

A Nineteenth-Century Estate Sale: Wetherby 1824

By R. W. UNWIN

BY the second decade of the nineteenth century, nine-tenths of the 1,448 acres that constituted the Yorkshire manor and township of Wetherby was in the possession of the sixth Duke of Devonshire, whose family had gradually extended their landholding from the seventeenth century onwards. The sale of this estate in 1824—over 1,300 acres, the manorial rights, and more than two hundred business and domestic premises—aroused interest over a wide area. Numerous printed sale catalogues were distributed, and newspapers throughout the county included a complete account of the auction details, being confident that it provided “a fair criterion of the value of landed property in this part of the kingdom.”¹

This article looks at the possible reasons for the sale, while the voluminous conveyancy material necessitated by such a turnover of property provides an opportunity for reconstruction and analysis for which there can be few parallels in the period. By collating the information in the sale catalogue, land tax returns, commercial directories, newspapers, and documents of title, it is possible to establish fairly accurately the socio-economic structure of Wetherby on the eve of the auction. An attempt is also made to analyse the pattern of ownership and the occupational structure of Wetherby in the late 1820's.

I

During the French and Napoleonic Wars, agriculture in England was, in general, prosperous with the inflation of farmers' profits and landlords' rents. In the decade after the ending of the war, there were a number of economic crises, the mild recovery in prices during 1816–18 not being sustained. Towards the end of 1819 cereal prices began to fall and continued to do so until they reached their nadir in 1822, exacerbated in the short run by the resumption of gold payments. The worst fears of depression were realized, and petitions of distress poured into the House of Commons from all over the country. The *Reports* of the Select Committees on Agricultural Distress in 1820–2 leave no doubt about the widespread distress among farmers and the difficulties of estate stewards during the period of adjustment following the wars. Worst hit were those tenants with leases contracted before 1812, who could continue to farm their lands only by piling up arrears of rent or eating into reserves. On the other hand, tenants with annual contracts could receive immediate relief by a reduction in rents which might placate the farmers or keep them in occupation. With falling corn prices and a crisis among dairy- and stock-farmers,

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 Oct. 1824. This article is based partly on work carried out by members of the Wetherby Tutorial Class—organized jointly by the W.E.A. and the Department of Adult Education of Leeds University—to whom the author, as tutor, acknowledges his appreciation. Professor B. Jennings offered helpful criticism in the early stages of the research.

the early 1820's were an extraordinarily difficult period, and some landlords were obliged to make considerable permanent reductions in rentals.¹

It is not possible to assess exactly the effects of such adverse conditions on the numerous market-towns up and down the country, but concerned as they were in the supply of goods to agricultural hinterlands where purchasing power was depleted, and marketing produce at falling prices, it would not be difficult to understand why there could be considerable distress. It is not inconceivable that it was distress in the Wetherby district, coupled with the knowledge that rents had been abated in many places by up to 30 per cent, which prompted the inhabitants of the township to petition the Duke of Devonshire in 1823 for a reduction and more equitable distribution of an annual rental which had been fixed in 1806. At the time of the sale the story of the petition appeared in many Yorkshire newspapers, and it was widely rumoured that the sixth Duke had been so incensed by the action of his tenants that it had been decided to sell the estate.²

Whether the Duke of Devonshire and his agent were motivated solely by the petition from the inhabitants of Wetherby cannot be readily substantiated, since the first-hand opinions of the *dramatis personae* have not so far come to light. One Yorkshire newspaper ascribed the decision to sell Wetherby to another factor, namely that the sixth Duke hoped to consolidate his Derbyshire estates by the purchase of the Marquis of Ormonde's property which was put under the hammer at about the same time.³ The Devonshire agent certainly attended the sale of the Ormonde estate less than a month after the sale of Wetherby, but it seems just as likely that the proceeds from the Yorkshire estate would have been used to help pay for the improvements which the architect Wyattville was carrying out at Chatsworth—the Lodges and Entrance Gates, the Drive, and the North Wing, dominated by the Theatre Tower.⁴ However, it is also clear that, if it was necessary to put real estate on the market, the need was not sufficiently acute that other West Riding property had to be sold—a search through the Registry of Deeds revealed that other Devonshire lands were not sold at the same time as Wetherby.

The motives behind the sale are open for discussion; what is certain is that its timing could scarcely have been more opportune. On 21 October 1824, the *Leeds Intelligencer* reported:

It is a well known fact, that the whole of this valuable property was offered to a distinguished landholder in this county for the sum of £121,000. A few days prior to the sale taking place, a gentleman of the neighbourhood of Wetherby offered £150,000 for it, but at that time the Duke's solicitor thought proper to decline taking it. From the result of the whole, it is shown that, if a few enterpris-

¹ H. G. Hunt, 'Agricultural Rent in South East England 1788-1825', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, vii, pt 2, p. 103.

² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 Oct. 1824; *Leeds Mercury*, 16 Oct. 1824; *York Courant*, 19 Oct. 1824; *York Herald*, 16 Oct. 1824.

³ *York Chronicle*, 21 Oct. 1824.

⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, xciv, 1824, p. 637. "The agent of the Duke of Devonshire was the bidder at £215,000 . . . (for the Ormonde estate) purchased by Mr Arkwright."

ing gentlemen had purchased this property on the liberal terms first held out, what an amazing sum might have been realised.

The circumstances which led to the refusal of an offer 25 per cent above the original asking price, and the final realization of over £168,000, clearly require explanation.

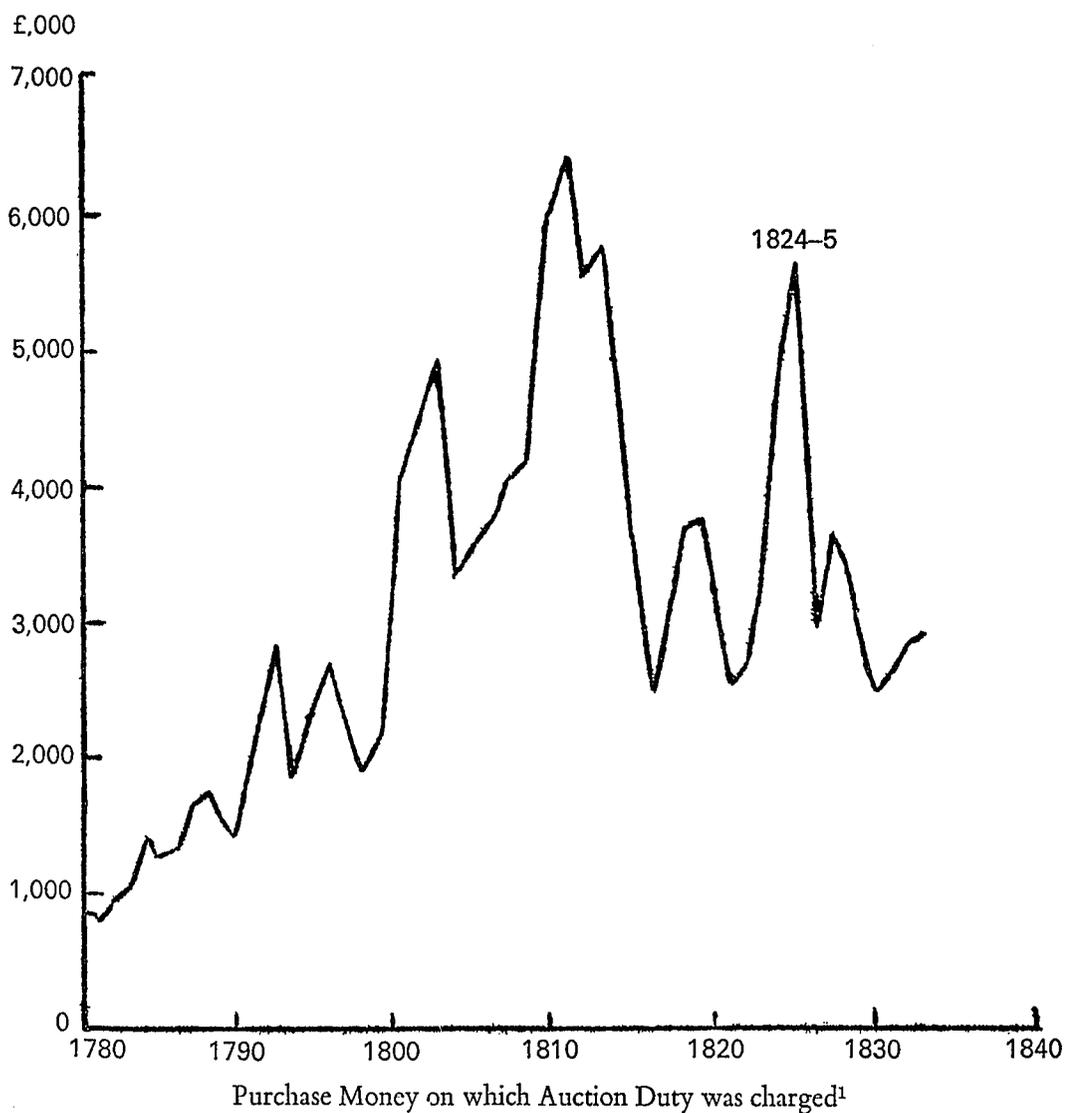
In the absence of a national land-market, how could the agents and solicitors acting on behalf of a large landowner decide on the most favourable time to sell an estate? Reports in local or county newspapers on commodity or stock-prices were commonplace by the early nineteenth century, but could never produce the ruling price of land—it did not exist. The value of land depends partly on a variety of local qualities—geology, situation, climate, and accessibility among others—and partly on the variety of tastes and interests of prospective purchasers. Nevertheless, general influences could produce effects on the level of land transfers, and such influences certainly figured in the press. By consulting the details of sale auctions the relation between the figures of purchase money and the actual quantities of property sold could be calculated. The upward movement in the number of years' purchase during the period 1792–1811 was clearly discernible in a table produced by Arthur Young. Other sources also indicate a higher rate than usual during the Napoleonic Wars, of up to thirty-five years' purchase of existing rents at a time when rents were expected to go on rising.¹ At times of uncertainty demand-determined prices for land tend to fall, for example in the years which immediately followed the Napoleonic Wars. Although the depression was beginning to lift in manufacturing circles by 1820, and merchants were predicting a period of prosperity, agriculture and the land-market remained in the doldrums until at least 1823. Was it such conditions which meant that the original asking price for the Wetherby estate of £121,000 could not be obtained?

