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the involvement of the Bradford and Sutherland estates in political developments on their urban land from 1830 to the end of the nineteenth century. The chapter focusses primarily on the politically turbulent period from 1830 to 1850 when aristocratic estates are shown to have been heavily involved in influencing political developments in the towns. Political and social tensions escalated in this period and several flashpoints emerged, both nationally and in Staffordshire. By 1830, considerable pressure existed for the reform of the parliamentary system: namely the widening of the franchise and redistribution of parliamentary seats. The Great Reform Act of 1832 was the most significant political development of the nineteenth century and established both Walsall and Stoke-upon-Trent as parliamentary boroughs. The campaign for reform revealed and exacerbated tensions within society. For some, the Reform Act did not bring sufficient change and Chartists, demanding further political reform, gained popularity. The Chartist movement coincided with strikes and unrest throughout Staffordshire and contributed to the ‘pottery riots’ in 1842. Other measures including the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834 and campaigns to repeal the Corn Laws further escalated tensions in society. Political and social unrest were not confined to Britain. Across Europe, widespread unrest culminated in the revolutions of 1848, the ‘springtime of the peoples’, which were apprehensively watched by the British aristocracy.¹

Amidst such times of turbulence, the reaction of the aristocracy, the traditional ‘leaders’ of society, must be considered. Aristocratic landowners exercised substantial influence on politics in the early nineteenth century and monopolised the representation of the county seats in parliament, as well as many of the boroughs.² As has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters, industrialisation and urbanisation brought challenges to the traditional ‘social control’ many landed families

¹ J. Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe: From the French Revolution to the Present*, (New York, 1996), p. 715.

² G. Clark, *The Making of Victorian England*, (London, 1994), pp. 211-2.

commanded. Their political hegemony, sometimes entrenched for a century or more, was threatened by demands for parliamentary reform. Concurrently, in times of increased poverty and hunger, their position as the wealthiest members of society brought both acrimony from the masses and a perceived duty to assist their poorer neighbours. The 1820s, 1830s and 1840s witnessed an upsurge in anti-aristocratic sentiment.

In Staffordshire, the situation was particularly acute. The county contained several towns and districts that had witnessed remarkable growth in population and importance, yet remained unrepresented in parliament. The Black Country and the Potteries were among the large manufacturing centres demanding a readjustment of the parliamentary system. Simmering political unrest, alongside considerable levels of poverty, made the populous regions in the North and South of the county a tinderbox of social tensions.

Aristocratic landowners and their mansions were the most ostentatious symbol of disparity and injustice in the county. The duke of Sutherland and the earl of Bradford each faced hostility in this period. These two estates had varied responses to the political changes, which will be compared and analysed in this chapter. In both cases, the often bruising encounters and increased animosity faced by estates following attempts to control political developments in the growing towns encouraged landowners and their agents to withdraw from any involvement in national politics by the 1850s.

The landowners themselves were often absent from their estates and were reliant on their agents for information on public sentiment. As with other areas of estate management, agents provided detailed and astute advice to their employees and were integral to the formation of estate policies. Yet agents, as middle-class professional men, occupied an uneasy and curious position. While professionally they were duty-bound to act in the best interests of their aristocratic employers, their personal opinions could often be at odds with those of landowners.

Recognition as a parliamentary borough can be considered an important milestone in the development of nineteenth century towns. Inclusion in the 1832 Reform Act indicates that Walsall

and the Staffordshire Potteries were considered settlements of size and importance. As such, the role of landowners and their agents in politics in these new boroughs is indicative of aristocratic contribution to the social development of towns. Moreover, the waning political influence of landowners over their tenants provides an insight into the translation of social control and deference into the urban setting. Working-class consciousness and political awareness is evident in 1832 and was further heightened by the Chartists movement. As such, politics can be seen as integral to the development of communities in the nineteenth century. How aristocratic estates perceived this awakening consciousness is important to analysing their wider attitudes towards their urban estates and their own perceived role in a rapidly changing society.

By the 1850s both landowners relinquished any attempt to control political developments on their urban estates. While detailed discussions of politics were initially common in the letters of agents to their landowners, most notably in Peter Potter the elder's missives to Lord Bradford, from the 1850s such discussions are almost entirely absent from the correspondence. Landowners recognised that it was neither feasible nor desirable for them to dominate political developments on their urban estates in the manner they had become accustomed in their rural heartlands.

Walsall was considered in 1832 to be of sufficient size to warrant its own Member of Parliament. Longton did not gain its own representation but was included in the new parliamentary borough of Stoke-upon-Trent. As such, in the campaign for reform and the first twenty years of parliamentary representation, Longton is discussed within the context of the wider Stoke borough. However, the political sentiment in Longton can often be discerned as distinct in accounts of the elections for the Stoke borough. Moreover, the election to parliament of Richard Edensor Heathcote, a landowner of Longton Hall, highlights that the town contributed significantly to the politics of the Potteries borough.

6.2 SECONDARY LITERATURE

LANDLORD INFLUENCE IN POLITICS

That landlords controlled the votes of their tenants has been established by historians. G. Kitson Clark discusses the 'influence' that pervaded mid-nineteenth century politics in Britain, particularly in the county seats. The best known form of influence was that of the rural landlord over the votes of his farming tenants. Clark maintains that it is difficult to distinguish between 'legitimate influence', based on natural relationships and mutual respect and 'illegitimate influence' based on intimidation or threats of eviction. There were several reasons why tenants might assent to voting for their landlord's favoured candidate. These ranged from loyalty and a genuine belief that the landlord knew what was best, to fear or a desire to curry favour. Often, Clark asserts, it was the result of unthinking custom.³

H.J. Hanham argues that, far from being eradicated by the Reform Act of 1832, landlord influence was, if anything, increased. Moreover, even later in the nineteenth century, corruption continued and was, Hanham states, probably more widespread shortly after the passage of the 1872 Secret Ballot Act, than at any other time.⁴ The counties and many of the boroughs became, more than ever, 'the preserves of the great landowners' who could command the votes of their tenants.⁵ Even by 1885, county politics, continued to be 'largely the politics of landlords influence', as the law made the tenant dependent on his landlord.⁶

This was particularly the case with rural tenants. As Frederick Pollard wrote in 1883, there was legally no difference between urban and agricultural leaseholds, yet in practice and custom, the difference was considerable. He cited the often personal relationship between the agricultural tenant and landowner, and the practice of a reduction of rent in bad agricultural years. In return, the landlord expected 'a certain amount of deference and compliance' from his tenants. As such,

³ Clark, *The Making of Victorian England*, pp. 211-2.

⁴ Hanham, *The Nineteenth Century Constitution*, p. 257.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

‘political support of the landlord is not unfrequently [*sic*] reckoned on with as much confidence as the performance of... the conditions of the tenancy itself.’⁷

Thus, the relationship between landlords and their rural tenantry is well established. Tenants traditionally followed their landlord’s wishes in politics. This can be seen to hold true on both the Bradford and Sutherland rural estates. Indeed, on Lord Bradford’s Knockin estate, the votes of the tenantry were effectively considered the property of Lord Bradford.⁸ However, the situation of the tenants of an aristocratic landlord in an urban context could be more complex. John Rule highlights that the traditional social bonds and notions of paternalism that were strong in rural villages, were not replicated in the urban setting.⁹ This dilution of traditional influence, coupled with waves of unrest and radicalism in the newly populous manufacturing towns, saw increases in anti-aristocratic sentiment.¹⁰ In such a context, it cannot be assumed that tenants followed the political course desired by their landlord in the deferential manner observed on rural estates. Indeed, Clark suggests that as towns got larger and wealthier, the power of landlords diminished, and they became less confident about wielding their influence.¹¹

THE PERIOD 1830-1850

David Cannadine has written authoritatively on the ambivalence and ambiguity that aristocratic landowners felt for the towns on their estates. He considers the image of ‘the city in arms against a countryside tenaciously opposed to reform’ too simplistic in seeing class and geographical conflict at the root of nineteenth century politics. Such an analysis presents both groups as monolithic, and ignores important variations and divisions within landowning society, as well as between city-dwellers.¹² Instead, the towns were both ‘poison and pillar, blunderbuss and buttress’ for the aristocracy, in a similar way that landowners themselves were seen as ‘both idol and evil, example

⁷ F. Pollock, *The Land Laws*, document 228 in Hanham, *The Nineteenth Century Constitution*, p. 289.

⁸ SRO, D1287/13/8 K/264, Potter to Lord Bradford, 6.11.1822.

⁹ Rule, *Labouring Classes*, pp. 160-2.

¹⁰ E. Richards, ‘The Social and Electoral Influence of the Trentham Interest, 1800-1860’, *Midland History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Autumn 1975), pp. 131-3.

¹¹ Clark, *The Making of Victorian England*, p. 210.

¹² Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 29.

and enemy' for the towns.¹³ The period 1820-1840 is characterised by confrontations between the aristocracy and the towns, and the withdrawal of several landowners from urban affairs, bringing an end to a long period of aristocratic dominance, never again to be fully replicated.¹⁴

The aristocracy were both the beneficiary and victim of urban growth, while urban society was successful in assaults on landed dominance, yet remained divided in its attitudes towards these patricians.¹⁵ It is in the turbulent period of reform and riots that these paradoxes are most starkly highlighted. By examining the reactions of the Bradford and Sutherland estates in this period of confrontation, Cannadine's arguments are both justified and complicated. Cannadine used the examples of the dukes of Sutherland throughout his analysis, and his argument about the withdrawal of landowners in this period is based largely on the backlash towards the 'Trentham Interest' in Staffordshire politics.¹⁶ However, analysis of relatively smaller, and more representative landowners, such as the estates of the earls of Bradford, complicates this picture.

¹³ Cannadine, *Lords and Landlords*, p. 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

6.3 ARISTOCRATIC ESTATES AND PRE-REFORM POLITICS

The composition of parliament developed haphazardly over centuries, creating many discrepancies. Two types of constituencies sent members to parliament: counties and boroughs. Traditionally, counties were intended to represent the interests of the landed gentry, while boroughs represented merchants and traders.¹⁷ The county of Staffordshire, and the borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, each sent two representatives to parliament, from 1355 to 1832.¹⁸

GEORGE BRIDGEMAN, 2ND EARL OF BRADFORD

Members of both the Bridgeman and Leveson Gower families had been elected to parliament regularly since the since the seventeenth century. Orlando Bridgeman, created the first earl of Bradford of the second creation in 1815, represented Wigan as Tory MP from 1784 until 1800. His eldest son, Viscount Newport, the future second earl of Bradford, was head of the family throughout the period analysed in this chapter. His own political sentiments are therefore worthy of consideration. Newport did not relish the idea of a political career for himself. In 1816 he told his father he had ‘no desire to be a Member from any immediate personal pleasure I should derive from it.’¹⁹ However, Newport understood that, as an aristocratic heir, it would be ‘more responsible’ for him to serve as an MP. Sons of noblemen evidently felt a responsibility to represent the people in parliament, which Newport recognised as ‘a duty... and a point of propriety’.²⁰

Duty and tradition were powerful motivators for aristocratic families, seldom more so than in political affairs. The brother of the first earl, John Bridgeman (who took the surname Simpson, for inheritance reasons) was MP for the Shropshire borough of Wenlock, a seat the Bridgeman family had represented for several generations. In 1816, with Simpson soon to retire, Newport recognised that the Bridgeman family were ‘duty bound towards the electors of Wenlock’ to represent the

¹⁷ Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Vol. 1, (London, 1753), p. 159.

¹⁸ W.Page (Ed.), *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, Vol.1, (London, 1908), p. 238.

¹⁹ SRO, D1287/18/11 P/836w, Viscount Newport to Lord Bradford, 13.11.1816.

²⁰ SRO, D1287/18/11 P/836w, Viscount Newport to Lord Bradford, 13.11.1816.

borough and resist any attempt from others to ‘monopolise the two seats’. As such, Newport resolved to stand in the upcoming by-election, if his father desired, although he was not optimistic that he would win.²¹ Ultimately, the idea of Newport standing for Wenlock was dropped.

The sense of duty was akin to the paternalism many aristocrats felt towards their rural tenantry and was not replicated once the family’s urban estates were enfranchised in 1832. It was not suggested that members of the Bridgeman family should stand for election in either Walsall or Bolton.

Instead, in the 1840s, Lord Bradford’s son represented the rural southern division of Shropshire.

Newport expressed fear at the potential of the masses and the danger they might pose to the existing social order. He was prone to dramatic and apocalyptic descriptions of popular politics. Newport was vehemently opposed to measures to reform parliament and was adamantly anti-Whig, to a far greater extent than his father, declaring his ‘great dislike’ of Lord Grey, Henry Brougham and several others with progressive opinions.²²

In 1816 he was scathing of the ‘inflammatory speeches’ and ‘most seditious and mischievous resolutions’ of reformists which were acclaimed by ‘their low blackguard assemblies’.²³ He lamented at length on the subject of politics to his mother, believing that ‘the voice of reason and moderation is stifled, Satan walks abroad unmasked and unchained. The Vengeance of Heaven seems to hang over the head of poor England, and a miracle almost seems necessary to ward off the impending ruin.’²⁴

While the heir to Lord Bradford expressed his lack of interest in a parliamentary career, the duke of Sutherland’s eldest son held similar sentiments. Although Earl Gower, the future second duke of Sutherland, did enter parliament, first for the Cornish borough of St Mawes and then for Newcastle-under-Lyme from 1812, he had little enthusiasm for the role. In 1809, Gower wrote that he was soon to be in parliament, but that he ‘[knew] of little other advantage to be gained from it

²¹ SRO, D1287/18/11 P/836w, Viscount Newport to Lord Bradford, 13.11.1816.

²² SRO, D1287/18/11 P/837e, Viscount Newport to Countess Bradford, 16.3.1817.

²³ SRO, D1287/18/11 P/836o, Viscount Newport to Countess Bradford, 4.9.1816.

²⁴ SRO, D1287/18/11 P/836o, Viscount Newport to Countess Bradford, 4.9.1816.

but that of being able to frank letters.’²⁵ Gower had little interest in making or hearing speeches and, far from any motivation to represent the people, his political career was driven only by convention.

After such long traditions of political representation in the Bridgeman and Leveson Gower families, the heirs of each almost simultaneously expressed a lack of interest in becoming politicians. Their motivations are unclear, although it is possible that, Gower and Newport considered the trivialities of parliamentary politics and electioneering to be beneath their station as heirs to large estates. Conversely, each may have considered the unrest in the early nineteenth century and the recent experience of the French aristocracy, as omens that landowners’ hegemony would soon face challenges.