The refusal of an offer of £150,000 a few months later is more easily explained. Some economic historians consider the years 1824–5 to have witnessed the first truly modern cyclical boom, the culmination of the upswing which had been taking place in some branches of the economy after 1821. The features are well known: a stock-market boom; a peak of industrial activity; a wave of speculation; and a burst of real-estate investment and domestic building. As early as February 1824 the *Yorkshire Gazette* cautioned that speculation was likely to raise the value of land to an artificially high level, "a state, we conceive, equally remote from the high prices of former years, and the depression of the last years." The continued advance in land prices no doubt weighed heavily with those who advised that the offer of £150,000 for the Wetherby estate should not be accepted, but that preparations should continue for the public auction. Probably the most effective way to find out the market value of an estate was to sell it publicly, but with a reserve price based on a more or less accepted idea of the value. If necessary, it could then be bought in at a price just above the final bid, and then sold by private contract.²

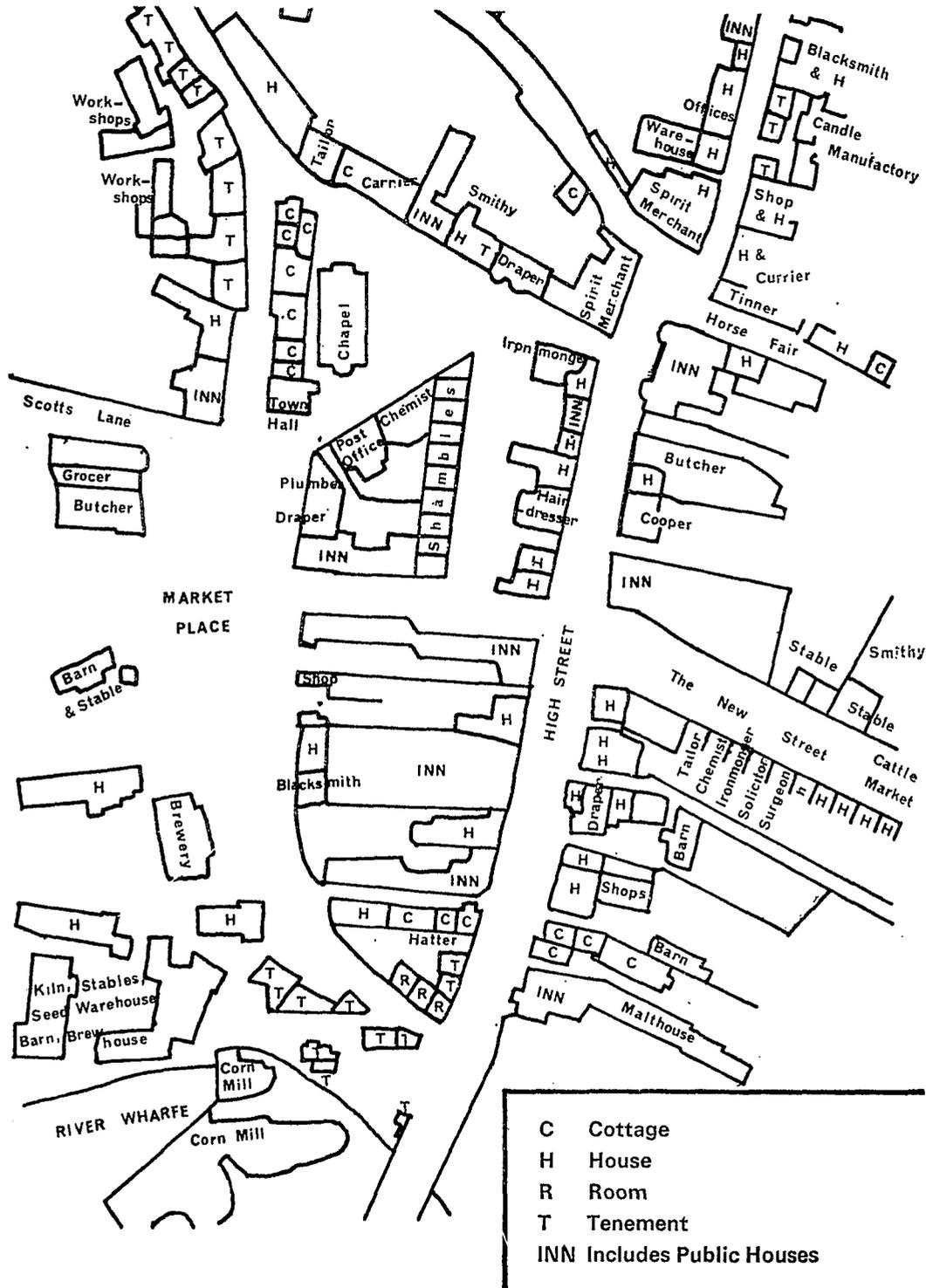
¹ F. M. L. Thompson, 'The Land Market in the Nineteenth Century', *Oxford Economic Papers*, ix, 1957, pp. 285–300. Reprinted in *Essays in Agrarian History*, II, 1968, p. 36.

² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

As there was no official compulsory registration of all land sales in this period, it is only by examining the yield figures from the auction duty that we can obtain a rough guide to the purchase-money laid out on land and property. From the figures produced by the Excise Inquiry of 1835 it is clear that the sale of Wetherby occurred in a peak year. Although property other than land was included, it seems highly probable that at least 90 per cent of the yield figures represented sales of real estate. It must be emphasized that the figures do not provide a guide to the acreage of land which had been put under the hammer, although they do indicate the fluctuations in activity in one section of the real-estate market. The timing of the sale of Wetherby and its successful outcome for the vendor tend to support the argument that it



¹*Ibid.*, p. 34.



Reconstruction of the market and posting town of Wetherby, 1824

was demand which called the tune, and that demand fluctuated broadly with economic conditions and expectations.

II

Since the investment propensity of prospective purchasers was determined partly by the general level of activity, and partly by the opportunities likely to accrue from the ownership of property in a particular locality, it is pertinent to ask what Wetherby seemed to offer in the 1820's. The printed specifications for the sale of the Devonshire estate naturally gave prominence to the favourable position and site of Wetherby as a market, coaching, and posting town on the Great North Road, and emphasized the improvements which had been effected or were contemplated in the local turnpike roads to Leeds and York, and for the widening of the stone bridge over the river Wharfe.¹

Small country towns tended to grow in importance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as the reliance upon fairs or itinerant pack-men waned. Those towns which had survived from the numerous market centres of earlier times were presented with opportunities to consolidate their position as major service-centres for agricultural hinterlands. Standing in the midst of a great area of fertile land, Wetherby was a natural centre for the marketing of agricultural produce. The cattle-market was situated at the top of New Street, but animals brought into the town for the Thursday market were penned up in the adjacent streets and lanes. In addition, at certain times of the year an important quantity of droving traffic passed through the town using the two river crossings—the bridge in Wetherby, and St Helen's ford a little below the town.