Viscount Newport was certainly concerned with the ripples of disquiet amongst the population. On the subject of his brother, Orlando, gaining a public office, Newport warned his mother to ‘look at the disposition of the people of England now... half the placemen will be driven out of their places and left to starve.’²⁶ Similarly, Earl Gower did not object when told to stand down in the Newcastle election in 1820, expressly preferring a quiet life, free from the demands of politics and industry.²⁷

THE ‘TRENTHAM INTEREST’

The pre-reform political activities of the Leveson Gower family have been researched in detail by Eric Richards. Through their properties in Trentham and Lilleshall, the family had held a grip on much of Staffordshire politics for almost a century and formed part of the ‘Grand Whiggery, the inner circle of the aristocracy’.²⁸ Such was his influence, it was said in 1819 that Lord Stafford could ‘utter an opinion that is worth ten votes at least in the House of Commons.’²⁹ In

²⁵ Lord Gower to Snape, quoted in Richards, ‘Trentham Interest’, p. 138.

²⁶ SRO, D1287/18/11 P/836z, Viscount Newport to Countess Bradford, 4.12.1816.

²⁷ Richards, ‘Trentham Interest’, p. 140.

²⁸ D. Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs, 1832-1886*, (London, 1965), p. 197.

²⁹ Creevey, quoted in Richards, ‘Trentham Interest’, p. 118.

Staffordshire, as the largest landowners by some distance, the Leveson Gower family possessed effective control over four seats in the boroughs of Lichfield and Newcastle-under-Lyme.³⁰

However, this influence had become costly and by 1790, the family was alarmed at the expense of treating their voters. In Newcastle, it was reported that ‘every resident Burgess, his wife and family, considered themselves as having a Right to be maintained during the poll.’³¹ These high expenses, combined with considerable popular unrest in North Staffordshire, influenced the sensational withdrawal of Lord Gower from the 1820 Newcastle election.³² Gower standing down was described as a ‘revolution’ and a ‘successful rebellion of the freeholders.’ Loch lamented that the ‘upper classes have lost the influence over the middle and lower classes’ and dramatically declared that ‘the revolution is begun, how and when it is to end God knows’.³³

However, while fear and expense may have been factors, commercial concerns were highly significant in the decision to withdraw from politics. A change of attitudes is evident as early as 1812 when Loch assumed the management of the estates. Loch was more concerned with bringing the estate up to its potential value, an aspiration to which politically motivated favours were a hindrance.³⁴

The professionalised practices of estate management Loch had introduced did not have place for the costly expenditure of elections. The Leveson Gower family voluntarily relinquished its political influence in Staffordshire, in favour of investments in buildings and infrastructure which would recoup future profits. Political involvement, and the prestige this brought, was of lesser importance to the estate than maximising profits.

IMPORTANCE OF AGENTS

³⁰ Richards, ‘Trentham Interest’, p. 126.

³¹ Report on Expenditure at 1790 election, quoted in Richards, ‘Trentham Interest’, p. 129.

³² Richards, ‘Trentham Interest’, p. 141.

³³ Loch to Fenton, quoted in Richards, ‘Trentham Influence’, p. 135, Loch to Lord Commissioner Adam, quoted in Richards, ‘Trentham Influence’, p. 135.

³⁴ Richards, ‘Trentham Influence’, pp. 121-2.

In the withdrawal of Gower from Staffordshire politics, the estate's agents, most notably Loch, made important decisions. While Richards describes the election and its significance, he does not consider the integral role that agents played. Loch, rather than Lord Stafford, decided that Gower should stand down from the Newcastle contest. Loch wrote privately that 'the whole responsibility' of the decision 'fell entirely on me'. He saw the contest as 'a large expenditure to be incurred for no permanent use'.³⁵ Further, it was Loch who informed Gower he was to withdraw and Loch who was accused of misjudgement by several subagents, as well as by Lord Stafford's brother.³⁶

The view in aristocratic circles was also that the Trentham agents had influenced Gower's withdrawal. Richard Wellesley, brother of the duke of Wellington, believed Gower had declined because 'all his agents concurred in the decision' that his success was doubtful.³⁷ However, Trentham agent William Lewis was upset by Loch's decision, writing, 'I never expected you would have left me the way you did without saying a word, the shock has been altogether too much for me.'³⁸ Lewis evidently recognised that it was Loch who had made the decision to withdraw.

The estate's agents were further accused of exacerbating the family's unpopularity. Lord Stafford was informed that the conduct of his 'stewards and agents have brought your family into disgrace'.³⁹ Other landowners were similarly told that Gower 'may thank his Father's Agents entirely for his Unpopularity'.⁴⁰ Serving as the link, or often the buffer, between an aristocrat and his tenants, put agents in an unenviable position. However, as with many others aspects of estate management, agents played an integral role in the political affairs of the estate. Loch made important decisions on estate policy. The instructions given by Loch for Lord Gower, heir to the largest estate in the country, to withdraw from the Newcastle election, demonstrates the exceptional influence Loch had.

³⁵ SRO, D593/ K/1/5/9, Loch to Count Flahaut, 16.3.1820.

³⁶ Richards, 'Trentham Interest,' pp. 133-6.

³⁷ Richard Wellesley to Littleton, quoted in Richards 'Trentham Interest', p. 136.

³⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/2/2, Lewis to Loch, 15.3.1820.

³⁹ Anonymous 'Freeholder' to Lord Stafford, quoted in Richards, 'Trentham Interest', p. 136.

⁴⁰ Broughton to Littleton, quoted in Richards, 'Trentham Interest', p. 136.

6.4 PRESSURE FOR REFORM AND 1832

By 1830 there was growing recognition of the need for parliamentary reform. Reformers demanded the equal distribution of parliamentary seats, the extension of the franchise and the removal of 'rotten boroughs'. A considerable body of scholarship exists examining the national campaign for reform. As such, this will not be considered here. The focus instead will be on the reform campaign in Walsall and in the Potteries and the attitudes of aristocratic landowners.

Industrial areas of the Midlands and the North were underrepresented in parliament. Staffordshire was notable amongst these. The Staffordshire Potteries (including the townships of Lane End and Longton) was one of the most populous areas that did not have separate parliamentary representation, being home to some 53,000 people. Walsall, similarly, had no representation, despite having a population of 15,000.⁴¹

Aristocrats held differing views of the impending Reform Bill. The Leveson Gower family, ardently supported reform and in 1833, Lord Stafford was later created the duke of Sutherland on account of his support for the Reform Bill. Having said this, Lord Francis, the duke's second son, later claimed his father was a reformer 'out of mere cowardice and dotage'.⁴²

Edward Littleton, created Baron Hatherton in 1835, and Lord Bradford's rival landowner in Walsall, was an active supporter of reform. In February 1831, Littleton, as Member of Parliament for Staffordshire, presented a petition to the House of Commons requesting the creation of parliamentary boroughs for several populous districts in Staffordshire, including Walsall and the Potteries.⁴³ The County of Stafford, he argued, warranted an increased number of representatives as the county had some 400,000 inhabitants, and ranked as the third best county in terms of 'commercial and manufacturing skill... [and] employments connected with machinery'.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 11.2.1832, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 18.2.1832.

⁴² E. Richards, 'Gower, George Granville Leveson', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004), Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, p. 140.

⁴³ Hansard: Mr Littleton to HC Deb, 28.2.1831, vol. 2, cc. 1035-6.

⁴⁴ Hansard: Mr Littleton to HC Deb, 28.2.1831, vol. 2, cc. 1035-6.

Conversely, many aristocratic families were opposed to reform. The private letters of the Dowager Countess of Bradford to her son George, the second earl, demonstrate the pronounced fears of Reform amongst the landowning class. The Dowager Countess was a keen follower of politics and was well informed on national developments. She was in contact with several peers, and canvassed the political views of all she met and relayed these to her son in detailed missives. She was unafraid to criticise the political views of her male acquaintances and to give advice to her son.⁴⁵ However, the extent to which her opinions were respected is debateable, as Lord Bradford's responses were sometimes brief, and were considerably less regular than those from his mother.

WOMEN IN POLITICS

The political engagement of Lady Bradford, evidenced in her private letters, raises questions about the role of elite women in nineteenth century politics. While much is written about women in the suffrage movement later in the century, as well as about notable individuals in the eighteenth century, women's engagement with politics in the first half of the nineteenth century appears to have been relatively overlooked. Steven King and Patricia Hollis are amongst those who highlight the increasing role of middle class women in local government in the late nineteenth century, yet earlier engagement is not emphasised.⁴⁶ Upper class women are demonstrated to have been involved in public life mainly as figureheads of philanthropic organisations.⁴⁷

A discussion of elite women and politics invariably highlights the contribution of Georgiana, duchess of Devonshire. Charismatic and popular, the duchess acted as an advisor to several of the most important politicians, most notably in the 1780s. She was reportedly able to influence these

⁴⁵ In September 1831, Lady Bradford accused Lord Bath of being 'shilly-shally' and criticised his inclination not to vote as he opposed the Bill but feared the effects should it be thrown out of the Lords. SRO, D1287/18/20 P/953k, Lady Bradford to Lord Bradford, 24.9.1831.

⁴⁶ See P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914*, (Gloucestershire, 1987), S. King, 'We might be trusted': Female Poor Law Guardians and the Development of the New Poor Law', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 49, (2004), S. King (ed.), *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880-1920* (Sussex, 2006)

⁴⁷ See Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England*, (Oxford, 1980).. Millicent fourth duchess of Sutherland is perhaps one of the most well-known of such women. Millicent's philanthropic credentials are emphasised in a hagiography by her son, the fifth duke of Sutherland in his autobiography, *Looking Back*.

men and is credited with achieving a considerable number of political victories for the Whig party. Georgiana was keenly aware of her influential position and wrote, 'I have been in the midst of action... I have seen parties rise and fall—friends be united and disunited.'⁴⁸ As her biographer Amanda Foreman wrote, Georgiana was not the only woman to enjoy political influence and power, but she was the 'most enduring and publicly acknowledged.'⁴⁹

Elaine Chalus has researched the involvement of elite women in English political life in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ Chalus challenges the notion that only exceptional women such as Georgiana were involved in politics, and that their involvement was limited and indirect. The personal, social and familial nature of eighteenth century politics provided more women with a wider variety of opportunities than is recognised. Women from politically active families grew up with politics, and their participation was often accepted, expected, or even demanded.⁵¹

The Dowager Countess of Bradford, Lucy Elizabeth Byng, was from a politically active family. The Byng family, Viscounts Torrington, produced several members of parliament, and Lucy would no doubt have grown up with politics and absorbed its rituals. Her marriage in 1788 to Orlando Bridgeman, MP for Wigan until 1800, may have nurtured this political engagement.

While Lady Bradford's letters show no hint of active involvement in politics, she was engaged with developments and exhibited informed opinions. She was keen to discuss national politics with the peers she socialised with, as well as her son. This contrasts with the assumption in Sarah Stickney Ellis' 1839 guide *The Women of England*. Ellis believed the subject of politics was 'seldom a favourite theme' for women to discuss. Instead, they preferred to talk about their houses, their housekeepers and themselves.⁵² Whilst Ellis was writing primarily for a middle-class audience, the letters of the countess of Bradford belie her generalisation.

⁴⁸ A. Foreman, 'Cavendish, Georgiana, duchess of Devonshire (1757–1806)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, (2004).

⁴⁹ Foreman, 'Cavendish, Georgiana, duchess of Devonshire'.

⁵⁰ E. Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c1754-1790*, (Oxford, 2005).

⁵¹ Foreman, 'Cavendish, Georgiana, duchess of Devonshire'.

⁵² S. Ellis, *The Women of England*, (London, 1839), p. 169.

ARISTOCRATS AND REFORM

By September 1831, it appeared likely that the House of Lords would vote against the second reading of the Reform Bill, and many peers feared the public's subsequent reaction. Some believed the country would descend into civil war, while others feared attack in retaliation for their personal opposition to reform.⁵³ Lord Bradford had determined to vote against the Bill, an action his mother fully supported, although she feared for her son's safety from the inevitable public backlash.⁵⁴ Lady Bradford believed it was the 'Duty' of peers to oppose the Bill and protect the country from radicalism, whatever the consequences. She admonished those peers she considered cowardly in relenting to public pressure.⁵⁵

In October 1831, by a majority of 41, the House of Lords voted against the Reform Bill, causing public outrage. True to his word, Bradford voted against Reform.⁵⁶ Aristocratic fears of the consequences of rejecting the Bill proved well-founded and riots broke out in several towns and cities, the 'last great urban riot in English history.'⁵⁷ The mansions of local aristocracy were targeted and Nottingham Castle, home of the duke of Newcastle, was burned down.⁵⁸

Despite the rejection of the second bill, a third bill ultimately passed in June 1832. The size of the pre-reformed electorate is difficult to gauge due to the diverse voting qualifications, however, estimates suggest some 400,000 people in England had some sort of franchise. Following the Reform Act, the electorate was increased to more than 650,000 as men occupying property worth £10 a year were permitted to vote. A national system of registration of voters was also

⁵³ SRO, D1287/18/20 P953a, Lady Bradford to Lord Bradford, 1.9.1831. 'Lady Bedford says her brother told her that he thinks, whether the Reform Bill passes or not, she may live to see a Civil War.' SRO, D1287/18/20 P/953i, Lady Bradford to Lord Bradford, 18.9.1831, Lord Balcarras foresaw 'frightful consequences' when the Bill being rejected by the House of Lords and expected his house in Wigan to 'fall a sacrifice to his opposing the Bill'.

⁵⁴ SRO, D1287/18/20 P/925n, Lady Bradford to Lord Bradford, 6.10.1831.

⁵⁵ SRO, D1287/18/20 P/925n, Lady Bradford to Lord Bradford, 6.10.1831.

⁵⁶ Hansard: House of Lords Debate, 7.10.1831, cc. 339-40.

⁵⁷ G. Rude, 'English Rural and Urban Disturbances on the Eve of the First Reform Bill', *Past and Present*, Vol. 37, (July 1967), pp. 97-98.

⁵⁸ Rude, 'English Rural and Urban Disturbances', pp. 97-98.

implemented.⁵⁹ The Reform Act disenfranchised 56 ‘rotten’ boroughs, and reduced a further 30 to one parliamentary seat. Representation was given for the first time to over 40 towns and urban areas, including Walsall and Stoke-upon-Trent.

The agitation for reform was felt keenly in Walsall and the Potteries, and large rallies were held in support of reform. Political developments were closely followed by the masses, particularly in the ‘days of May’ when the Reform Bill appeared to be in jeopardy. There were scenes of elation throughout the Potteries when Earl Grey returned as Prime Minister on 15 May 1832, replacing the reactionary duke of Wellington. In Lane End, ‘the bells were rung merrily till a late hour... [and] flags were hoisted at almost all the manufactories’.⁶⁰ Similarly, the Walsall Political Union determined to parade the town and hold meetings every evening until the Reform Bill was passed.⁶¹ Potter relayed how ‘the people’ had taken possession of the Church for more than a fortnight, displaying the Union Jack upon the tower and ringing the bells at rallies and meetings.⁶²

Lord Bradford instructed Potter to inform him of developments and public opinion in Walsall. In several detailed missives, Potter relayed ‘the most angry, revengeful and rebellious feelings’ that were common in Walsall. Business almost wholly ceased in the Black Country during the turbulent ‘days of May’ and membership of the Political Unions increased dramatically. Potter reported how alongside the numerous working and middle class supporters, several ‘wealthy and influential’ men had also joined the Walsall Union.⁶³

Potter played an integral role in informing his aristocratic employer of the strength of public sentiment in favour of reform. He acted as Lord Bradford’s link to his urban estate and warned the reactionary aristocrat that opponents of reform were ‘very, very few’ in Walsall. He believed that, such was the public demand for immediate reform, all opposition to the measure would be ‘worse

⁵⁹J. Phillips and C. Weatherall, ‘The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 2, (April, 1995) p. 414.