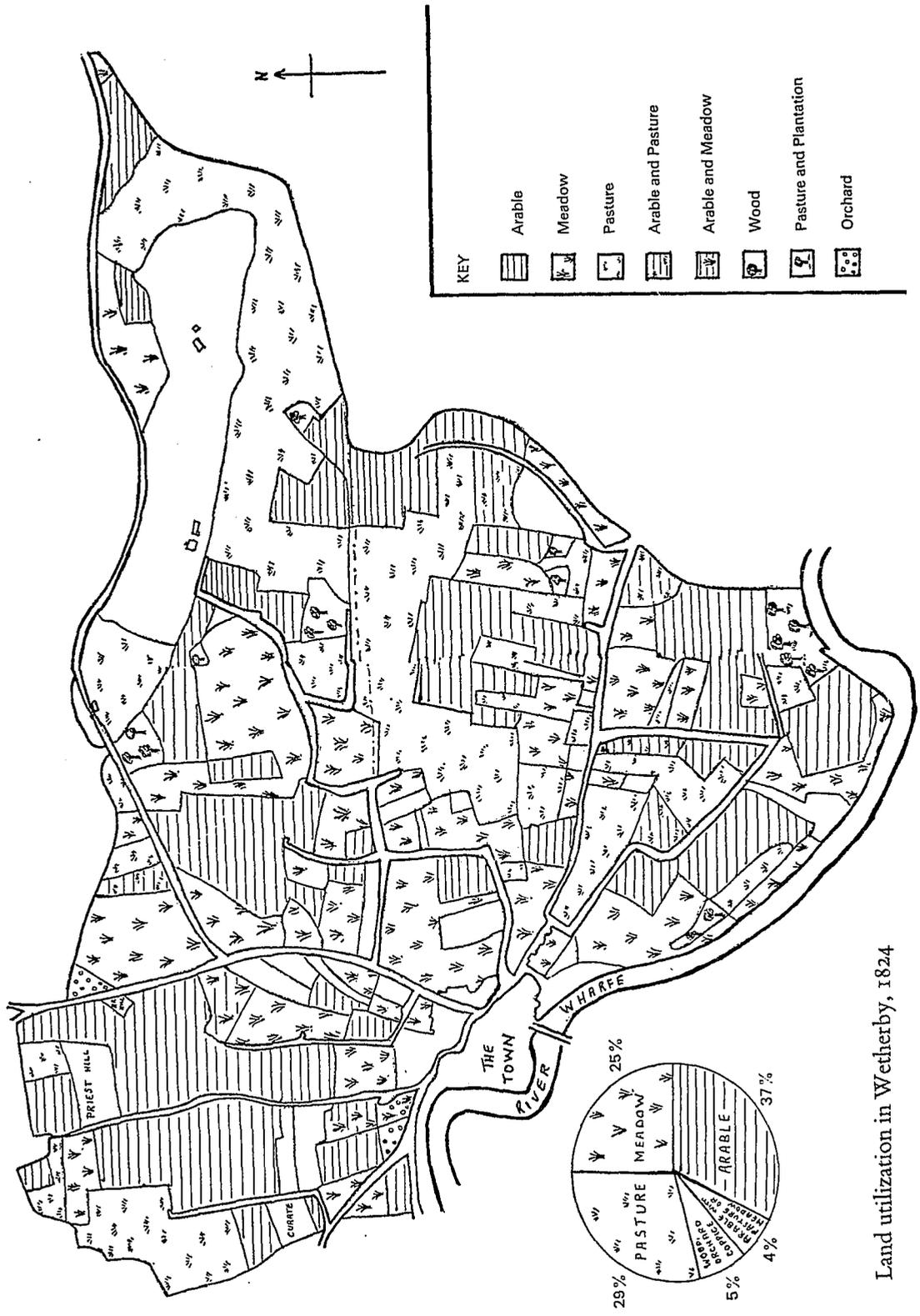
Unfortunately, few written impressions seem to have been left by those passing through the town, attending its Thursday market and two annual fairs, or presiding—or presided over—at the Quarter Sessions which were held at Wetherby until the 1830's. Topographers and travellers usually commented unfavourably on the town itself, but were more impressed by its natural environs in lower Wharfedale. At the time of the sale, the *Leeds Intelligencer* emphasized the absence of visible signs of progress at a well-frequented market and posting town:

The inhabitants of Wetherby, judging from the dilapidated state of their houses, a stranger would conclude, had been excluded from the rest of the world for the last fifty years, or that a law had been past [*sic*] to prohibit both the carpenter and the bricklayer from coming amongst them, so little of their handy work is in this place visible, if we except the new street lately erected by his Grace the Duke of Devonshire.²

The sale catalogue and contemporary commercial directories tended to stress the improvements upon which the ducal proprietor had embarked after 1811. Ten new

¹ *Yorkshire The Whole Town of Wetherby . . . Specifications*. Subsequently referred to as *Specifications*.

² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 Oct. 1824.



Land utilization in Wetherby, 1824

shambles or shops had been erected to the east of the market place; a terrace of twenty-five smaller stone houses had been built in New Street on the site of old buildings which had been demolished; and five sites in the town had been let on building leases at ground rents.¹

By 1824 the Duke of Devonshire had acquired every piece of land in the town itself, with the exception of the property of a farmer in New Street and an innkeeper in Back Lane. In listing the existing property for sale in Wetherby, the two post houses, three inns, and seven public houses understandably figured prominently, as did the brewery and corn-mills. We have to look at the terminology of the sale catalogue for clues as to the type and condition of the various properties. Only seven houses—rented by the more prosperous tradesmen—merited the description “capital”; for the rest there was an assortment of eighty houses, forty cottages, and about thirty tenements. In addition, there were approximately forty shops and workshops, usually attached to the living accommodation. Within the town area there was a variety of barns and outbuildings—the *Plan of the Town of Wetherby* printed for the 1824 sale shows seventy stables, twenty cowhouses, eight pigsties, and one poultry house adjoining the properties in the High Street and the Market Place alone. The physical proximity of the human and animal populations of Wetherby meant that constant efforts had to be made to impose some restriction on the location of pigsties, pigeon-cotes, and dunghills, the entries in the court-leet records providing a testimony to these recurrent problems² The rights of the manor, which was co-extensive with the township, were included in the sale: the courts baron and leet; the tolls of the fairs; the stallage and piccage of the markets; and the rents and profits of the ten shambles.³

Although a few acres on the outskirts of the town had not been acquired by the Devonshire family, more than 1,300 acres of land were also put under the hammer. Eastward of the Pennines the characteristic scenery is that of a rich agricultural land in a belt of magnesian limestone extending in the West Riding from Conisborough to Wetherby, the escarpment becoming less marked to the north, and sloping eastwards into the wider plain of the Vale of York. In general, the soils in the township of Wetherby, being derived from a mixture of magnesian limestone, marl, and boulder clay, are fertile and easily worked. If any distinction must be made it would be between the western parts of the township, which included the limestone quarries whence the inhabitants obtained their principal building material, and the eastern parts of the township with its greater concentration of alluvium.⁴ In the early nineteenth century the fields to the west of the Great North Road—West Field and Barley Field—extended from the Kirk Deighton boundary in the north to Town End Close in the south, and included a higher proportion of arable land than other parts of the manor. Hall Field on the east of the Great North Road extended from the old York Road in the north to a line parallel with the southern boundary of the Cemetery in the south, and had almost equal proportions of arable

¹ Specifications.

² Leeds Central Library Archives. Manor of Wetherby Records, DB 98/2.

³ Specifications.