⁶⁰ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19.5.1832.

⁶¹ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19.5.1832.

⁶² SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 5.6.1832.

⁶³ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 16.5.1832.

than useless'. Potter believed that the bill must be passed 'to prevent a greater evil'.⁶⁴ Lord Bradford, Potter correctly recognised, was opposed to reform and found Potter's descriptions unpalatable. Had it not been for Bradford's 'express wish' to be informed of the situation, Potter insisted he would have remained 'entirely silent' on the matter.⁶⁵ Potter himself was a supporter of reform, and told Lord Bradford in May 1832 that he was glad the Reform Bill was likely to pass. However, it was a moderate and limited reform he favoured, as he clearly despised the radical policies of Attwood.⁶⁶

Similarly to Walsall, there was mounting pressure for reform in the Potteries. A Political Union was established aiming to ensure that the Potteries received fair representation. The *Staffordshire Advertiser* speculated that one march held in May 1832 was attended by 30-40,000 people from 'every quarter of the Potteries'.⁶⁷ However, in contrast to the unrest in Walsall, the campaign in support of reform remained peaceful in North Staffordshire.⁶⁸

Once passed, the Reform Act divided the Staffordshire county seats into two divisions: the northern and the southern, which each sent two members to parliament. Three new parliamentary boroughs were created in the county: Stoke-upon-Trent and Wolverhampton each sending two members while Walsall sent one.⁶⁹

Walsall's inclusion in the Reform Bill was controversial. Lord Russell, in advocating Walsall's inclusion, described the town as 'rich, populous and thriving', with a population of 15,000.⁷⁰ Others however, claimed that Walsall's real population was 6,401, describing the town as 'the Old Sarum of the Reform Bill' due to the 'tricks and connivances' of the government to see it included.⁷¹

There were some in Walsall itself who were sceptical as to the suitability of the borough for

⁶⁴ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 16.5.1832.

⁶⁵ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 16.5.1832.

⁶⁶ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/81, Potter to Lord Bradford, 29.5.1832.

⁶⁷ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 26.5.1832.

⁶⁸ J. Ward, *Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, (London, 1843), p. 61.

⁶⁹ Page, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 1, p. 272.

⁷⁰ John Croker, cited in E. Homeshaw, *The Corporation of the Borough and Foreign of Walsall*, (Walsall, 1960), p. 138.

⁷¹ Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, p. 139.

representation. Joseph Cotterell, a notable radical and agitator in the town, initially feared the enfranchisement of Walsall would render it a 'close and rotten borough'.⁷² Cotterell had long been a critic of Lord Bradford and there is little doubt he was implying Walsall would become a pocket borough for Lord Bradford and his agent, whom he later accused of intimidating their tenants' votes.⁷³ Despite this opposition, the motion to include Walsall in the Bill was passed in the Commons by a majority of 78.

⁷² *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 9.6.1832.

⁷³ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/81, Potter to Bradford, 19.11.1832.

6.5 ARISTOCRATS IN POST-REFORM POLITICS

TENANT AUTONOMY AND LANDLORD INFLUENCE

Before a discussion of political developments in the newly created boroughs of Walsall and Stoke-upon-Trent, the impact of the Reform Bill upon tenant autonomy and landlord influence must be analysed. Although the 1832 Reform Act brought changes to the parliamentary system, landlords continued to influence the votes of their tenants. It was invariably through their agents that this influence was exercised.

Agents and landlords were quick to suggest that they did not influence their tenants' votes. In the 1832 election, Lewis claimed tenants were 'left uncontrolled to exercise the election franchise to their own wishes'.⁷⁴ Similarly, the duke informed Lord John Russell that he had 'told [his preferences] to all those who have asked my opinion on the subject, but I have done nothing to control the votes of my tenants.'⁷⁵ However, although the duke ostensibly did not wish to influence his tenants, Loch told Lewis who Lord Stafford's preferred candidates were, instructing, 'you know our tenants will vote if qualified, so tell them.'⁷⁶

Loch gave Lewis detailed instructions to ensure that as many of their tenants were registered to vote as possible.⁷⁷ He knew the tenantry would vote as instructed, making it essential that as many of those eligible were admitted as voters. The priority for the estate was to avoid accusations of influencing the tenantry, lest the estate face a public backlash. In the 1835 election, Lewis promised to pursue, 'that course that will keep your Grace's name free from Public censure', yet resolved to 'explain to friends and tenantry your Grace's political feelings.'⁷⁸

As Pollard suggested, after reform, and even as late as the 1880s, rural tenants continued to vote according to their landlord's wishes.⁷⁹ Loyalties to the landowning family remained so natural that

⁷⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/4/2, Lewis to Earl Gower, 13.12.1831.

⁷⁵ SRO, D593/K/ 1/5/21, Lord Stafford to Russell, 21.9.1832.

⁷⁶ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Loch to Lewis, 14.6.1832.

⁷⁷ SRO, D593/K/3/1/18 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1832], Loch to Lewis, 17.6.1832.

⁷⁸ SRO, D593/K/3/4/3, Lewis to duke of Sutherland, 10.5.1835.

⁷⁹ Pollard, *The Land Laws*, document 228 in Hanham, *Nineteenth Century Constitution*, p. 289.

in 1847, the tenants of the Trentham estate reportedly could not believe that the Whig duke of Sutherland did not intend them to vote for his Conservative nephew.⁸⁰ Such an interpretation denies the existence of tenant autonomy or engagement with political developments. In the contest, the estate solicitor Fenton believed it was ‘pretty certain’ that, if ‘left to do as they like’ the tenants would vote for the duke’s nephew. As such, a letter was circulated to the tenants declaring the duke’s neutrality in the contest.⁸¹ The perceived necessity of such a reminder however, does not prove that one was required and that the tenants would have voted blindly for a member of the Leveson Gower family. It serves only to highlight that agents feared the influence they had previously exerted over their tenants could now backfire against them.

The autonomy of urban voters warrants consideration. Lord Bradford’s Walsall tenants generally voted according to their landlord’s wishes, as on rural estates. In the 1837 election, Potter informed Bradford that the tenants had ‘shewn great attachment to you and will doubtless vote most cordially on the conservative side.’⁸² Up to the late 1830s at least, traditional ties of deference between tenant and landlord continued into urbanising areas. This is in contrast to Rule’s assertion of such ties not being reproduced in the towns.⁸³

Lord Hartington’s Committee on the Pathology of Elections in 1870 concluded that corruption was rife at both Municipal and Parliamentary elections. Boroughs were ‘extremely corrupt’ while in County elections, ‘intimidation by landlords prevailed’.⁸⁴ In some boroughs, so common were treating and bribery that a considerable number of voters would not vote unless they were paid, preventing ‘respectable persons’ from becoming candidates. Thus, the prevalence of bribery in Newcastle elections in the early 19th century remained common despite successive Reform Acts.

⁸⁰ Southgate, *Passing of the Whigs*, p. 86.

⁸¹ Richards, *Trentham Interest*, p. 143.

⁸² SRO, D1287/18/21 K/194, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1837.

⁸³ Rule, *Labouring Classes*, pp. 160-2.

⁸⁴ Lord Hartington’s Committee on the Pathology of Elections, 1870 – document 227 in Hanham, *The Nineteenth Century Constitution*, p. 287.

Moreover, intimidation of tenants by landlords, and of workers by their employers was found to be prevalent.⁸⁵

However, the bribery and treating of electors allowed some entrepreneurial tenants to exploit agents' desire to secure votes, and to benefit financially from their vote. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the 1837 Walsall election, a publican tenant of Lord Bradford received money for 'treating his voters' in support of the Conservative candidate. Such practices, Potter believed, were within the 'rightful use of [a proprietor's] possessions'.⁸⁶

Agents were accused by Hartington's report of exerting undue influence on tenants. Agents, it was asserted, frequently used language 'which the landlord would shrink from using', but which he did not consider it necessary to disown.⁸⁷ In the 1832 Walsall Parliamentary election, Potter was accused by Cotterell of threatening and intimidating Bradford's tenants to vote against Attwood, accusations Potter vehemently denied.⁸⁸ Potter assured Bradford that he had issued 'not the slightest threat or intimidation' towards any of the tenants. He had simply endeavoured to 'convince them' of the necessity to thwart Attwood's 'horrible views'.⁸⁹

The 1832 Reform Act changed little in regards of landlords' influence. Moreover, the composition of the reformed Parliament remained similar in some respects. In 1753, Sir William Blackstone wrote that the county seats in Parliament were 'represented by knights, elected by the proprietors of lands' while the boroughs were represented by 'citizens and burgesses, chosen by the mercantile... [and] trading interest of the nation'.⁹⁰ A century later, this distinction was unchanged. In the South Staffordshire election of 1857, Peter Potter the younger believed the seat would be better served by Mr Wrottesley, 'a member of an old County family' who thus had a 'prior claim to represent his County.' The other candidates, Potter surmised were 'a knot of traders' who he believed 'ought

⁸⁵ Lord Hartington's Committee on the Pathology of Elections, 1870 – document 227 in Hanham, *The Nineteenth Century Constitution*, pp. 285-6.

⁸⁶ SRO D1287/18/21 K/194, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1837.

⁸⁷ Lord Hartington's Committee on the Pathology of Elections, 1870 – document 227 in Hanham, *The Nineteenth Century Constitution*, p. 287.

⁸⁸ Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, p. 140, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 15.12.1832.

⁸⁹ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/81, Potter to Lord Bradford, 19.11.1832.

⁹⁰ Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, vol. 1, p. 159.

certainly to be satisfied with the possession of their own boroughs.’⁹¹ The view that landowners had an inherited right to county seats remained entrenched, 25 years after the Reform Act.

This distinction can be seen clearly in the representatives of the Staffordshire county seats. Before Reform, the two seats had been strategically divided by prominent landowners to avoid the need for elections. One seat was controlled by the Leveson Gowers with a member of the Wrottesley family often sitting in their interest. The second seat was held by the Littleton family for the 50 years before reform. In the 1832 election, Littleton and Wrottesley were returned as the first representatives for South Staffordshire. Indeed, for the first 25 years of its existence, the seat was represented without exception by aristocratic landowners.

The North Staffordshire county seat was also dominated by landowners, but to a notably lesser extent. The men elected to this seat were substantial landowners, but often not from the highest ranking aristocratic families. The composition of the electorate, may have contributed to this, Loch observing in 1855 that the gentlemen in North Staffordshire were, ‘Tory, Tory to the backbone’ and ‘great opponents of the influence of the greater families.’⁹²

While the second duke of Sutherland and the second earl of Bradford each rejected political careers, the same was not true of their heirs. The future third and fourth earls of Bradford each represented divisions of Shropshire for the Conservative party.⁹³ Similarly, the future third and fourth dukes of Sutherland both represented the county of Sutherland in Scotland.⁹⁴ Evidently in the 1850s, heirs to great aristocratic estates did not consider themselves to be too grand for politics, as their father’s generation had. They were more than willing to represent safe county seats in times of relative political stability.

Although engagement with county politics continued in both families, the Staffordshire seats were avoided. In 1851, Loch warned that Earl Gower had ‘no chance at present’ of successfully

⁹¹ WLHC, 59/22. (Letter 18211), Potter to Davidson, 30.3.1857.

⁹² SRO, D593/K/1/5/40, Loch to Dundass, 13.2.1851.

⁹³ Orlando Bridgeman represented South Shropshire, 1842-1865, George Bridgeman represented North Shropshire, 1867-1885.

⁹⁴ Richards, *Trentham Interest*, p. 144.

contesting the North Staffordshire seat. The strong Tory interest and Gower not being well-enough known in Staffordshire were cited as reasons, Loch observing that, ‘the family don’t live much with the country people.’ Loch believed that the only way to gain the necessary influence would be to open the grounds of Trentham up to the people.⁹⁵

ARISTOCRATS IN THE REFORMED BOROUGHES

Younger sons of landowning families were occasionally elected to the boroughs of Walsall and Stoke-upon-Trent, although they often quickly took the opportunity to transfer to a more country seat, as soon as that opportunity arose. No members of the Bridgeman family attempted to stand to become Walsall’s representative. Lord Bradford instead utilised his influence to ensure that a favourable Conservative candidate was elected in the borough, through the tireless campaigning of his agent, Peter Potter.

Not all landowners with urban estates avoided borough elections, however. Lord Hatherton, who had an active political career himself, advised his son, Edward Richard Littleton, to stand for election in Walsall in 1847. Littleton, a Liberal, was successfully elected as MP however he served only one term before instead standing for South Staffordshire, a seat formerly held by his father.

In the Potteries, although local manufacturers and industrialists were most often elected to parliament, aristocrats did occasionally occupy the Stoke-upon-Trent seat. In 1836 the Liberal party invited Colonel George Anson, brother of the earl of Lichfield, to stand for the Stoke borough. The Conservative party were unable to find a competitor and Anson duly ‘walked over the course.’⁹⁶ As no election was held, it is difficult to establish how popular Anson was in the Potteries. Moreover, Anson was unenthusiastic about representing an industrial borough, only accepting the party’s invitation after unsuccessfully standing for South Staffordshire in 1835.⁹⁷ Anson again stood for the county seat in 1837, one year after assuming the Potteries seat, and was this time successful. The

⁹⁵ SRO, D593/K/1/5/40, Loch to Dundass, 13.2.1851.

⁹⁶ Ward, *Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 64.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

first occasion that an aristocrat actively contested an election in the Potteries was in 1841, when Frederick Ryder, son of the earl of Harrowby, was defeated.⁹⁸

In 1852, Frederick Leveson Gower, the duke's nephew, was successfully elected to represent the Stoke-upon-Trent borough for the Liberal party. Leveson Gower unseated William Taylor Copeland, the china manufacturer who had held the seat for the Conservatives for 15 years. Evidence from Longton's consistent support for Liberal candidates and violent opposition to Copeland, as will be discussed further below, suggests that Leveson Gower would have received support from the electors in Longton. In the 1819 Newcastle election it had been observed that Lord Gower received strong support in Lane End and Hanley, suggesting that deference to the Leveson Gower's was strongest in those townships.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ward, *Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 80.

⁹⁹ Richards, *Trentham Interest*, p. 132.