⁴ P. Kendall & H. Wroot, *Geology of Yorkshire*, III, 1924, p. 883.

and meadow. Further east in Swinnow the proportion of pasture increased, while Hurthwaite in the southern part of the manor had roughly equal proportions of arable and grass. The land use of the Devonshire estate in 1824 can be classified under a number of categories:

<i>Land use</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Percentage of Estate¹</i>
Arable	486	40
Meadow	336	27
Pasture	348	28
Rough pasture	23	2
Woodland	22	2
Orchard	15	1
	1,230	100

The estimated value of the whole estate was £5,000 per annum, and for the purpose of the 1824 sale it was divided up into 170 lots. All the lots, with the exception of the five on building leases at ground rent, were to have vacant possession at Lady Day 1825, the yearly tenants receiving notice to quit by that date. When the tenants petitioned the Duke of Devonshire in 1823, the equalization of rents seems to have been as much their objective as a general reduction.² It is difficult to analyse the rents of the town properties accurately from the sale specifications, since a number of dwellings, inns, trading premises, and outbuildings might be included in one sale lot for which a total rental was stated. In the fields of the township the rents per acre varied from over £6 to as low as 6s. Eleven sale lots had rents per acre in excess of £2 10s.: all were small plots, not more than 7 acres each, in close proximity to the town. In general, proximity to the town appears to have been a major determinant in the level of rents, decreasing with distance from the centre of Wetherby, although there were a few exceptions. Over half the land on the Devonshire estate was rented at 25s. or less per acre, including much of the eastern part of the township; one-third was rented at rates between 26s. and £2 per acre; about one-twelfth at levels between £2 and £3; and about one-fortieth of the land was valued at over £3 or more per acre.³ It seems that the land holdings were not compact, an estate memorandum recording that "the property has always been let in scattered lots all over the manor and not in compact Farms as is usually the case."⁴

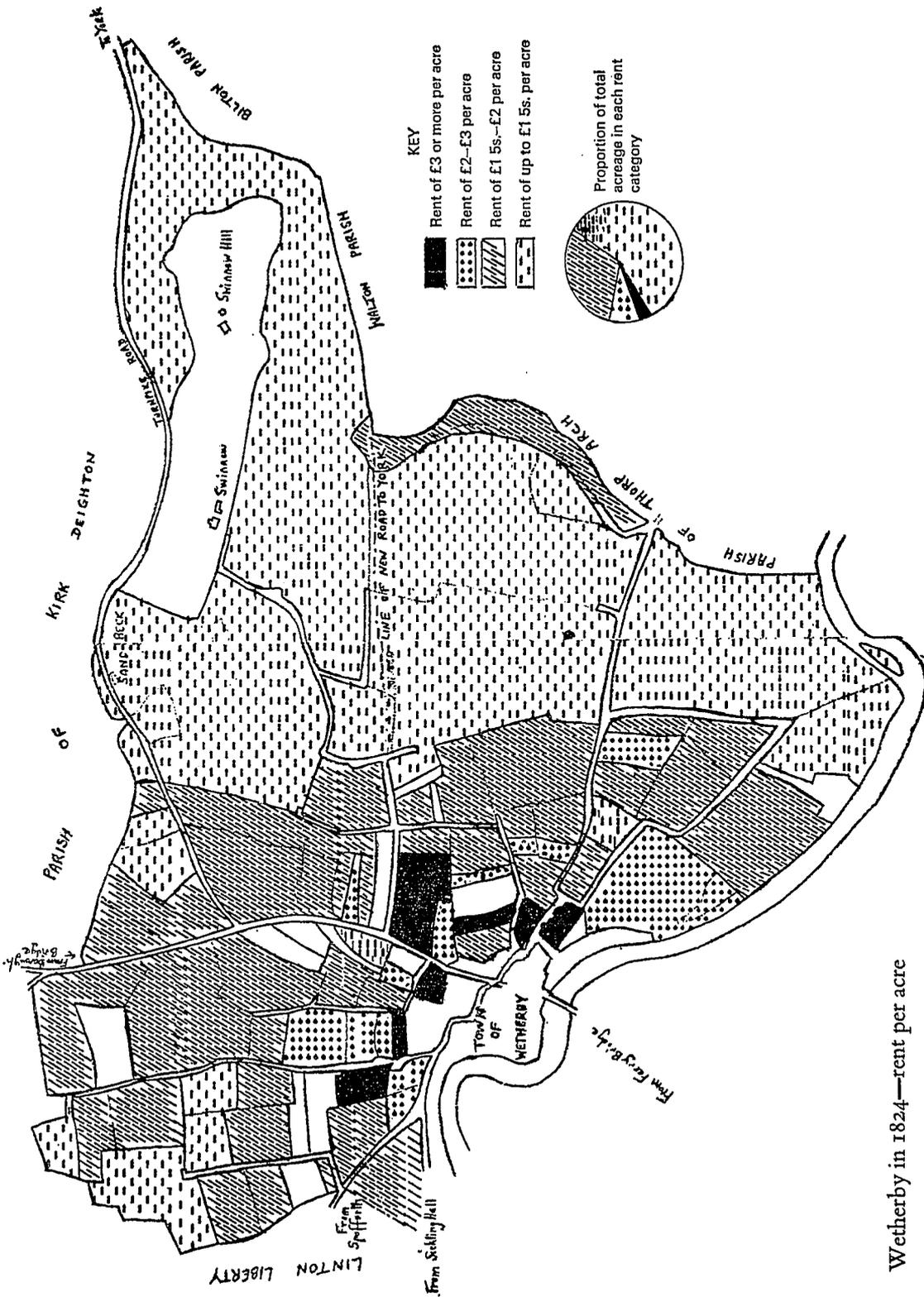
III

The essential profile and occupational structure of a coaching and posting town—which also served as a market and supply centre for an agricultural hinterland—may be discerned by the use of contemporary commercial directories; and by collating such information with the details of the sale catalogue and the land-tax

¹ Specifications. ² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 Oct. 1824. ³ Specifications.

⁴ Chatsworth MSS. L/45/106. Abstracts of title and copies of opinions.

WETHERBY



Wetherby in 1824—rent per acre

returns of 1824-5, it is possible to analyse the socio-economic make-up of Wetherby.¹ Provision had been made in 1798 for landowners to redeem their annual land

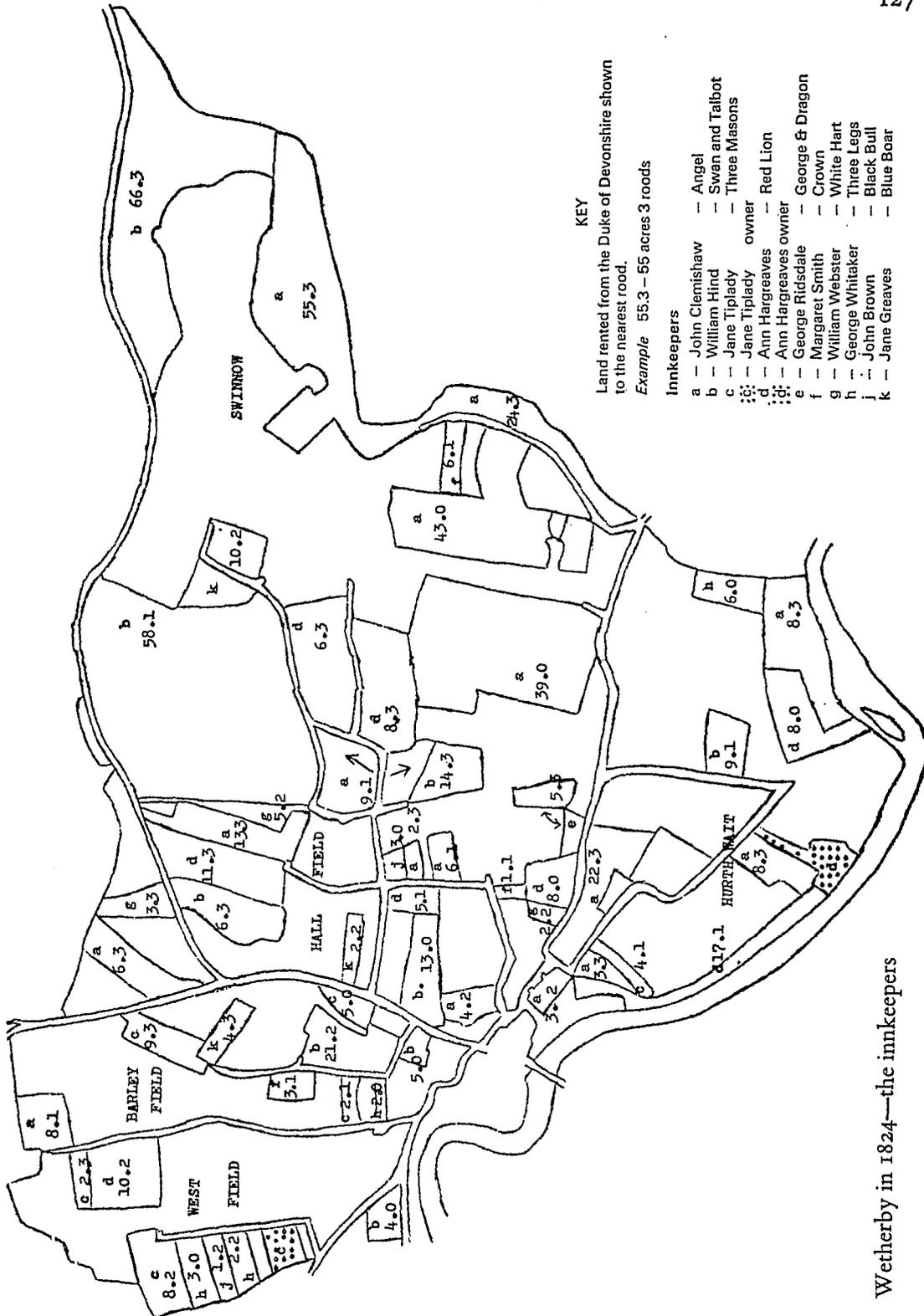
Occupation	No. in group	Land tax	Land tax	Acreage (tenants)		
		—owners	—tenants	a.	r.	p.
		£ s. d.	£ s. d.			
Innkeepers	12	14 2	33 0 10	634	3	7
Brewers	1	1 18 8	3 14 5	71	1	16
Corn millers	2		8 5 10	61	3	12
Provision dealers	13	1 17 5	16 7 4	187	1	3
Landholders/Farmers	10	4 7 0	11 8 0	257	2	6
Craftsmen	20		8 15 2	75	3	28
Dealers (non-provision)	8		1 15 1			
Services	8		3 11 10	35	0	27
Professions	8	12 9	2 12 8	13	2	23
No stated occupation (land-tax paid)	28	19 6	6 6 5	15	0	39
No stated occupation (no land-tax paid)	87					
	197	£10 9 6	£95 17 7	1,352	3	1

tax with a lump sum of fifteen years' purchase, and to make an accurate analysis of the different occupational groups, the redeemed or "exonerated" sums have been included. Of the £9 18s. land-tax assessment outstanding in the total assessment of £116 5s. 1d. for the township of Wetherby, the sum of £8 can be accounted for by the officer of the Excise. Included in the total of 1,352 acres 3 roods 1 perch are the 80 acres which made up the tenant farms at Swinnow, which were owned by Richard Fountayne Wilson of Melton on the Hill and Ingmanthorpe. Of the "missing" 96 acres which would give a township and manor total of 1,448 acres, it is possible to account for 22 acres in hand at the time of the sale; the area of the town; and the few acres owned by other proprietors.

Of the township's total land-tax assessment the innkeepers as a group accounted for almost 30 per cent; while they were tenants of four-tenths of the total acreage. With the exception of the Fox, all the inns in Wetherby belonged to the Devonshire estate, and only the Devonshire Arms, "a substantial New Stone-built House" was in hand at the time of the 1824 sale. A distinction between the two posting houses, the Swan and Talbot and the Angel, "a large brick-built house" on the one hand, and the remaining tenant innkeepers on the other, seems justified: between them the two posting house tenants rented 462 acres 4 perches, and were

¹ E. Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County of York*, Leeds, 1822; West Yorkshire Record Office, Wakefield. Land Tax Duplicate Returns, Claro Wapentake.

WETHERBY



Wetherby in 1824—the innkeepers

assessed in land-tax for £21 3s. 10d. There were extensive facilities attached to the inns, obviously associated with their particular positions and functions. Altogether the property of the innkeeper tenants included ten granaries, seven haylofts, seven cowhouses, three pigsties, and one dovecote, while there was a dairy at the Red Lion. There was individual stabling for approximately 170 horses together with "open" and other stabling—about 80 per cent of the town's total—but only the Devonshire Arms and the two posting houses had specifically assigned accommodation for carriages. In only one instance, at the Angel, was there a smithy and shoeing shop. Six of the inns had a "soldiers' room", and on the first floor of the Devonshire Arms there was an assembly room. Only two inns, the Blue Boar and Crown, included a brewhouse, and at the latter a malthouse was specifically listed.¹

Providing for the needs of many of the town's inns in the early nineteenth century was the brewery in the Market Place, of which Gregory Rhodes was the tenant. As a common brewer he brewed only for sale to publicans and private customers away from his brewery. As tenant of the Duke of Devonshire at the time of the sale, Rhodes occupied "all that newly erected capital Dwelling House and Brewery" at an annual ground rent of £26 10s., a malthouse behind the George and Dragon, and over 70 acres of land. In addition, as owner-occupiers the Rhodes family were assessed at £1 18s. 8d. per annum in land-tax, principally for their property at Priest Hill. Apart from brewing, the main industry in Wetherby was the milling of corn. The property rented by John Greenwood and David Farrer for £200 per annum included two water-mills, dressing-machines, a seed warehouse, barn, cowhouse, and brewhouse. The dwelling-house which went with the property was substantial, including three parlours and six bedchambers. In addition, the partners rented over 60 acres. Taken together the brewers and corn-millers in Wetherby paid over 10 per cent of the township's land-tax assessment and were the occupiers of about one-tenth of the acreage in 1824.

The thirteen provision dealers—five grocers, four butchers, two spirit merchants, one baker and one tallow chandler—were men of some substance in Wetherby: altogether they were assessed for about 15 per cent of the land-tax of the township, and they rented about one-eighth of the acreage. Within this category, the butchers were assessed at £8 os. 4d. in land-tax and rented over 100 acres. William Hill, the only owner-occupier among the butchers, rented a shop and slaughter-house, as did William Powell, who was also described as a ham factor. The grocers paid £2 14s. in land-tax, but only two of them rented land—about 21 acres. The most substantial grocer rented a "capital house and shop" in the Market Place, besides being the owner of property at Hill Top which was leased out as an "academy." The spirit merchants, who were assessed at £4 1s. 10d. in land-tax, each rented a shop, warehouse and dwelling-house in the High Street. The tallow chandler also rented a house in the High Street, together with a shop, candle manufactory, barn, cowhouse, pigsty, and granary. In addition to 36 acres, the baker rented a small house in New Street, and a barn and stable in the Market Place. The "non-pro-

¹ Specifications.

vision" dealers were of less substance than the provision dealers. This group, three drapers, two tailors, two ironmongers, and one hatter, rented no land, and were assessed for land-tax at only £1 15s. 1d., or about 1.5 per cent of the township's total. The property they rented included nine houses, two shops, two warehouses, two stables, one barn, one workshop, one cowhouse, and one pigsty.

The twenty craftsmen—four saddlers, four carpenters, three blacksmiths, two shoemakers, together with a plumber, cooper, skinner, currier, house painter, tinner, and clockmaker—were all tenants on the Devonshire estate. Altogether they were assessed at £8 15s. 2d. in land-tax, about 7 per cent of the township's total, and rented 75 acres 3 roods 28 perches of land, or about one-twentieth of the acreage. The property they rented also included fifteen houses, two cottages, two tenements, eight workshops, six cowhouses, six stables, four shops, three smithies, three barns, together with one each of the following: granary, tanpit, timber loft, warehouse, drying shed, dovecote, apiary, and pigsty. The blacksmiths, shoemakers, tinner, and clockmaker rented no land, and these seven craftsmen were assessed at only £1 3s. 10d. for land-tax. The most substantial individual craftsmen seem to have been a carpenter and a plumber.

About 3 per cent of the township's land-tax was assessed on those concerned with the provision of services, and they rented about one-fortieth of the land. In this category is included the Post Office, which was described in the sale catalogue as being "in excellent repair." The professions also accounted for about 3 per cent of the land-tax, but the total acreage held by this group, which was made up of two "academies," two surgeons, three solicitors, and the excise officer, amounted to only some 13 acres.¹

From the foregoing analysis it is clear that a number of difficulties may arise from the nature of occupations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: many innkeepers, tradesmen, and small manufacturers were also farmers or smallholders, and the distinction between a craft occupation and agriculture was not always sharply delineated. There are also possible pitfalls in a study of the socio-economic structure of a single community on the basis of land-tax and property records: it would be most unusual if the interests of all occupational groups were confined within the boundaries of one parish or township. Such difficulties are apparent in the case of those whose livelihood was largely derived from the land. Owners and tenants sometimes had land in more than one parish, and it is therefore unwise to draw very firm lines between the different categories since a small man in one district might have been a large one in another. Similarly, an owner in one parish may appear as a tenant in another—or even in the same parish—and it is not always easy to determine how large a proportion of both owners and tenants were paying in more than one parish.²

¹ *Ibid.*

² For problems in using the Land Tax returns see G. E. Mingay, 'The Land Tax Assessments and the Small Landowner', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xvii, 1964, pp. 381-8; J. Martin, 'Landownership and the Land Tax Returns', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, xiv, pt 2, 1966, pp. 96-103.