6.6 THE BOROUGH OF WALSALL AND STOKE-UPON-TRENT

The first two decades of the newly created parliamentary boroughs of Walsall and Stoke-upon-Trent were turbulent, and elections were often accompanied by violence. In the Potteries, much of the unrest occurred in Longton, which is demonstrated to have emerged as politically distinct from several other Potteries towns. The often chaotic elections of 1832, 1837 and 1841 will be examined in the two boroughs, before periods of stability emerged in both. As a result of these early interventions, and the hostile reaction of the townspeople to their interventions, the involvement of the Bradford and Sutherland estate in subsequent parliamentary elections declined significantly.

As the traditional bastions of social control, aristocratic landowners observed political developments on their urban estates with some trepidation. The estates agents kept the absentee landowners abreast of local developments and, as with many other aspects of estate management, were demonstrated to have played an integral role in the implementation of estate policy. Moreover, the heightened popular awareness and engagement with politics in these formative years of parliamentary representation is indicative of an increase in towns' self-awareness and the construction of a distinct identity.

1832

Once created as a parliamentary borough, Stoke-upon-Trent was represented by prominent pottery manufacturers and other businessmen. The first two members returned for the borough were Josiah Wedgwood II, representing the Whigs, and the Conservative John Davenport, each of pottery dynasties. Davenport owned several pottery manufactories near Burselm and employed some 1,500 people. He was notorious as a severe employer and was known to have been unenthusiastic about the Reform Bill.¹⁰⁰ Davenport was very unpopular in certain areas of the Potteries, most notably in Longton where, on the first day of polling, the inn where he and his committee were assembled was attacked by a mob.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 62.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

Davenport received very little support amongst eligible voters in Longton. Of the 397 votes cast in Lane End, only 35 were in favour of Davenport. In comparison, in Burslem, with an electorate double the size of Longton's, Davenport was overwhelmingly the favoured candidate, receiving 383 votes.¹⁰² Over half the votes cast in Longton were in favour of the industrialist and landowner Richard Edensor Heathcote, of Longton Hall. Heathcote represented the Whigs and was a renowned supporter of parliamentary reform.¹⁰³ That Heathcote and Davenport received substantial support in the towns in which they were employers and landowners, could indicate that electors voted primarily for their local candidate. Indeed, Shaw wrote scathingly of the 'overweening deference' of the people of the Potteries towards 'the master' who was regarded with awe and fear.¹⁰⁴ However, as discussed below, the 1837 Potteries election challenges this assumption and emphasises awareness of party political loyalty, rather than mere deference to a local elite.

Walsall's first parliamentary election was also marred by unrest. The campaign was described as 'long, bitter and violent' and on election day, the military were called to restore order and 35 arrests were made.¹⁰⁵ De Bosco Attwood, son of the Birmingham Political Union founder Thomas Attwood, stood for election. He campaigning against so called 'boroughmongers', of whom Lord Bradford was considered chief.¹⁰⁶ Potter despised Thomas Attwood and was alarmed that his son was initially the only candidate for Walsall. Potter endeavoured to persuade Charles Smith Forster to stand against him. Forster, a banker and member of Walsall Corporation, had been opposed to Walsall being granted a parliamentary seat, but agreed to stand in the first election.¹⁰⁷ Potter recommended Forster to Lord Bradford as a 'very sensible, intelligent man, much inclined to good order.'¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Table of electoral results in Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 63.

¹⁰³ Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 62, Jenkins, *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, vol. 8, p. 63.

¹⁰⁴ Shaw, *When I Was a Child*, chapter 20.

¹⁰⁵ Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, pp. 139-40.

¹⁰⁶ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 5.6.1832.

¹⁰⁷ Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁸ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 5.6.1832.

Forster had a close professional relationship with Potter through his position as chairman of the South Staffordshire Junction Railway and the two were in regular correspondence. Potter had a personal account with Forster's bank, and Forster was one of the initial occupants of Bridgeman Terrace, built by Potter. A prominent citizen in Walsall, Forster used his influence to help Potter and the Bradford estate on several occasions.¹⁰⁹

Despite their stark differences of opinion towards the need for reform, the two largest landowners in Walsall, Lord Bradford and Lord Hatherton, both supported Forster and opposed the 'mob' government advocated by Attwood.¹¹⁰ Forster's policy of moderate reform appealed to the wealthier voters in the town, while Attwood found support amongst the lower middle class artisans.¹¹¹

Potter kept Bradford abreast of the election campaign and described how 'great outrages are daily committed, and some bloodshed [caused]'. Looting was common, committed largely by 'the honest and industrious productives', which Potter blamed on the corruptive agitation of Attwood and his allies.¹¹² As he and his sons walked through one of Attwood's rallies, Potter was 'plentifully greeted by groanings and cries of Boroughmongers etc: from many hundreds of voices.'¹¹³ Evidently many in Walsall correctly assumed Bradford was an enemy of reform. Potter claimed that the Attwoodites, 'with their auxiliaries the Mob' would not allow those opposed to Attwood to vote 'but at the risk of bodily harm if not their lives'.¹¹⁴ Indeed, Forster estimated that 20,000

¹⁰⁹ For example, in November 1830, Forster and his brother assisted Potter in qualifying as a Commissioner on the Walsall Trust, a position he desired in order to influence trustees decisions about the course of a major road through the town. (WLHC, 59/21, (Letter 1921), Potter to Curtis, 16.11.1830.)

¹¹⁰ Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, p. 140.

¹¹¹ Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, p. 140.

Attwood stood for a reduction of taxes, extinction of the East India Companies monopoly, abolition of Negro slavery and vote by ballot. (Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, p. 139.) Potter described this speech as 'a very monotonous, schoolboy sort of a speech' (SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 5.6.1832.)

¹¹² SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 5.6.1832, SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 23.6.1832.

¹¹³ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 5.6.1832.

¹¹⁴ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/193, Potter to Lord Bradford, 23.6.1832.

members of the Political Union from other towns entered Walsall on election day and attacked the inn where Forster's supporters were congregated.

Potter was active in canvassing in support of Forster. He was determined to 'thwart the horrible views of the Attwoodites' whom he considered 'destructionists... the very worst enemies to the cause of a rational reform'.¹¹⁵ Forster was not popular in Walsall and his initial speech was repeatedly interrupted with shouts from the crowd of 'we won't have you' and accusations that he was the choice of the boroughmongers.¹¹⁶ Perhaps due to the limited size of the reformed electorate, Forster was elected by 304 votes to 231, helped no doubt by Potter's tireless campaigning.¹¹⁷

1837

Forster ran unopposed in Walsall in 1835 but was defeated in the 1837 election by Francis Finch, a Liberal.¹¹⁸ Potter was again active in canvassing for Forster and on the day of the election, he and his son visited the houses of all those who had promised their vote to Forster, to ensure that each man went and voted.¹¹⁹ After defeat in this election, Forster declared that he would not stand in any future elections. Upon hearing this, Potter melodramatically declared that Walsall was 'for a long while to come completely in the power of the turbulent and evil minded.'¹²⁰

Potter disliked Finch and considered him somewhat a radical. With evident distaste, he informed Lord Bradford of Finch's activities in Walsall which included petitioning for the repeal of the Corn Laws and the foundation of Walsall's Mechanics Institute.¹²¹ Potter and, apparently, 'all other... respectable people' in Walsall, believed this institute was established 'entirely for factories and party purposes' and admonished the MP's involvement in its foundation.¹²² Finch was a dissenter

¹¹⁵ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/81, Potter to Lord Bradford, 19.11.1832.

¹¹⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2.6.1832.

¹¹⁷ Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, p. 141.

¹¹⁸ Homeshaw, *Corporation of Walsall*, p142

¹¹⁹ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/194, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1837.

¹²⁰ SRO, D1287/18/21/K/195/3, Potter to Lord Bradford, 20.3.1838.

¹²¹ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/100, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.2.1839.

¹²² SRO, D1287/18/26 K/100, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.2.1839.

and while Potter, once a dissenter himself, could hardly oppose Finch on those grounds, he criticised one of his associates as ‘an avowed and proselyting Infidel’.¹²³ Finch was, however, active in representing Walsall’s interests in parliament, including attempts to protect the rights of the passengers from the greed of railway companies.¹²⁴

Potter continued to be in regular contact with Forster after he ended his political career. Indeed, Potter’s correspondence provide considerably more information about Forster than any of the other MPs for Walsall. Upon Forster’s defeat in 1837, Potter suggested it was wise for the Conservatives to ‘leave their opponents entirely to themselves’ predicting that they ‘may ere long fall out among themselves for their share of power and plunder.’¹²⁵ This judgement proved inaccurate as, aside from a four month period in 1841, Walsall was not again represented by a Conservative candidate until 1892.

This withdrawal from interference in borough politics was maintained for several years. Once Potter’s son became chief agent in 1843, he had little to do with the parliamentary representatives of the town and political discussions were rarely broached in his correspondence with Lord Bradford. This suggests that if the agents could not get their favoured candidate elected, they tended to ignore politics in Walsall. This was an indifference shared by the aristocratic family themselves and there is no mention of any of the Walsall MPs in the private correspondence of the second earl of Bradford, indicating his lack of in the political development of that, urban, part of his estates.

Following Potter’s success in ensuring Bradford’s favoured candidate be elected in Walsall in 1832, this influence diminished. Potter could not prevent Forster’s defeat in 1837 and failed to dissuade him from withdrawing from further political contests in the town. The involvement of the Bradford estate in Walsall politics was most active when there were personal ties with a candidate.

¹²³ Hansard: Mr Finch to HC Deb 5.8.1839, vol. 49 cc. 1271, SRO, D1287/18/26 K/100, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.2.1839.

¹²⁴ Hansard: Mr Finch to HC Deb 31.7.1840, vol. 55, cc. 1179-81, Hansard: Mr Finch to HC Deb 23.7.1840, vol. 55, cc. 927.

¹²⁵ SRO, D1287/18/21 K/194, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.7.1837.

These ties, rather than specific policies or doctrine were the strongest factor dictating political engagement in the borough.

As with the inaugural election 1832, the 1837 election in Stoke-upon-Trent was marked by violence. Unable to find a suitable candidate from the Potteries, the Liberal party brought forward two candidates unconnected with the borough: Matthew Bridges of Bristol, and Frank Cyric Sheridan, grandson of the Irish playwright. The Conservative candidate, alongside an increasingly reluctant Davenport, was William Taylor Copeland, a prominent china manufacturer with factories in Stoke.¹²⁶

Contemporary writer John Ward suggests that the Conservative candidates were at a 'manifest advantage' due to their intimate local connection with the Potteries. However, this was not a significant factor in Longton. While in the majority of Potteries towns the local Conservative candidates both secured comfortably the most votes, in Lane End the Liberal candidates received 85% of the votes cast. Each candidate received over three times more votes than either Davenport or Copeland.¹²⁷ Once it became known in Lane End that Bridges and Sheridan were defeated, mobs attacked the houses and manufactories belonging to friends of the successful candidates. Police and magistrates were attacked and the Staffordshire Yeomanry were called to disperse the crowd.¹²⁸

The strong electoral support for the Liberal candidates, despite their lack of connection with the borough, suggests that awareness of party politics was a factor in voting patterns in Longton. Votes were not cast simply in deference to a local landowner or industrialist. The outbreak of popular violence at the election of Davenport and Copeland suggests that the masses in Longton had an adverse reaction to the election of unpopular local elites.

¹²⁶ Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 64.

¹²⁷ Statistics calculated from table of election results in Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 65.

¹²⁸ Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, pp. 67-8.

These trends were repeated in the 1841 election. The Liberal party brought forward John Lewis Ricardo to contest the seat. The Conservative candidates were Copeland and Frederick Ryder, a younger son of the earl of Harrowby. Ricardo was a man ‘without any special ground of connection with the borough or its interests’.¹²⁹ However, he was elected, along with Copeland, and received overwhelmingly support in Longton, securing 87% of the votes.¹³⁰ That an unknown Liberal candidate received such strong support when opposing a local Conservative manufacturer and the son of a Staffordshire aristocrat suggests that party political loyalties were strong in Longton, more so than any notions of deference.

As with each of the elections since the Borough was created, the Conservative candidates were attacked as they canvassed in Longton. Ryland and Copeland were assailed with missiles and were forced to take shelter in the town hall before being escorted out of the town. It was decided that the Conservative candidates should, in future, discontinue canvassing in Longton.¹³¹

Ricardo proved to be a popular and successful representative for the Potteries, winning four successive elections and holding the seat until his death in 1861. Ricardo was actively involved in the repeal of the Navigation Acts which, along with the repeal of the Corn Laws, helped to reduce food prices in Britain.¹³² Upon the development of the Dresden estate by the Longton Freehold Society in the 1850s, Ricardo was honoured with the naming of a street after him, along with several other liberal politicians. Fittingly, Ricardo Street runs parallel to Cobden Street, named after the anti-Corn Law agitator.

¹²⁹ Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 582.

¹³⁰ Calculated from table of election results in Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 583.

¹³¹ Ward, *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent*, p. 583.

¹³² For numerous examples of Ricardo’s contributions see; Hansard: Mr Ricardo to HC Deb, 19.1.1847, vol. 89, cc. 72-73, Hansard: Mr Ricardo to HC Deb, 9.2.1847, vol. 89, c. 1007, Hansard: Mr Ricardo to HC Deb, 16.2.1849, vol. 102, cc. 760-1.

POST 1840s

Despite the unrest brought by the Chartist movement, which will be discussed below, stability of parliamentary representation in the Potteries was marked by the long tenure of Ricardo. Similar stability was established in Walsall in 1852 with the election of Sir Charles Forster, son of Walsall's first MP, Charles Smith Forster. The younger Forster was a Liberal where his father had been Conservative and held Walsall's only parliamentary seat from 1852 until his death in 1891. The stabilisation of political tensions in Stoke and Walsall is representative nationally following the turbulent decades of Reform and Chartism.

Upon Peter Potter the younger assuming the role of Bradford's chief agent, he continued to inform Lord Bradford of political developments in Walsall. However, after 1850, these briefings were rare, as Bradford became increasingly disinterested and aloof from politics in Walsall.¹³³

Potter maintained regular correspondence with Charles Smith Forster, mainly concerning the advent of the South Staffordshire railway. In June 1846, it was rumoured that Forster's son was to stand in the upcoming Walsall election representing the Liberal party. Bradford was evidently concerned at this prospect and instructed Potter to inform him when an announcement of the 'Radical candidate' was made.¹³⁴ Potter assured Bradford that the elder Mr Forster would 'use his utmost endeavours to dissuade or hinder his son from coming forward.'¹³⁵ Such endeavours, if any were indeed made, were unsuccessful. Sir Charles Forster first stood for Walsall in 1847, being defeated by Littleton's son, before being elected unopposed in 1852. During his long period as MP for the town, there was little correspondence of a political nature between the Bradford agents and Forster.

Even in the context of elections of national importance, agents and landowners did not demonstrate any desire to exert their influence in the towns bordering their urban estates. Indeed in 1857, when

¹³³ One notable exception to this concerned the Mayor's dinner in December 1845, which Lord Bradford had evidently expressed some interest in being kept informed of. (see SRO, D1287/18/27 K/111/1, Potter to Lord Bradford, 30.12.1845.)

¹³⁴ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/111, Potter to Lord Bradford, 22.6.1846.

¹³⁵ SRO, D1287/18/27 K/111, Potter to Lord Bradford, 22.6.1846.

an unusually high volume of agent's correspondence survives, there is no discussion in the correspondence between Potter and Bradford of the general election or the likely outcome in Walsall. Similarly, in 1880, another year given particular focus in this thesis, on both the Bradford and Sutherland estates the general election and the members likely to be returned in Walsall and Stoke upon Trent was not a primary concern. Walsall, the Bradford estate accepted, had long become a Liberal stronghold, and there was little that the estate, with its tenuous popularity in the town, could do to challenge this.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, following a protracted period of disinterest, the political involvement of the Bradford agents appears to have been revived. George Gybbon Potter was involved in the town's branch of the Conservative party and actively supported the electoral campaigns of his friend Frank James.¹³⁶ Potter acted as James' solicitor in a slander case against a rival candidate and canvassed on his behalf in successive Walsall by-elections in the early 1890s. Upon James' removal as Walsall's representative for bribery and corruption, Potter defended his friend both publicly and privately.¹³⁷

The personal networks that drove the engagement in Walsall politics for the Bradford agents in the 1830s can be seen to have been similarly influential in challenging a long period of political apathy. George Gybbon Potter however, acted largely on his own political feelings, as well as in his role as a professional solicitor, rather than on behalf of his aristocratic employer as his grandfather once had. The detailed briefings provided by Peter Potter the elder in the 1830s were notably absent from the correspondence in subsequent decades.

¹³⁶ WLHC, 59/25 (Letters 384 and 385), Potter to Balfour, 19.11.1891.

¹³⁷ WLHC, 59/25, (Letter 718), George Gybbon Potter to ET Holden, 11.3.1893, WLHC 59/25, (Letter 442), George Gybbon Potter to Leckie, 19.11.1892, WLHC, 59/25, (Letter 454), George Gybbon Potter to the editor of the *Walsall Advertiser*, 23.11.1892.

6.7 CHARTISM

Following the 1832 Reform Act, there were some who felt the measures introduced had not gone far enough in expanding the franchise and reforming parliament. The Chartists, a working class movement formed in the late 1830s, called for further democratising measures. The movement had six demands: the introduction of universal adult male suffrage, the secret ballot, the removal of property qualifications for Members of Parliament, the payment of Members, equally sized constituencies and annual parliamentary elections. The chronology of the Chartist movement nationally will not be discussed here, rather the section will highlight the perceptions and reactions of the agents of the Bradford and Sutherland estates towards the threat posed by the movement to their urban estates.

The Chartist movement revealed tensions in society which many in positions of authority had hoped the Reform Act had placated. Riots and strikes were plentiful in the industrial towns of the North and Midlands of England, and in South Wales, in the late 1830s and 1840s and were often blamed on the Chartists' incendiary rhetoric.

CHARTISM IN NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE

Robert Fyson argues that Chartism in the Potteries was overwhelmingly a working class movement. Whereas the upper middle classes of other towns were involved in Chartism nationally, this was largely not the case in the Potteries, where this class was very small. Longton is highlighted by Fyson as a hotbed of support for Chartism in the Potteries. It was there, along with in Hanley, that the most significant unrest was witnessed. Police Superintendent, George Ryles, stated in 1839 that there were 1,500 Chartists in Longton, compared with only 50 in Burslem.¹³⁸

There were several flash points at which the threat of mass unrest was perceived to be particularly acute. Fyson highlights three such points in the movement in the Potteries. Firstly, the early Chartist upsurge led to widespread arming in 1839, but no outbreak of violence. Secondly, the riots

¹³⁸ Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', p. ii, p. 110, pp. 346-7.

and trials of 1842, in which the Potteries witnessed some of the largest disturbances and severest retributions nationally. Finally, a second revival emerged in 1848 which did not descend into violence. There followed a considerable period of ‘late Chartism’, lasting as late as 1860.¹³⁹

Chartist’s opposition was aimed towards the rich and powerful and the ‘traditional enemies of radicalism’.¹⁴⁰ The correspondence of the duke of Sutherland’s agents, demonstrate the fear that the estate was likely to be a principal target should a mob arise in the region. Indeed, in 1838, the duke had requested that the Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire visit Newcastle on account of the ‘disgraceful and lawless state of that district’ where ‘a spirit of insubordination and licentiousness’ was increasing.¹⁴¹

In May 1839, Loch was concerned by reports of unrest in the Potteries, especially at Lane End, which was linked to a strike of stone masons. He instructed Lewis to increase the number of night-watchmen in the neighbourhood.¹⁴² Lewis, assured Loch that although there had been ‘some little skirmishing at Lane End between the Police and the Blackguards’, reports of rioting had been greatly exaggerated. Lewis maintained there was ‘nothing to fear’ and believed Loch’s desire for additional security would be counterproductive, warning that ‘to appear alarmed would only afford encouragement to the vagabonds in the neighbourhood.’¹⁴³ While there were several local Chartists, Lewis believed they were ‘scarcely listened to’.¹⁴⁴

In times of unrest and threat, aristocratic estates were reliant on local agents for information. In July 1842, Trentham agent William Steward informed Loch that striking colliers and potters in Lane End were in a ‘riotous state’. Reductions in colliers’ wages in several pits had escalated into widespread strikes and by mid-July Lewis reported that ‘all the colliers in the North of [Staffordshire] have turned out and left their work’. They traversed the country in small parties,

¹³⁹ Fyson, ‘Chartism in North Staffordshire’, p. ii, p. 350.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁴¹ Duke of Sutherland, cited in Fyson, ‘Chartism in North Staffordshire’, p. 86.

¹⁴² SRO, D593/K/1/3/27, Lewis to Loch, 6.5.1839; SRO, D593/K/1/5/35, Loch to Lewis, 9.5.1839, SRO, D593/K/1/5/35, Loch to Lewis, 10.5.1839.

¹⁴³ SRO, D593/K/1/3/27, Lewis to Loch, 10.5.1839; SRO, D593/K/1/3/27, Lewis to Loch, 11.5.1839.

¹⁴⁴ SRO, D593/K/1/3/27, Lewis to Loch, 11.5.1839.

levying contributions and compelling others to join them.¹⁴⁵ These strikes continued for over a month and Loch was kept well-informed of the situation by the Trentham agents. Steward reported the widespread attacks of the property of many of the better off Potteries residents. The houses of a local magistrate, and of the Rector of Lane End, were attacked and the police stations at Spratslade and Lane End were destroyed by the rioters.¹⁴⁶

The agents' were further responsible for the protection of Trentham Hall from any potential attack, a matter that was taken extremely seriously. Steward requested that members of the Stafford and Lichfield yeomanry guard the grounds whenever possible. When none were available, he stationed his 'own men', likely comprising Trentham employees, to protect the grounds. In August 1842 some 60 men were stationed in the yard at Trentham Hall for consecutive nights.¹⁴⁷ Once the riots had subsided and the striking men had returned to work, Steward continued to station 15 men to guard the Hall overnight.¹⁴⁸ As with the unrest in 1839, the Trentham agents assured Loch that the situation was not as perilous as exaggerated reports suggested. Steward felt sure that Trentham was unlikely to be attacked, but remained prepared and vigilant.¹⁴⁹

In 1848, fear of unrest once again arose. Loch was informed by a local magistrate of the 'very alarming circumstance' in the Potteries due to the 'social disorganisation' and 'great distress' amongst the people.¹⁵⁰ Steward was less alarmist, reporting that in actuality 'all was quiet' in the Potteries. Nevertheless, he had purchased £35 worth of guns and pistols, and reported to Loch that Chartists were intending to make a 'great display' near Newcastle.¹⁵¹

Steward assured Loch there was 'not much fear of anything serious happening here' and saw no reason for the duke of Sutherland's family to avoid coming to Trentham as planned. He advised Loch against boarding up any windows on the Hall, as this would 'create suspicion'. The estate

¹⁴⁵ SRO, D593/ K/1/3/30, Steward to Loch, 15.7.1842, SRO, D593/ K/1/3/30, Fenton to Loch, 17.7.1842, SRO, D593/ K/1/3/30, Lewis to Loch, 16.7.1842.

¹⁴⁶ SRO, D593/ K/1/3/30, Steward to Loch, 16.8.1842.

¹⁴⁷ SRO, D593/K/1/3/30, Steward to Loch, 17.8.1842, SRO, D593/K/1/3/30, Steward to Loch, 18.8.1842.

¹⁴⁸ SRO, D593/K/1/3/30, Steward to Loch, 28.8.1842.

¹⁴⁹ SRO, D593/K/1/3/30, Steward to Loch, 18.8.1842.

¹⁵⁰ SRO, D593/K/1/3/36, J.A. Wise to Steward, [forwarded to Loch 29.3.1848], Steward to Loch, 31.3.1848.

¹⁵¹ SRO, D593/K/1/3/36, Steward to Loch, 14.3.1848, SRO, D593/K/1/3/36, Steward to Loch, 29.3.1848.

was, Steward concluded, much better prepared for any unrest than they had been in 1842, when attack had also been averted.¹⁵² As with many aspects of society on landed estates, it was the local agents, rather than the absentee landowner or the celebrated chief agent, who were the true gauge of the feelings of society, and who acted to protect the property of their employers.

Colliery agents for the large pit owners also played an important role in the 1842 riots. Indeed, their actions sparked the initial strikes in the Potteries. W. H. Sparrow owned a large mine near Longton, and in the summer of 1842, 300 of his workers went on strike in protest at a 7d a day reduction in wages, enforced without the legally required two weeks' notice.¹⁵³ It was Sparrow's agent, George Mitcheson, who faced the miner's odium. Mitcheson reported that 200 of the striking miners had paraded through the Potteries with flags and banners. The miners, Mitcheson said, 'swear vengeance against me – and give it out that they will take away my life... I am obliged to watch my house every night and the rest of the property'.¹⁵⁴ This anger towards the colliery agent was perhaps intensified due to Sparrow being in Wolverhampton, suggesting that agents for large industrialists also faced the public backlash for their absentee employer's unpopular decisions, in a manner that aristocratic land agents were accustomed to.

When mobs attacked properties in the riots, Mitcheson's house was spared.¹⁵⁵ However, Earl Granville's colliery agent, Forrester, was not so lucky. His office was attacked and his house was reportedly saved from flames with great difficulty. These attacks were in retaliation for Earl Granville, brother of the duke of Sutherland, following Sparrow's lead and reducing wages by 6d a day, an announcement delivered through his agent.¹⁵⁶ As with Mitcheson, Forrester bore the backlash for his employer's greed as the public face of businesses and estates.

Support for Chartism was not equally strong in all Potteries towns. The movement was most popular in Longton and Hanley. Fyson suggests that the nature and attitude of local elites was an

¹⁵² SRO, D593/K/1/3/36, Steward to Loch, 31.3.1848.

¹⁵³ Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', p. 151.

¹⁵⁴ Mitcheson, cited in Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', p. 151.

¹⁵⁵ Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', pp. 166-7.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 152, p. 163.

important factor in the movement's relative strength. Burslem had a repressive, Tory elite which largely succeeded in controlling its working population, explaining the absence of Chartist activity in that town. Conversely, the Longton pottery industry was largely the preserve of small masters, producing a weak and incohesive ruling elite, which supposedly facilitated the high levels of Chartist unrest in the town.¹⁵⁷ In this analysis, the absenteeism of the duke of Sutherland and the estate's diminishing levels of social control outside of the village of Trentham, could have contributed to the strength of Chartism in Longton.

CHARTISM IN WALSALL

George Barnsby has examined Chartism in the Black Country and argues that while all towns had some support for the movement, Dudley and Bilston had as strong support as anywhere in the country.¹⁵⁸ Walsall had its own Chartist Association, but support for Chartism does not appear to have been particularly strong in the town. Indeed, in a frenzied Parliamentary debate on Chartism in 1839, Francis Finch, member for Walsall, argued that accounts of the arming of the people 'had been greatly exaggerated', stating that such arming was certainly not widespread in his constituency.¹⁵⁹

Early meetings of Chartists in Walsall were disrupted by Anti-Corn Law supporters, who encouraged a boycott of the 'Tory Chartists'. Barnsby suggests that in 1841, the movement gradually gained some support in Walsall. Twenty people enrolled in the National Chartist Association (NCA) at the initial meeting in Walsall in June 1841 and ten representatives from the town were nominated to the General Council of the NCA.¹⁶⁰

The early Chartists did however wield some influence in Walsall. In February 1839, Potter reported to Lord Bradford how the Chartists had 'vastly outnumbered' anti-Corn Law petitioners organised by Finch at a meeting in Walsall Town Hall.¹⁶¹ Potter, as with the Trentham agents, acted as the

¹⁵⁷ Fyson, 'Chartism in North Staffordshire', p. 349.

¹⁵⁸ G. Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, (Wolverhampton, 1980), p. i.

¹⁵⁹ Hansard: Mr Finch to HC Deb, 6.6.1839, vol. 48, c. 34.

¹⁶⁰ Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶¹ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/100, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.2.1839.

link between the absentee landowner and developments on his estates. He informed Lord Bradford of the Chartist's aims, incorrectly outlining the 'Five points' demanded by the People's Charter.¹⁶² Potter was vehemently opposed to the Chartists' demands, describing their aim as 'complete revolution and Sans Culottes tyranny, the worst of all tyrannies.'¹⁶³ Potter's opposition to Chartism is perhaps unsurprising as an agent of an aristocratic estate. Moreover, Potter repeatedly demonstrated himself to be a supporter of conservative values, despite his support for reform in 1832.

As with national trends, Chartism's influence in the Black Country grew considerably by 1842. While support flourished in Dudley and Bilston, the movement received only a steady increase in support in Walsall. The town's Chartist Association was one of five Associations who formed the South Staffordshire District Council, and held weekly meetings.¹⁶⁴ When pressed for an estimation of potential signatories to the Chartists' petition, the Walsall delegate confessed that 'Walsall had not yet discussed the matter', but claimed that 6,000 signatures could be secured.¹⁶⁵ The actual number of Walsall signatories is not recorded, however other Black Country towns secured only half of their estimated signatures.¹⁶⁶

In July and August 1842, there were widespread strikes across the South Staffordshire coalfield, which spread to strikes amongst other workers across the Black Country. Miners at the lime and coal pits around Walsall were amongst the first to strike, and successfully compelled other workers to join them. In July, the Walsall contingent of the Staffordshire Yeomanry was deployed.¹⁶⁷ However, these strikes were not accompanied by the violence and riots witnessed in North

¹⁶² SRO, D1287/18/26 K/100, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.2.1839. Potter failed to mention the demands for equal constituencies, securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors.