A notable omission from contemporary commercial directories was specific reference to the farming community in Wetherby, although the number of "pure" farmers was very small indeed. For the purpose of our analysis of the 1820's the group of landholders and farmers is made up of those who owned or rented land, whose property seems indicative of farming interests, and who were not otherwise classified either in commercial directories, the sale catalogue, or in other records, for example conveyancy documents. Of the ten occupiers included in this group, Richard Fountayne Wilson of Melton on the Hill and Ingmanthorpe was the most substantial. As an owner he was assessed for land-tax at £4 7s., principally for the farms at Swinnow, which were then in hand. In addition, he rented 23 acres on the Devonshire estate for which land-tax was assessed at 18s. 6d. The other owner-occupier in this group was William Grafton, who paid 4s. 11d. land-tax for his property near the cattle-market in New Street. He also rented 48 acres, for which land-tax was assessed at £2, and included a barn, cowhouse, stable, and farmyard. Although the latter term was used only once, each of the tenants in this group rented cowhouses and stables, besides a total of 105 acres. Pigsties and poultry houses were each listed once, and one holding included a calf house, paddock, and "a bath and dressing-room" near the river Wharfe.¹

Of the remaining inhabitants of Wetherby who were assessed for land-tax in 1824 it seems that twenty-eight were tenants on the Devonshire estate. The total rented property included eighteen houses, three cottages, four stables, one paddock, one granary, and one pigsty. Although land was rented in three instances, there was no indication of associated farming, craft, or other activity. Nine of the inhabitants in this group were either spinsters or widows.

At the lower end of the social ladder there are likely to be fewer misrepresentations in a single township or parish study, since the activities of the poor are more likely to be confined to one district. A reconstruction of a community based on commercial directories or land-tax returns alone is open to criticism on the grounds that the poorer inhabitants will scarcely figure, although numerically they may well constitute the majority. The use of other records can do much to redress the balance. Scattered through the various lots listed in the sale catalogue for Wetherby in 1824 were a number of properties which were almost certainly inhabited by the poorer sections of the township's community. Altogether eighty-seven tenants were named whose holdings were not assessed for land-tax: their dwellings included thirty-nine tenements, of which one was thatched; twenty-nine cottages, of which four were thatched; eleven small houses; seven "low rooms," and one shop. Many of these properties were situated on Chapel Hill, in Back Lane, West Gate, and in Horse Fair; and immediately north of the bridge at the southern entrance into the Market Place. Of these inhabitants, twenty-two were women, no doubt many of them widows. Not one of the eighty-seven tenants rented land, although four small gardens were listed. The outbuildings of these properties were few in total: three workshops, two barns, two pigsties, and one cowhouse. The properties on the

¹ *Specifications.*

Devonshire estate in the hands of the overseers of the poor included the poor house in West Gate, together with six tenements and four cottages.¹

Descriptions of the inhabitants of Wetherby at the time of the sale used several terms: "landholders of every description"; "the Respectable Tenants in the town"; "Wetherby gentlemen"; "the poorer and middling part of the people"; "the lower orders of the inhabitants."² Clearly, in attempting to interpret such terms it is essential to cut across the occupational classifications we have so far considered—there were rich and poor innkeepers as well as craftsmen or provision dealers. The collation of a variety of records permits a tentative reconstruction of the "pecking order" in Wetherby in the 1820's:

Name	Occupation	Land Tax		Land		
		Owner	Tenant	a.	r.	p.
		£ s. d.	£ s. d.			
R. F. Wilson	Landowner	4 2 1	18 6	103	3	34
G. & Q. Rhodes	Brewers	1 18 8	3 14 5	71	1	16
W. Hill	Butcher	1 4 6	1 6 7	13	3	5
J. Pullein	Grocer	12 11	1 8 6	9	1	24
		(non-occupying)				
Ann Hargreaves	Innkeeper	6 10	4 3 4	76	0	38
Jane Tiplady	Innkeeper	4 11	2 7 6	32	3	23
W. Grafton	Farmer	4 11	2 0 0	48	1	22
J. Clemishaw	Innkeeper		12 0 10	260	2	25
W. Hind	Innkeeper		9 3 0	201	1	19
J. Greenwood & D. Farrer	Corn millers		8 5 10	61	3	12
W. Powell	Butcher		3 18 0	60	0	20
Clemishaw & Son	Spirit merchants		2 8 2			
D. Wiggins	Baker		1 19 8	36	2	36
S. Slater	Farmer		1 15 6	22	1	30
S. Wiggins	Farmer		1 12 2	22	1	9
J. Britain	Spirit merchant		1 13 8	14	0	9
		£8 14 10	£58 15 8	1,035	2	2

Of the township's total land-tax assessment, the eighteen proprietors named above were assessed for almost 60 per cent; of the total acreage they were tenants or owners of over seven-tenths. The essential profile of Wetherby as a market, posting, and coaching town on the Great North Road is clearly revealed. The property of Richard Fountayne Wilson and the Rhodes family in Wetherby represented only part of their total activities and sources of income, and it would seem possible that a careful scrutiny among documents of title relating to neighbouring townships would show that others among "the top of the town" had extra-township interests.

¹ *Ibid.* ² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 Oct. 1824.

It might also become necessary to include others among the leading proprietors if any consideration is to be given to the purchasing propensity of Wetherby's inhabitants, undoubtedly an important factor when the town was put under the hammer.¹

IV

On 8 October 1824, the London auctioneer arrived in Wetherby, and anxiety mounted among the inhabitants as numerous strangers appeared in the town. Rumours that the sale was to be a "select" meeting with admission by ticket only can have done little to calm the charged atmosphere, although in the event such fears proved to be groundless. The Town Hall, a comparatively small building in the Market Place, was full when the auctioneer and the Duke's solicitor arrived at twelve o'clock on 11 October.

From the tribune, the auctioneer opened with some remarks concerning the cost of conveyancy, to the effect that the Duke's solicitor, in order to facilitate the purchase of the smaller lots, had agreed to charge only 15 guineas for the legal work necessary for the respective vendees.² The auctioneer then proceeded to read the conditions of the sale: if disputes arose as to the highest bidder, the lot in question was to be resold; all purchasers were to pay a deposit of £20 in every £100 at the time of the sale and the remainder by Lady Day 1825, after which the vendor would receive 5 per cent interest on all outstanding sums; that the purchasers should pay the auction duty of 7d. in the pound; that boundary disputes after the sale would be referred to a referee; and that failure to comply with the sale conditions would mean the forfeiture of the deposit money and subsequent resale of the lots in question. The purchasers were to take over responsibility for the land-tax apportioned to the respective property, and, on the question of tithe, attempts had been made to establish which parcels of land were liable to a modus or annual payment "in lieu of Tythe Hay on the old Inclosures." Other tithe would also continue to be paid, to which all land in the township was subject, "with the Occasional exception of the Lands called Swinnow Farm when the same are in the Occupation of the owner." The timber and underwood on the estate was to be taken at a valuation, also to be completed before Lady Day 1825.³ In the case of Wetherby, the motives of the purchasers seem to have been largely of an economic nature, but it is important that other possible considerations should not be entirely overlooked, particularly where non-residents were concerned. Certainly it is clear that competition at the 1824 sale was exceptionally keen, not one lot remaining unsold, and only one being knocked down at the first bidding.⁴

The sale catalogues which have survived from the Wetherby sale invariably include details written in at the time of the purchasers of the 170 lots and the prices paid, information which also appeared in the principal county newspapers. The true position in regard to the purchasers is partly obscured by the private agreements which were obviously made at the time, while in one or two cases the added

¹ R. D. Murphy, 'The Wilsons of Leeds', *National Register of Archives Bulletin*, iv, 1961 (typescript, Leeds).

² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 14 Oct. 1824.

³ *Specifications*.

⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 Oct. 1824.

entries of purchasers vary from catalogue to catalogue. Nevertheless, when used with care, the catalogues provide a rough guide, which can be collated with documents of title, land-tax returns, and commercial directories. The four days of the sale did not pass without moments of excitement or personal drama. Many of the town's inhabitants belonged to families whose associations with Wetherby stretched back across the generations, and there was some anxiety, which in the event was dispelled by the auctioneer, about the various fixtures in the dwelling-houses and other properties. For the most part, the inhabitants seem to have been particularly eager to purchase the inns, mills, shops, or domestic premises which they had previously rented.