¹⁶³ SRO, D1287/18/26 K/100, Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.2.1839.

¹⁶⁴ Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, p.15.

¹⁶⁵ Scholfield, quoted in Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, p. 12. For comparison 10,000 signatures were estimated to be achievable in Bilston, 6,000 in Wolverhampton, 3,000 in Wednesbury and 8,000 in Kidderminster.

¹⁶⁶ Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, pp. 12-14.

¹⁶⁷ *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, reproduced in Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, p. 27.

Staffordshire. Barnsby argues that this was due to the strength and influence of local Chartist leaders who were able to control their supporters and preserve the peace.¹⁶⁸

This analysis differs notably from Fyson's assertion that the absence of a strong elite in Longton facilitated violence. Black Country elites are not considered significant by Barnsby in maintaining order and are conversely implied to have been powerless in some area, notably Bilston where, 'there can be little doubt that the Chartists controlled the town.'¹⁶⁹ As with the Potteries, there was a revival of support for Chartism in 1848 in the Black Country and the Walsall Association held regular meetings. However, organisation had broken down and the movement ultimately came to little in the region.

Ultimately, the aims of Chartists to secure further parliamentary reform were unfulfilled in the 1840s. The movement was accused of inciting strikes and violence in Staffordshire. However, fear of the prospect of organisation of the masses is evident amongst the agents of aristocratic estates, at least in the case of the Sutherland estate. Loch considered Trentham likely to be a principal target for the mob whenever unrest emerged in the Potteries; this suggests that the earlier criticism the Sutherland estate faced over the 'Trentham Interest' had created a deep vulnerability. There remained a sense of existing as a 'garrison in an enemy's country' despite their public support for parliamentary reform in 1832.¹⁷⁰

The fear of violence, so prevalent in the Trentham agents' correspondence, was notably absent from those of the Bradford agents. The threat of an attack on the estate in Walsall was negligible, due in no small part to the complete physical absence of the aristocratic family from the town. They had no grand palace in Walsall which might serve as a target for rioters. While attack was unlikely, Potter considered the ideals of Chartism deeply problematic. While a supporter of the inclusion of 'a respectable class of voters' in the franchise, for Potter, universal male suffrage and secret ballots

¹⁶⁸ Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁹ Barnsby, *Chartism in the Black Country*, p. 29.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted from an anonymous letter, in E. Richards, 'The Uses of Aristocracy: The Sutherlands and Staffordshire in the Nineteenth Century', *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*, Vol. 21, (1981), p. 67.

could only bring working class tyranny to Britain.¹⁷¹ Whether Potter truly believed this, or whether this is merely how he expressed the movement's aims to his reactionary employer, is not clear from the correspondence.

¹⁷¹ SRO, D1287/18/24 K/81, Potter to Lord Bradford, 29.5.1832.

6.8 CONCLUSION

Later in the nineteenth century, subsequent Reform Acts and redistributions further changed the shape of Staffordshire's political representation. These changes recognised the increased importance of industrial areas of Staffordshire, with Hanley, West Bromwich and Wednesbury being created parliamentary boroughs. Conversely, the importance of county seats, the exclusive preserve of aristocrats and landowners, was gradually eroded. Nationally, aristocratic political influence had been profoundly challenged in the 1830s and 1840s, but remained strong.

The political control of landowners over their rural tenants remained largely unaffected by the 1832 Reform Act. However, there was to be no return to Staffordshire politics for the Sutherland family. While individual Leveson Gowers continued to stand in parliamentary elections, no attempts were made to revive the systematic dominance of the family in Parliament. The Bridgeman family continued their involvement in national politics, albeit in safe county seats, and never in Staffordshire.

By 1838, the Bradford and Sutherland estates did not hold significant political influence in their urban estates. Peter Potter had been active in securing a Conservative candidate's election for the newly enfranchised borough of Walsall. He convinced Bradford's tenants of the propriety of voting in accordance with their landlord's wishes. These urban tenants often displayed loyalty to their landlord akin to the deference which remained strong on rural estates. However, where Potter had been successful in 1832, he was unable to prevent a Liberal candidate's election in Walsall in 1837 and was powerless to dissuade Forster from retiring. Thereafter, Potter's influence and interest in politics declined and he became resigned that Walsall had become a Liberal stronghold. Politics ceased to be a prevalent issue in the correspondence between landlord and agent.

While the Trentham agents continued to covertly maintain their influence over the duke's tenants votes, active political engagement and overt attempts to control tenant's votes were discontinued. Under Loch's stewardship, the political withdrawal of the Sutherland estate in Staffordshire had

been calculated to prioritise commercial ventures more likely to bring a more tangible financial return.

In both Walsall and Longton, a radical, liberal identity had been forged, arousing strong bonds of working class loyalty, even amongst those who remained politically disenfranchised. In both towns, this loyalty had the potential to manifest into violence, often aimed at the rich and powerful. In Walsall, the Political Union stressed the separation of interests between the employee and employer. This laid the foundation for a radical tradition which would remain strong in the town, and which prevented a Conservative candidate from again representing the town for over 60 years. In Longton, a fierce Liberal identity was evident by 1832, marking the town as politically distinct from other areas of the Potteries. This identity was characterised by opposition to the rich and the powerful, evidenced by the riots in summer 1842.

The manufacturing districts had, as Loch had observed, begun to ‘cast off their dependence on higher ranks.’¹⁷² While the ‘revolution’ that Loch believed had begun was never to materialise, there can be no denying that the political and social upheavals of the 1830s and 1840s rocked the existing social order. In this respect, it can be considered that Cannadine’s phase of ‘crisis and confrontation’ is largely accurate. However, whether this phase was gradually replaced by a period of ‘mutual admiration’ is far from clear. The earls of Bradford fit uneasily into Cannadine’s analysis. After the 1850s, there is no discernible ‘admiration’ for Walsall from the Bridgeman family. The town continued to be largely ignored by the aristocratic family, and the management of that part of the estate was left to largely to the Potter’s discretion. Conversely, the Bradford tenants in Walsall did not display obvious affinity for their absentee landlord, symbolised by the muted celebrations to Lord Newport’s majority in 1866.¹⁷³

The agents remained the link between absentee landowners and their estates. The influential role of the Walsall and Trentham agents in political matters is demonstrated to have been as integral as

¹⁷² Loch to Lord Commissioner Adam, cited in Richards, *Trentham Interest*, p. 135.

¹⁷³ SRO, D1287/20/5 P/243, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.3.1866.

with many other aspects of the social and economic development of aristocratic estates. Agents sought to control the political activities of tenants and pursue the policy of their employees, as far as such a policy existed, utilising their personal and professional networks. In some respects, agents acted as the facilitators that made the estates realise that traditional political dominance could not continue. They showed that social control was still possible, but as urbanisation progressed, this control was increasingly difficult to maintain. Ultimately, on both estates, commercial ventures were prioritised over political influence. Social control and influence were abandoned in recognition that the aristocracy could make vast profits from urbanisation and industrialisation, but could no longer control these. As such, landowner remained aloof from their urban estates, leaving them to be managed by the local agents.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 AIMS

This thesis addresses several gaps in the existing historiography, and contributes to the understanding of the role and importance of land agents to the development of nineteenth century towns. The social and professional background of agents on urban aristocratic estates has been examined. While much was previously known about a handful of high profile agents, this thesis highlights the importance of lesser known agents to the development of British towns. These agents were responsible for implementing estate policy directed from London, Scotland or rural Staffordshire, and managing the daily running of the estates. It is in examining these less celebrated agents that the true nature of their influence on urban development can be established, rather than by focussing on high-profile, but atypical, agents, as has previously been undertaken by historians.

The thesis diverts focus from the urban aristocratic landowners to the men who actively managed the development of the estates. Rather than championing the contribution of dukes and earls to Britain's urban landscape, as has been undertaken with studies of the Butes in Cardiff, the Ramsdens in Huddersfield, or the Donegals in Belfast, the contribution of men in the emerging professional classes, principally the land agents, is highlighted. The roles and duties of these agents encompassed aspects of several professions, incorporating solicitors, surveyors, technical engineers and landscape gardeners.

In the daily management of the estates these men served as rent collectors, disciplinarians, a veritable police force, moral guardians and *de facto* justices of the peace. Further, as demonstrated in the two thematic chapters, these agents fulfilled significant roles in political developments in the growing towns, as well as in the provision and control of spaces for recreation for the people living there. Agents' involvement in the social and political development of towns, alongside its physical growth, demonstrate their integral contribution to the character of the emerging towns.

Agents served as the link between landowner and tenants, simultaneously enacting the aristocrats' policy, while addressing tenants' grievances. When estate policy was unpopular, agents bore the popular odium. When a project succeeded, landowners reaped the plaudits. In periods of national anti-aristocratic sentiment, some tenants saw through this veneer and recognised that the landowner demanded the agent squeeze them for rent. Oft times however, the veneer held and agents were accused of greedily misrepresenting the landowners' noble intentions.

Integral to this thesis is the development of urban estates. While the management of rural societies has been documented, the dynamics and levels of social control experienced in the urban setting is not fully understood. Similarly, the remit of the rural land agent has been ascertained to be diverse and varied, yet the duties and professional networks in the growing urban towns have not been explored. These relationships had many variables, including the personalities of the individuals (agent and landowner), the topography of the estate, the period of the century of their employment, the political and social affiliation of town councils and the intentions of the individual estate. These gaps in our understanding warrant the re-examination of urban development with a new focus; from the perspective of the landed estate and through the prism of agents' correspondence.

7.2 AGENTS AND PROFESSIONALISATION

Examination of the Bradford and Sutherland estates demonstrates that agents should be placed firmly in the centre of discussions of nineteenth century urban development. While landowners were largely uninterested in the specifics of the development of their urban estates, agents, most notably the Potters of Walsall, were intimately involved in all aspects of the physical and social development of towns. In the period of greatest expansion of Walsall, between 1825 and 1860, it is difficult to refute that Peter Potter and his son were fundamental to the growth of the town. The elder Potter's influence extended to the establishment of the town's political identity, a hallmark of the modern town, through his involvement in the inaugural election once Walsall became a parliamentary borough.

Landowners' apathy towards urban development meant that agents were often afforded considerable autonomy. Peter Potter the elder had a veritable free reign in the development of Walsall including where, and when, to lay roads. The initial impetus for urban development in Walsall came from Potter, rather than from Lord Bradford. As Potter wrote to Lord Bradford in April 1826, 'I confess myself somewhat sanguine in my expectations of the Walsall estate being of much greater importance than it has hitherto been considered.' He advocated the 'extension of the mining operations and the establishment of a good building scheme' as he had already commenced on the Bolton estate.¹ Bradford's permission for developments was often sought retrospectively. When the aristocrat challenged Potter's decisions, the agent justified his motives and was often permitted to continue. Successive earls of Bradford displayed a lack of knowledge and interest in the Walsall estate, delegating the responsibility for the continuing development of the town to Potter's descendants.

The management of the duke of Sutherland's Staffordshire estates was devolved to James Loch, and later his son, George. These chief agents afforded the local agent at Trentham considerable, although variable, levels of authority. The suburban developments undertaken from 1864 were

¹ SRO, D1287/12/1 K/227, Peter Potter to Lord Bradford, 25.4.1826.

overseen by the Trentham agent, and managed largely by a surveyor who, ultimately, undertook many of the duties experienced by an agent with regards to the management of the tenantry.

Further case studies are required to ascertain how far the Potters were the exception, rather than the archetypal land agents. Indeed, the findings of this thesis directly contrast with those of Sarah Webster's study of the role of agents in the agricultural improvements on the Egremont estates. While Webster highlighted diverse patterns of estate management and hierarchies of agents, she concluded that the agents she studied were largely dependent on their employer and had 'little autonomy or liberty over estate management.'² Conversely, this thesis demonstrates that while there were variants to the management structures of different estates, the chief agents on both held considerable levels of power, authority and autonomy in the daily management of estates, and in the development of urban estates. Potter could make decisions of considerable significance to the estate with minimal input from the landowner.

Comparisons with the Sutherland agents in North Staffordshire caution against assuming all agents enjoyed unlimited control of all facets of urban developments, as Potter did. While George Menzies assessed every potential lessee in order to manage the social composition of the suburban developments, the mechanics of planning roads and building plots was delegated to a surveyor. From 1878 John Garrett conforms to the model of agent on the Bradford estate, possessing the practical knowledge of a surveyor, alongside the responsibility of the management of the growing tenantry.

The urban nature of Walsall in comparison with the semi-rural, suburban developments on the duke's Longton estate, represent one important difference in this analysis. Yet even this distinction is not clear. Walsall cannot be considered entirely urban at the time of Peter Potter the elder's appointment as agent in 1820. Moreover, Potter was further charged with the management of the rural Weston and Knockin estates.

² Webster, 'Estate Improvement', p. 224.

Generalisations about patterns of estate management are further complicated when one considers George Loch. As Sutherland chief agent, Loch oversaw urban developments from afar, having little involvement in daily management of the developments. Yet Loch had earlier been influential in the development of the Ramsden estate in Huddersfield, most notably in the development of the railway in the 1840s.³ This demonstrates that assumptions about the role of agents, even the same agent working for different estates, can be problematic.

Due to the scale and notoriety of the Sutherland estate, and the extent of their archive material, the Sutherland estate and the role of James Loch have been used by some historians to form generalisations about estate management. This is shown from Cannadine's phases of urban relations to Spring's rural focus. Yet the case studies undertaken in the present thesis demonstrate that the Sutherland estate should not be considered a typical landed estate. The vast scale of their landholdings, their prestigious social position and the desire to maintain their appearance of grandeur, rendered the Sutherland agents less autonomous than other, lesser known, landed estates.

The legacy of the Highland Clearance policy meant that in the 1860s, the Sutherland agents were regularly curtailed in their fulfilment of policies due to a fear of a public backlash to perceived harsh, or unfair, policies. While naturally impacting on the estate policy in Scotland, this earlier backlash is shown to have similarly inhibited the management of the North Staffordshire estate. Moreover, the great wealth and national reputation of the estate meant that the agents were imbued with the necessity to act only in a manner considered befitting of the aristocratic ideal. When approached to develop their estates, agents routinely rejected such proposals, believing these pursuits to be inappropriate for such an estate.

Agents on the Bradford estate, unencumbered by national prestige and the necessity of maintaining a benevolent reputation, enjoyed a considerably greater freedom of decision making. The Bradford

³ See for example, J. Springett, 'Landowners and urban development: the Ramsden Estate and Nineteenth Century Huddersfield', *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 8, no. 2 (April 1982), pp. 129-144, D. Whomsley, 'A Landed Estate and the Railway: Huddersfield 1844-54', *Journal of Transport History*, New Series vol. 2, no. 4, (1974).

agents were able to evict tenants and erect houses in the manner considered most profitable, without fearing the odium of the public on a national scale.