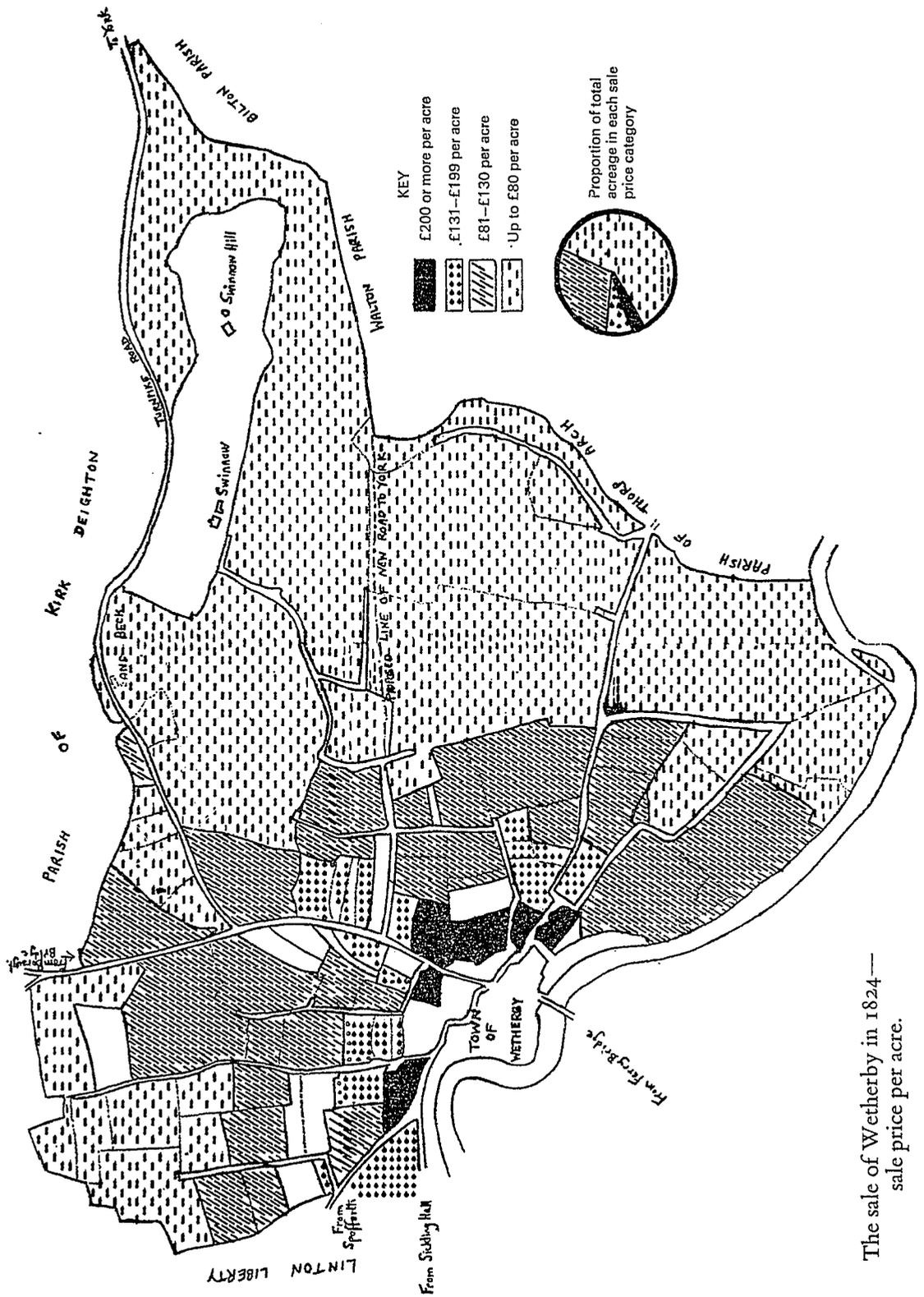
Of the twelve inns sold in 1824, three realized more than £1,500, four were sold for £1,000–£1,500, and five yielded between £500 and £1,000.¹ As a result of the sale the coaching and posting traffic seems to have been more completely monopolized, in the short run at least, by the Clemishaw family: they purchased the Swan and Talbot and continued as tenants of the Angel, which was bought by John Greenwood of Keighley for £2,016, the highest price for an inn. Greenwood, a Keighley cotton manufacturer, was by far the most substantial of the "outside" purchasers. It seems probable that the interest which he took in Wetherby was designed to provide an inheritance for his second son, Edwin. Besides the Angel, he purchased a variety of property in the town and more than 250 acres.

Perhaps most interesting in connection with the inns was the extent to which the Wetherby brewer, Gregory Rhodes, was able to establish tied houses. At the sale Rhodes took the opportunity to purchase five of the inns, together with the house and brewery in the Market Place of which he was already lessee. These inns and the brewery constituted part of the growing interests of the Rhodes family. The will of Gregory Rhodes in 1829 included details of six inns in Wetherby—he purchased the Blue Anchor after the sale—together with three in York, three in Tadcaster, two in Otley, and one each in Langthorpe, Marston, Knaresborough, and Kirk Deighton.² In 1824, another common brewer, Thomas Jackson of Green Hammerton also purchased one of the inns in Wetherby, the Red Lion.³

The outstanding price paid for property in Wetherby was £8,100 for the two corn-mills, purchased by the occupying tenants, which according to the *York Herald and General Advertiser* was a highly popular outcome: "When the mills were knocked down to Messrs Greenwood and Farrer, the hall resounded with plaudits, and as soon as it was communicated to the populous (*sic*) without doors, it was continued through the streets in a manner highly expressive of the great esteem in which those gentlemen are held."⁴ Purchasers among the provision dealers included the two butchers, William Powell and William Hill; the grocer John Pullein; the tallow chandler; and the two spirit merchants. Amongst the group of craftsmen, two saddlers and a family firm of carpenters became owner-occupiers as a result of the sale. Of the professional group, it seems that James Beaumont a sur-

¹ *Ibid.* ² West Yorkshire Record Office. KK.164. Will of Gregory Rhodes, 11 Nov. 1829.

³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 Oct. 1824. ⁴ *York Herald*, *op. cit.*



The sale of Wetherby in 1824—
sale price per acre.

geon, and Edward Richardson a solicitor, made the most considerable purchases of property.

As far as the properties in the town itself were concerned, the average for the High Street sale lots accorded most closely to the number of years' purchase for the whole town. Altogether, the ninety-two town lots yielded £55,666, which represented thirty-seven years' purchase on the annual rental of £1,500. The development potential of land and property adjacent to the river Wharfe, which had been emphasized in the sale catalogue, may well have been indicated by a much higher figure of number of years' purchase—over sixty years—but there is always the possibility that these lots were under-rented at the time of the sale.¹

In the case of land it is possible to use two criteria for evaluation, namely the number of years' purchase and the sale price per acre. In all, the seventy-seven sale lots of land around the town produced £107,885, or the exceptionally high figure of fifty-five years' purchase on the annual rental of £1,800. The land adjoining the Great North Road or in close proximity to the town—and hence the most likely to be developed—was sold at a high number of years' purchase. The *York Chronicle and General Advertiser* reported on the differences in sale prices in various parts of the township: "Some lots of land contiguous to the Town, sold as high as from £300 to £500 per acre, some at £200, a good deal at about £100, and one large lot of excellent land containing 306 acres was bought . . . for less than £17,000."² An analysis of the sale price per acre shows a more clearly defined pattern of land value than the rent per acre distribution, decreasing according to the distance from the town. The average price for some 1,300 acres was £83, an exceptionally high figure: approximately six-tenths of the land was sold at £80 per acre or less; about one-third at rates between £81 and £130; about one-fifteenth at £131–£199 per acre; and about one-fortieth yielded more than £200 per acre at the sale.³

The development possibilities of Mather's Garth on the eastern outskirts of the town were clearly demonstrated by the speed of the bidding to the final sale price of £2,010—for a small lot of less than 4 acres. The established traders of the town were clearly apprehensive that the purchaser of the manor, which included the market rights, might remove its location away from the Market Place to Mather's Garth. Before the sale of the lordship on the last day a discussion took place between a number of the inhabitants of Wetherby and Joseph Green of Bradford on the subject of the removal of the market, since the latter had now secured a favourable site. It was even suggested that a committee might be formed to take over the lordship on behalf of the inhabitants, a proposal which the auctioneer was unwilling to countenance. After a heated contest Green purchased the manor for £5,010, but resold it almost immediately to Richard Fountayne Wilson.⁴ The inhabitants presented a vote of thanks to their new lord of the manor, but it is difficult to tell whether the Yorkshire M.P. anticipated reciprocal support from the increased number of freeholders in Wetherby.

¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 16 Oct. 1824.

² *York Chronicle*, 21 Oct. 1824.

³ *Specifications*.

⁴ *York Herald*, 16 Oct. 1824.

A detailed study shows that most of the land in the township was bought by non-residents, who also laid out more than one-quarter of all the money raised from the sale of the town properties. Landed families with estates adjoining Wetherby or in neighbouring parishes and townships figure prominently among the non-resident purchasers: these included Paul Beilby Thompson, later Lord Wenlock of Escrick, who also owned Wetherby Grange; Lieutenant-Colonel Randall Gossip of Thorp Arch; Peter Middleton of Stockeld Park; and G. Barlow of Ribston.

The sale of the Wetherby estate in 1824 realized £168,561, exclusive of the timber, which it was estimated would yield an additional £5,000. The auction duty on the sale amounted to almost £2,000, and in addition the conveyancing of the property was subject to stamp and *ad valorem* duty. The purchasers received massive abstracts of title commencing in 1678, when the estates had been resettled by the Earl of Devonshire. After 1824, the conveyancy of property in Wetherby always started by referring to the sale plans and catalogue.

All the contemporary newspapers commended the auctioneer for the manner in which the sale was conducted. The fair play of the auctioneer and the generosity of the bidders would no doubt be remembered by those who attended the sale in one instance above all. Included in one of the lots was a garden at Eel Mires rented by James Horner. When the lot was announced Horner stood up and addressed the auctioneer, claiming that he had transformed the land from an infertile bog by his own efforts, that he had, in effect, purchased it by the sweat of his brow. When the auctioneer asked for a bid, Horner proposed the sum of £400, and apparently his unassuming speech had had such an effect that no other bids were made. The auctioneer expeditiously brought down his hammer to the loud applause of all.¹ Later on the same day when all the lots had been sold, it was announced that the Duke of Devonshire had offered the Town Hall for the use of the inhabitants. The solicitor had also assured them that a liberal subscription would be forthcoming from the Duke for a new workhouse in Wetherby, provided the townsmen were unanimous in the choice of an eligible site.

At the time there must have seemed every reason for generosity and goodwill on all sides: the purchasers were confident that their investments would yield a satisfactory return; while the Devonshire estate had realized far more than could have been hoped for even a few months before. If pecuniary motives were paramount, the results of the sale clearly indicated that it had taken place under highly favourable circumstances. Yet it is pertinent to ask whether the success which attended the sale of Wetherby could have been even greater? Had the estate been put under the hammer when the prices for land and property had reached their ceiling? The *Leeds Intelligencer* certainly had no reservations about the advantages of putting land on the market in the autumn of 1824:

We have no doubt that the example of the noble Duke, and the success attending it, will induce other land proprietors in the neighbourhood to avail themselves

¹ *York Herald*, 16 Oct. 1824.

of the present rage for purchasing, by bringing their property into the market at a season so admirably calculated to refund ample interest for their capital.¹

In the following weeks, reports were made on the continued rise of confidence and property prices in Wetherby, no doubt boosted by rumoured modifications in the Post Office mail routes.² Other sales of Yorkshire property also produced high yields. An estate of Walter Fawkes of Farnley Hall near Otley, which was sold in November 1824, realized over £73 per acre or forty years' purchase; while a small estate on the outskirts of Huddersfield was sold in December at no less than 133 years' purchase. No wonder, then, that the *Yorkshire Chronicle and General Advertiser* could end the year on a confident note: "The columns of our paper serve every week to convey an idea of the very extensive transference of property, which is taking place in this county, particularly in the West Riding." Purchases were undoubtedly made at exceptionally high prices at this time,³ but, within eighteen months the bottom had dropped out of the land and property market.

It is fortunate that the land-tax returns for the township of Wetherby after 1825 include full details of the rental value for all the property and land, together with the respective owners and occupiers.⁴ Although the 1826 return is damaged, it is clear that the total rental of those assessed for land-tax was in excess of £5,000 per annum. For all subsequent years between 1827 and 1832 the total was little more than £3,500, a clear indication of the depth of the depression which affected property values with the collapse of the boom in 1826. One of the more obvious results of the sale of the Wetherby estate was the increase in the number of owner-occupiers in the township from nine to over forty, amongst whom nineteen were also tenants. On the other hand, the turnover of property seems to have done little to alter the occupational profile of the town.

Under the conditions set out for the sale it was stipulated that a number of lots would be sold subject to the proviso that the whole or parts of the properties would be demolished to give a "new look" to the town. In particular, access to the Market Place from the bridge, and from the Spofforth and Linton directions, was to be improved by the removal of a number of small tenements, and a row of small cottages behind the old Town Hall was to be demolished. Though these improvements were made, in other respects there were few positive signs of progress in the years which followed the sale. Population growth in the township was small, rising from 1,217 in 1821 to 1,494 in 1851. A study of commercial directories reveals little of a more sophisticated occupational structure, and there were no major developments in public buildings until the 1840's. Descriptions of the town before the mid-nineteenth century refer to the improvements which the Duke of Devonshire had undertaken in the years before the 1824 sale, but make few, if any, references to subsequent development. Yet it might have been expected that the division of the

¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 Oct. 1824. ² *Yorkshire Gazette*, 23 Oct. 1824.

³ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, xciv, 1824, p. 637. For example, the Ormonde properties in aggregate realized £482,432 at an average of over forty years' purchase upon rack rents.

⁴ Land Tax Duplicate Returns, Claro Wapentake. West Yorkshire Record Office, Wakefield.

estate and the sale of lots in perpetuity would have encouraged the erection of new residences. Certainly capital was forthcoming at the time of the auction, but how far was it readily available in the years after 1824? Almost a century later, in 1912, the *Wetherby News Almanac* provided an interesting explanation:

Many old families ruined themselves by buying their holdings. They had been at cheap rents, and they bid against each other for the property, and borrowed money which they were never able to pay off, and the interest threw them into debt and to beggary. It is remarkable that at that day of dear money and cheap rents they gave as much for many of the lots as they are realising today.

Notes and Comments

ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM

The Annual Conference of the Society was held at Harper Adams College, Newport, Salop, on 7 to 9 April 1975. The Conference included papers by the President, John Higgs (Agricultural development: an historical perspective); H. E. Hallam (Aspects of agrarian history before the Black Death); David Hey (The agriculture of north Shropshire, 1640-1750), F. V. Emery (Innovation in pre-industrial Wales: the cultivation of clover), J. R. Walton (The diffusion of the improved short-horn breed of cattle in Britain 1770-1870) and A. R. H. Baker (Co-operation and change in French agriculture in the nineteenth century with particular reference to the role of agricultural syndicates in Loir-et-Cher, 1880-1914); there was also an excursion to South Shropshire led by David Hey.

The Society's twenty-third AGM was held on 8 April 1975. Mr C. A. Jewell and Mr M. A. Havinden were re-elected Treasurer and Secretary respectively and the four vacancies on the Executive Committee were filled by the re-elected retiring members, Professor A. M. Everitt, Mr G. Ordish, and Dr W. J. Rowe, and by Dr J. Chartres.

In her Chairman's report Dr Thirsk noted that the membership of the Society was now

787 or 13 more than in 1974. A one-day conference has been organized for 6 December at University College, London, on the theme of the diffusion of agricultural innovations. It was proposed to hold the next annual conference near Cambridge, on 12 to 14 April 1976, details of which will be announced in the New Year. It was also reported that the Clarendon Press had been approached with a view to publishing the translation of Wilhelm Abel's *Agrarkrisen und Agrarconjunctur* which the Society had financed. The Executive was also investigating the possibility of republishing Sir E. John Russell, *A History of agricultural science in Great Britain* (1966). The Treasurer reported a satisfactory balance of over £4,000 on current account but warned against a large increase in printing and postage costs which might necessitate the raising of the annual subscription in the autumn or the New Year. The Editor reported a steady flow of articles with the emphasis, as before, on the nineteenth century.

An appreciation of the late Professor H. P. R. Finberg, a former President of the Society and first Editor of the *Review*, was given by the President, Mr J. W. Y. Higgs, on the first evening of the Conference.

(continued on page 186)