It is thus lesser known estates, such as the Bradford estate, which are more typical of the landowning class in Britain, as opposed to the Sutherland estate which held over a million acres of land. It is in these smaller estates, and their lesser utilised archival collections, that a more representative understanding of the nature of estate management, and the intentions and priorities of aristocratic estates, can be gleaned.

This thesis contributes to the debate concerning the increasing professionalisation of estate management and the continuance of systems of patronage. Integral to this is the existence of a family dynasty of agents. The Potter family represent successive generations of agents on the Bradford estate. The Potters' affiliation with the Bradford estate in Walsall extended for a further half century beyond the period covered in this thesis. Other members of the Potter family worked for the estate in auxiliary capacities as solicitors, clerks or subagents. The Potters show that the role of land agent was increasingly interwoven with other professions. These professional skills were fundamental to the development of the Bradford estate, and render the Potter family integral to the growth of Walsall.

On the Sutherland estate, no such dynastic firm was in existence. Accordingly, the continuity of estate management and urban development was not replicated. The Trentham agents were selected for their acumen in agricultural management, rather than for any professional qualifications. Lewis was employed for his reputation as a farmer, and Fleming due to his proficiency as Head Gardner at Trentham and his success in seconding for the incumbent agent. George Menzies' land management experience was an advantage, but his selection was secured when he impressed George Loch and the Duke with his character and manner when they met at Dunrobin. Menzies was recommended to Loch by his uncle, who was respected in Loch's London network. Agricultural proficiency and farming knowledge were evidently still considered a prerequisite for

the Trentham agent, despite the rapidly changing requirements of the position due to the advent of suburban developments.

George Menzies' two sons, Robert and John, each followed their father into employment as land agents. Robert worked in London, while by 1911 John was living in Sutherland Cottage, Tittensor. This suggests that into the twentieth century a family dynasty of agents may have been emerging as the retired agent was succeeded by his son.⁴ The Sutherland estate, identified here and in other historians' accounts for its burgeoning professionalism in estate management, appears to have taken a backwards step towards a system of patronage by the end of the century.

Replacement agents were sought and employed on merit when the position of Trentham agent became vacant throughout the nineteenth century. Menzies' son's succession to his father's position by 1911 suggests that earlier outgoing Trentham agents could not suggest or recommend a replacement for their own position. Conversely, on the Bradford estate, the Potters could always suggest an experienced replacement, having trained their sons for the role and requirements of the agent for several years.

Ultimately the professionalisation of estate agency was a staccato affair. It is erroneous to consider the process as a Whiggish advance of progress in which systems of patronage were cast aside and estate management professionalised. Peter Potter the elder and James Loch each undoubtedly instituted increased professional practices to the management of their estates. They brought more competence, responsibility and autonomy from the landowner in decision making than had existed in the eighteenth century agency structures they inherited. They provided auxiliary professional skills to the agents' role; a surveyor in Potter's case, and legal training in Loch's. Yet, throughout the nineteenth century, systems of patronage and familial ties continued to shape estate management on both estates.

While many of the agents examined in this thesis demonstrate Paul Brassley's stipulation of 'hold[ing] exclusive knowledge of a specialised activity' the selection practices of agents on both

⁴ Robert Menzies: 1911 census [piece 488] John Herbert Menzies: 1911 census [piece 16372]

estates cannot, by Brassley's definition, be characterised as professional. Many did not acquire their positions entirely on merit, as elements of nepotism and inheritance are evident.⁵ Utilising Penelope Corfield's less rigorous definition of a profession as a 'skilled occupation organised around specialist knowledge, with both a theoretical and practical bearing', then the occupation of agent, as demonstrated in this thesis, can certainly be considered a profession.⁶

Sarah Webster argued that an estate's use of professional land agency firms signified the gradual move towards the professionalisation of the agency role, as detailed by Mingay and Barbara English.⁷ The use of these firms is entirely absent from the either Bradford or Sutherland estates. The services of these firms were evidently not considered necessary due to the competency of the incumbent agents and the strong professional and familiar networks of the estates.

The agents on the Bradford and Sutherland estates tended to serve for considerable periods. The average tenure for the agents studied is 26 years for the Bradford estate and 28 years for the Sutherland agents. The competence of the agents studied here explains the longevity of these agents in their roles. Most retired or died whilst in service. Only Fleming was removed from his position.

When a replacement agent was needed, a professional agency firm was not considered. The Sutherland estate preferred to promote from within where possible or, more commonly, connections with other landed estates were utilised, alongside recommendations from their social and professional networks. The criteria for selection in these cases were therefore formed emphatically through patronage, rather than in pursuit of professionalism as may well have been indicated by the use of land agency firms, as Webster purports.

Peter Potter the elder's employment as Lord Bradford's chief agent in 1820 is indicative of an early instance of the 'principle of merit' and the triumph of this ethos as identified by Corfield. Potter's authority was vested in the strength of his ability, his practical experience and qualifications, rather

⁵ Brassley, cited in Webster, 'Estate Improvement', p. 49.

⁶ P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700-1850*, (London, 1995), p. 25.

⁷ Webster, 'Estate Improvement', p. 224.

than through patronage or familiar ties. Yet the recruitment of subsequent agents on the Bradford estate demonstrate a reversion to systems of patronage. Potter's son inherited the position upon his father's death, rather than through the merits of his own ability. That the younger Potter quickly proved himself to be a competent agent in his own right is immaterial to this debate.

With George Gybbon Potter, a third generation of the Potter family succeeded to the Walsall agency in 1881, followed by several subsequent generations well into the twentieth century. This demonstrates that while Elliott and Corfield identified a meritocracy to be instituted in many professions by the 1870s, systems of patronage and nepotism were not entirely eradicated.

The Potter family thus aptly demonstrate the complexities of the protracted transition from patronage to professionalism. This process was complex, slow and witnessed many tangential steps towards true meritocracy. As Elliot stated, an ambiguity resulted from a meeting between 'the old tradition of status professionalism and the new tendency towards occupational specialisation.'⁸ The three members of the Potter family studied here each had specialised knowledge and training that equipped them to serve the often intertwined occupations of agent, surveyor and solicitor. Yet the inherited nature of their situation demonstrates Corfield's assertion that meritocracy was 'promoted within the interstices of the old world of patronage.'⁹ As an anonymous author in 1828 succinctly stated; 'The stream of true merit, like that of true love, perhaps, never did run smooth.'¹⁰

⁸ Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions*, p. 43.

⁹ Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, p. 210

¹⁰ Anonymous, quoted in Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, pp. 210-11.

7.3 PATERNALISM, PROFIT MAKING AND THE ABSORPTION OF ARISTOCRATIC VALUES

Agents on the Sutherland estate continued to hold some paternalistic intentions and sense of responsibility towards their tenants. This sense of social duty was extended towards the tenants on the new developments in the vicinity of Longton largely due to their close proximity to the 'home' estate of Trentham, and as these developments were suburban and residential in nature. Agents assumed the responsibility for policing the new estates and maintaining social discipline amongst tenants. Even at the end of the century John Garrett, ostensibly employed as a surveyor, was responsible for reporting and resolving disputes between tenants, and for relaying grievances to Menzies.

The extent to which agents adopted the values of their aristocratic employers is a recurring theme. James Loch largely absorbed the values and outlook of the Leveson Gower family on both a personal and professional level. Upon the death of the first duke in July 1833, Loch told Lewis he was 'happy and honoured' that he had been the one to 'close the eyes of my most excellent and beloved friend.' Loch observed the 'sensation of melancholy satisfaction quite indescribable... I am quite sure that there never was a death more severely felt.'¹¹ The personal bond Loch felt for the duke cannot be considered purely the relationship between a professional and his employer. Evidently Loch felt a powerful personal affinity for the aristocratic family, which surpasses that of a professional relationship.

The Trentham agents absorbed the landowners' values most notable in their attitudes towards urbanisation. Successive agents expressed the desire that the developments at Florence and Normacot should maintain a character befitting the values of the landowner. The discontinuance of pot banks and other industrial activity was expressly enforced to maintain this respectable character. Agents assessed all potential lessees as to their character and suitability to live on the estate, assessments that went beyond merely assessing their means to maintain rent payments.

¹¹ SRO, D593/K/3/1/19 [In-Letters of William Lewis, 1833], Loch to Lewis, 20.7.1833.

Potential lessees with a previous connection with the estate, notably retired labourers or gardeners, were always preferred to potters and other industrial workers. Menzies, in particular, had an evident distrust of workers from Longton, and of industrial activity in general. His attitude can be seen to have been inimical to the local economy of Longton.

On the Bradford estate, Peter Potter the elder was motivated by the potential for profits in his development of the Walsall estate. Potter was not overly concerned that the character of the estate was perceived as befitting of an aristocrat, and recommended the erection of a variety of houses on the estate as well as manufacturing premises, and, in 1837, a workhouse. This ambivalence towards the character of the Walsall estate was shared by Lord Bradford, who demonstrated little interest in the specifics of the Walsall development.

While undoubtedly having a strong affinity for his employer, Potter was ultimately a man of business. His 'schemes' as he described his developments of Walsall, were driven by the opportunity of profit, in both the short and long term. That he did not absorb the values of Lord Bradford is demonstrated in the correspondence between agent and landowner in the Reform Crisis of 1832. While working tirelessly to ensure the victory of Lord Bradford's preferred candidate in the subsequent election, when asked for his personal opinion, Potter expressed that he was strongly in favour of reform, an opinion which he admitted he knew would displease the reactionary Lord Bradford. Lord Stafford and James Loch shared reputations as strong supporters of electoral reform. Loch's association with Lord Dudley was terminated in 1832, in part due to that landowner's opposition to the Reform Act, demonstrating the importance of an affinity of outlook to some landowners.

7.4 PATTERNS OF ESTATE MANAGEMENT

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, writer and journalist T.H.S. Escott analysed contemporary patterns of estate management in 1879. Escott identified four dominant models of estate management which provide a useful comparison with the findings from the Bradford and Sutherland estates. On the first type of estate, the chief agent was in sole control of a geographically concentrated estate, such as on the duke of Cleveland's estate. In the second model, the chief agent managed an estate assisted by regional managers subordinate to him, as was the pattern on the Duke of Northumberland's estates. In the third model the landowner acted as co-ordinator over a number of equally ranked agents who managed dispersed estates, in the mould of the duke of Devonshire. Finally, Escott's fourth model saw agents who managed several smaller estates.¹² Sarah Webster utilised Escott's model and found that the management structures in her case studies could be seen to replicate all of the last three of Escott's categories, to varying degrees.¹³

The Sutherland estate structure most neatly fits the second of Escott's four models; that of a chief agent assisted by subordinate regional managers. This was the model while James Loch, and later George Loch, were chief agents, with William Lewis and George Menzies in particular having increasing authority on the Staffordshire estate. Once George Loch died in 1877, the position of chief agent was discontinued. Thereafter, Menzies co-ordinated with various professionals in London, and with the third duke of Sutherland directly. This would imply that Escott's third model best applied, although the duke cannot be considered to have co-ordinated all estates.

On the Bradford estate, Peter Potter the elder, and Peter Potter the younger until 1861 also most accurately conformed to Escott's second model. They were superior to subagents on geographically dispersed estates and were answerable only to Lord Bradford. However, while acting as the chief agent assisted by subordinate regional agents, the Potters were themselves responsible for the management of the Walsall estate. Peter Potter the elder and Peter Potter the younger must each

¹² T.H.S Escott, quoted in Webster, 'Estate Improvement', p. 267.

¹³ Webster, 'Estate Improvement', p. 267.

therefore be considered a hybrid between Escott's first model, of an agent in sole control of a single geographical estate, but also the second model, of a chief agent with subordinates.

After 1861 this picture is further complicated as Peter Potter the younger relinquished the role of chief agent, but remained Walsall agent. The agent remained superior to the other regional agents, but cannot be considered a chief agent overseeing all areas of the estate. Therefore, as with the Sutherland estate after 1877, the most fitting of Escott's models appears to be the third; the landowner co-ordinating equally ranked agents on dispersed estates. However, as with the Sutherland estate, this heralds unwarranted levels of interest and involvement from the aristocrat as an overseer, certainly with regards to the Walsall estate.

With George Gybbon Potter as agent, Escott's first model applies as he solely looked after the Walsall estate. However, as Edward Griffith began to be referred to as Chief agent in relation to the rural estates, Escott's model again does not fit neatly. Potter was never subordinate to Griffith, so a reversion to the second model of subordinate regional managers with Griffith as chief agent does not apply.

Escott's description of a landowner co-ordinating agents gives, in the cases of the Bradford and Sutherland estates, too much credence to the role of the landowner. None of the aristocrats studied here over a seventy year period were involved in the daily management of their estates to any notable degree, and were largely content for their agents to manage their estates on their behalf. This absence is most prominent in policies of urban development and in the management of urban tenantry. The landowners had less ideological investment and personal interest in such developments, and their input to these policies was accordingly negligible. The rebuilding of ancestral palaces, and, in some instances, the pursuit of agricultural improvements, were areas landowners contributed more readily to. The realisation and success of such pursuits evidentially held the ideological prestige landowners sought, to a far greater degree than urban development on distant parts of their estates.

While the third duke of Sutherland's involvement in the management of his estates increased, in North Staffordshire his input served largely to hinder and frustrate the agents. The duke's instructions, often on topics he was little acquainted with, had to be heeded. Agents thus sought to minimise the detrimental impact such policies would have on the estate. As the accountant Colin Mackenzie informed Menzies in 1878, 'we would all like best to see [the duke] let well alone... [if he] insists on doing something... the question is not what is absolutely the best thing to be done, but what is the best thing to advise in the whole circumstances'.¹⁴ Agents on the Scottish estates had similar frustrations, as the third duke enthusiastically pursued an unsuitable and extremely costly reclamation project in the Highlands.¹⁵

The third earl of Bradford's early attempts to dictate policy in Walsall demonstrated a lack of awareness of the social composition and urban nature of that estate in 1865. Peter Potter the younger informed Bradford that, as there were only two large farming tenants on the Walsall estate, Bradford's suggestions had no bearing in reality.¹⁶

Thus, unlike Escott's model of a landowner co-ordinating agents on disparate estates, in the case studies here the agents become self-sufficient so as not to require close management from the aloof aristocrat. Escott's contemporary models of estate management are thus shown to be largely unrepresentative of the realities of estate management. Escott's models referred to the management of rural estates, perhaps explaining why Webster found many parallels with the studies of agents in her research, while few are found here. The structure for estates that had an urban or suburban nature is evidently different and does not correlate strongly with practices common on rural estates.

While the agency structures on both the Sutherland and Bradford estates changed over time, the dominant trend was towards fragmentation of estate management and ultimately the removal of the chief agents' position by the end of the nineteenth century. The conclusion that this fragmentation resulted in increased direct management by the landowner is not evidenced strongly on either of the

¹⁴ SRO, D593/K/3/9/64 [separate file], Mackenzie to Menzies, 15.3.1878.

¹⁵ Tindley, *The Sutherland Estate*, p. 46.

¹⁶ SRO, D1287/20/5 P/243, Potter to Lord Bradford, 31.3.1866.

estates studied. As Escott wrote his analysis in 1879, a review of the typical structures of estate management at the end of the nineteenth century may well have reflected a general trend of fragmentation as indicated by the two case studies examined here. Other detailed case studies of the management of aristocratic urban estates are needed to ascertain whether these urban areas were typically administered separately from the rural sections, as with Piggott in Bolton and George Gybbon Potter in Walsall, or whether agents' duties straddled the urban and rural, as with Peter Potter the elder in the 1830s.

7.5 METHODOLOGY: BENEFITS & LIMITATIONS

The source set and methodology employed in this thesis have heralded many advantages. The agents' correspondence of the Bradford and Sutherland estates offer a rich and detailed account of the day-to-day management of aristocratic estates. While the urban development of Walsall, and to a lesser extent the suburban development of the duke's land in North Staffordshire, have been touched upon by local historians, none have used the copious agents' correspondence to detail their development. Nor have any attempted to examine these developments from the point of view of the estate, or with a focus on the agents' role.

Such a study of the Bradford estate would not have previously been possible due to the uncatalogued nature of much of the estates collection until recently. The catalogue of the agents' correspondence, held at Staffordshire Record Office, was not publicly available until 2013. Similarly, the sections of the Bradford Collection catalogued by the author as part of the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award, were not previously accessible, nor was it understood what documents this section included. Therefore, due to the efforts of archivists, and the CDA project, significantly more archival material is now accessible to researchers. As demonstrated in the present thesis, these documents can be utilised to chart developments on the Bradford estates. However, as the two thematic chapters, and the sections the building leases catalogued by the author demonstrate, a much greater understanding of the social development of Walsall is now possible.

The use of agents' correspondence has allowed a unique understanding of the processes of urban development and estate management. These letters afford the historian an insight into the negotiations, attitudes, priorities and assumptions of the agents and landowner in urban development. This allowed an unrivalled evaluation of these processes which other sources, which detailed only the final polished outcome, would not permit.

However, it is important to recognise the limitations of the sources and methodology. As outlined in the introductory chapter, a sampling technique for analysing the agents' correspondence has

been employed. This was necessary as it would be unfeasible for a single researcher to read all the agents' correspondence for the entire nineteenth century. No index of the letters exists, and the subject matter discussed is not apparent until each individual letter is read.

This sampling technique led to many serendipitous findings which enriched the narrative. An example of this is that of the housekeeper at Trentham, Mrs Doar, dismissed in spring 1832 for falling pregnant and was later found to be stealing from the estate. These events, highly revealing of estate attitudes and the mechanics of the agency structure, were only analysed amid the research concerning the Great Reform Act and James Loch's involvement in the turbulent 'days of May'. However, for every Mrs Doar, there are undoubtedly many revealing and significant instances that were missed from the sampling methodology. The narrative and conclusions reached have therefore been shaped by the years selected.

There are many 'silences' in the correspondence. By their nature they only depict a snapshot and a fraction of what took place, through the eyes of the men that created them. They predominantly only reflect the attitudes of the agents. The views of aristocrats and tenants are revealed only through letters to the agent, or when their views are relayed by the agent in his own missives. The voices of women are almost entirely absent from the narrative. The one notable exception is the Dowager Countess of Bradford's letters to her son in the context of the 1832 Reform Crisis.

Finally, the letters used are predominantly those of only nine men. On the Bradford estate the correspondence of Peter Potter the elder, Peter Potter the younger and George Gybbon Potter are used in great depth. On the Sutherland estate, the chief agents James and George Loch are used, as are the letters of the Trentham agents William Lewis, George Fleming and George Menzies.

Finally, after 1878, the correspondence of John Garrett, surveyor in the Florence Estate Office, are used in detail. Despite the limited number of individuals consulted, it has been shown that these men came from perhaps surprisingly diverse social and geographical backgrounds. Of the nine, only George Gybbon Potter was born in Staffordshire.

7.6 OTHER AREAS OF ENQUIRY

There are several areas of further enquiry prompted by the research for this thesis. Several characteristics of urbanisation found in this thesis warrant further investigation through detailed case studies. Among such issues include those of how the distance of a potential development from the 'home' estate impacted upon aristocrats' policies of urbanisation. Successive earls of Bradford assented to the Potters' developing the Walsall estate unabated. That the town, rarely visited by the aristocrats, was some seventeen miles from Weston, no doubt facilitated the policy of urbanisation. The Lancashire estate, some seventy miles north of Weston, was also allowed to expand unabated throughout the nineteenth century, and considerable mineral exploitation was undertaken.

Conversely, In North Staffordshire, the Sutherland estate were more concerned with the social character of their suburban developments. The south-western tip of Florence lay only three miles from Trentham Hall. Their agents ensured that no pot banks or industrial works be erected on the estates, and that existing works be torn down. They had abandoned earlier plans to develop the area, and commenced the Florence development with evident hesitancy. The estate appeared to consider the suburban developments as a useful buffer between Trentham and the town of Longton.

Therefore, the distance of the town from the home estate appears to have been a factor in the commencement or delay of urban development for aristocratic landowners. How important this was for other landowners would be a useful investigation through future case studies, and would help establish whether this was a common trend. A strong trajectory cannot be assumed from the evidence of these two Staffordshire estates.

A second area that warrants further study is what became of the urban aristocratic estates once they were sold off. In *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, David Cannadine devotes some consideration to the sales of urban land suggesting that fears of the future of real property, and attacks on slum landlords, motivated many sales. The agent of the Duke of Bedford advocated the sale of Covent Garden in 1913 as he had 'profound misgivings as to the future of real property,

especially in towns.¹⁷ Many of Cannadine's urban examples are from London or the more sensational sales of land in the provinces. He demonstrates that rural estates such as the Duke of Bedford's Thorley estates were sold piecemeal to the tenants at low prices.¹⁸ Who purchased urban estates, and the manner of their sale, requires further investigation. The Solicitors papers of the Earls of Bradford, catalogued by the author as part of the Collaborative Doctoral Award, includes the sale catalogue of the Walsall estate in 1945. While Walsall Corporation bought some lots, the majority were purchased by thousands of individuals. Who these individuals were, their social and economic backgrounds, and what they negotiated with the estate is worthy of further investigation. Occurring significantly after the end of the period of interest for this study, they were not analysed here.

Finally, this thesis is not intended to be a complete history of Walsall or of Longton, rather a study of the development of the parts of those towns on aristocratic estates. The approach taken here could usefully be replicated with an examination of other landowners in order to complete the picture for the towns of Walsall and Longton.

In Walsall this would require a similar study of the management of the estates of Baron Hatherton, the other major landowner in the town. Developments on Hatherton's estates are mentioned in passing throughout the thesis, demonstrating that he too was an active landowner on his urban estate. Moreover, the Hatherton estate is discussed in both the recreation and politics chapters, as the estate had a similarly significant impact to the Bradford estate in those two important areas of Walsall's nineteenth century development. Examining Hatherton's estate correspondence in detail could ascertain whether similar conclusions can be drawn about the importance of agents in urban developments, and the lack of involvement from landowners, or whether the Potters were exceptional in their levels of influence.

¹⁷ Cited in D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, (London, 1996), p. 122.

¹⁸ Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p. 110.

7.7 EPILOGUE

The Bradford and Sutherland estates followed different trajectories into the twentieth century. The large-scale sale of the Sutherland estate was typical of the national trend for aristocratic estates, while the Bradford estate proved to be atypical in this regard.

The fourth duke of Sutherland was to be the last to hold a presence in North Staffordshire. The decision was taken to sell parts of the Trentham estate in the early 1890s, and the ground rents of properties in the vicinity of Longton were the first to be sold via auction at Longton Town Hall. Some 1,360 houses, including much of the estate's property in Florence erected in the 1870s and 1880s, were offered for sale in April 1893.¹⁹ These sales occurred amidst a period of financial strain for the ducal family resulting from the costly and acrimonious legal proceedings following the disputed will of the late third duke.

That the new suburban developments were the first areas of the estate to be sold prompts two conclusions. Firstly, it was evident that these areas of the estate held little interest and attraction for the ducal family. Their populous and semi-urban nature was not considered befitting of the ideals of a grand aristocratic estate, and were deemed rife to be jettisoned when the estate's finances necessitated.

Secondly, the Florence and Normacot developments proved lucrative for a quick sale at auction, and attracted considerable interest from purchasers. When in need of capital, the houses on the new developments were considered a strong option for sale. These developments thus represented a short term investment by the estate, which was quickly capitalised on. The Florence area was planned out, built, populated and disposed of by the estate within a 30 year period.

In 1905, the duke abandoned Trentham, and, after offers to donate Trentham Hall to the borough of Stoke-on-Trent and the county of Staffordshire were rejected, the Hall was demolished in 1912. The fourth duke had doubts over the continued economic viability of landed estates. He instead

¹⁹ Auction catalogue, *Sale of The Duke of Sutherland's Trentham Estate*, on 19th, 20th and 21st April 1893.

sought the ‘immense opportunities’ offered by purchasing land in Canada, opportunities that he believed could not be realised in Britain.²⁰ Between 1908 and his death in 1913, the fourth duke bought over a thousand acres of land in Alberta and British Columbia, investing £250,000 on this venture.²¹ This period coincided with the sale of the Trentham and Lilleshall estates, which reportedly raised £400,000.²²

The remainder of the North Staffordshire estate began to be sold in 1914, but this disposal was postponed until 1919 by the outbreak of the Great War.²³ Some 330,000 acres of the Scottish estate were put up for sale in 1914, and in 1916 the fifth duke sold Stafford House, the family’s London palace.²⁴

Thus, the dukes of Sutherland became one of the many aristocratic landowning families who sold the entirety of their estates between 1880 and 1945 in what was heralded by contemporaries as the ‘silent revolution... the gradual disappearance of the old landed classes.’²⁵ With buyers for the grand houses scarce, many shared the fate of Trentham Hall and were destroyed. Cannadine found that some 79 ancestral houses were demolished between 1870 and 1919, and a further 221 in the interwar years.²⁶

The earls of Bradford defied this national trend. While making small and individual sales of part of the Walsall estate from the 1880s, notably to Walsall Corporation, Lord Bradford was disinclined to large scale auction of his estates. Indeed, in 1919 Bradford refused legal advice to sell his Walsall estate in light of the ‘wave of socialistic feelings sweeping the nation... a prominent feature in Walsall’.²⁷ To the suggestion that the trends of legislation towards wider enfranchisement, the reduced income to be gleaned from landownership and the increase in socialism in the town which had prompted Lord Hatherton to auction much of his Walsall estate,

²⁰ Duke of Sutherland, *Looking Back*, p. 58.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²² Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p. 110.

²³ Dobraszczyk, *Normacot*, p. 21.

²⁴ Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p. 116.

²⁵ Edward Wood cited in Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p. 111.

²⁶ Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, p. 119.

²⁷ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 15/186 (No. 981), H.E. Foster & Cranford to Lord Bradford.

Bradford was dismissive, believing that the ‘conditions that apply to Hatherton’ did not affect his estate.²⁸

Lord Bradford did, however, resolve to auction off the majority of his Walsall estate in 1945, and thousands of properties were sold to individual purchasers. Bradford retained his rural estates, and remains the owner of land in the parish of Weston to the present day. Only due to substantial death duties did the present earl gift the house, park and gardens to the nation in 1986.

²⁸ SRO, D1287/BSG/Box 15/186 (No. 981), Lord Bradford to H.E. Foster & Cranford.

APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE OF KEY INDIVIDUALS

SUTHERLAND ESTATE

HEADS OF THE LEVESON GOWER FAMILY

George Leveson Gower, 1st duke of Sutherland (1758–1833)

George Sutherland- Leveson Gower, 2nd duke of Sutherland (1786–1861)

George Sutherland-Leveson Gower, 3rd duke of Sutherland (1828–1892)

Cromartie Sutherland-Leveson Gower, 4th duke of Sutherland (1851–1913)

CHIEF AGENTS

John Bishton – 1788–1812

James Loch – 1812–1855

George Loch - 1855–1877

General Sir Arnold Burrowes Kemball – 1879–1886

R. M. Brereton – 1886–1889

TRENTHAM AGENTS

The Reverend Thomas Butt - 1805–1814

Francis Suther – 1814–1817

William Lewis – 1817–1842

William Steward – 1842–1858

George Flemming – 1858–1864

George Menzies – 1865–c1911

BRADFORD ESTATE

HEADS OF THE BRIDGEMAN FAMILY

Orlando Bridgeman, 1st earl of Bradford, (1762–1825)

George Augustus Frederick Henry Bridgeman, 2nd earl of Bradford, (1798–1865)

Orlando George Charles Bridgeman, 3rd earl of Bradford, (1819–1898)

George Cecil Orlando Bridgeman, 4th earl of Bradford, (1845–1915)

CHIEF AGENTS

Henry Bowman – 1786–1820

Peter Potter – 1820–1843

Peter Potter, the younger – 1843–1860 (became Walsall agent, 1861, position of ‘chief agent’ discontinued)

WALSALL AGENTS

Peter Potter – 1820–1843

Peter Potter, the younger – 1843–1881

George Gybbon Potter – 1881–1900

Edward Gybbon Potter – c.1900-

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SRO, D593/K/3/1

SRO, D593/K/3/3

Out Letters of James Loch, 1812-1851.

SRO, D593/K/1/5

In Letters of James Loch, 1812-1851.

SRO, D593/K/3/2/2

Out Letters of William Steward, 1842-1852.

SRO, D593/ K/1/3/30

In Letters of William Steward , 1842-1852.

SRO, D593/K/1/3/36

Out Letters of George Fleming, 1858-1864.

SRO D593/K/3/8/15

In Letters of George Fleming, 1858-1864.

SRO, D593/K/3/8

Out Letters of George Loch, 1855-1877.

SRO, D593/K/3/9/1

SRO, D593/K1/5

In Letters of George Loch, 1855-1877.

SRO, D593/K/3/9/41

Out Letters of George Menzies, 1865-1894.

SRO, D593/K/3/9/41

In Letters of George Menzies, 1865-1894.

SRO, D593/K/3/9

Bradford Collection, Staffordshire Record Office (SRO, D1287)

In and Out Letters of Peter Potter, the elder, 1820-1843.

SRO, D1287/9-/33

In and Out Letters of Peter Potter, the younger, 1843-1881.

SRO, D1287/12/

In and Out Letters of George Gybbon Potter, 1881-1900.

SRO, D1287/18/

Collection of Solicitors papers of Bailey, Shaw and Gillett, 1847-1906

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