An Eighteenth-Century Land Agent: The Career of Nathaniel Kent (1737–1810)*

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I

WHEN Nathaniel Kent died at Fulham on 10 October 1810 an obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* enthusiastically proclaimed it to be 'universally allowed that no professional man ever rendered more substantial services to the agriculture of his country than the late Mr. *Kent*'. Yet, despite the contribution to agrarian reform which he made — and which included supervision of the royal estates at Richmond Park and Windsor Great Park during the 1790's — relatively little is known of his life or methods.[1] This article attempts to remedy some of the deficiencies.

Nathaniel was born in 1737, the son of Ambrose Kent of Penton Mewsey in Hampshire. His early life remains obscure, though it is known that his elder brother, also named Ambrose, went up to Oxford in the mid-1740's. Subsequently he became a fellow and bursar of Magdalen College. Nathaniel, by contrast, was destined for government service and at the beginning of 1755, when aged about eighteen, he obtained a clerical post at Portsmouth dockyard under Mr Fiennes Eddowes, a former Oxford man in his early thirties, who was subsequently to be made a Surveyor of Customs. Two years later, still under Eddowes's direction, he was involved in the supervision of French prisoners captured during the Seven Years' War.[2] His next move came when he secured a secretarial position on the staff of Admiral Geary, a rear-admiral of the white, who served as post-admiral at Portsmouth from 1760 to 1762. When that employment came to an end, he managed to obtain a similar appointment with Sir James Porter, minister-plenipotentiary at Brussels from 1763 to 1765.

This early period on the fringes of government service was a difficult one for the young Kent. As Sir Lewis Namier has pointed out, departmental secretaries were the personal dependants of the ministers (or others) whom they served, and, as such, were often in a delicate relationship with their superiors. A quarrel or a failure to please could lead to their being cast adrift after years of diligent service. 'Both the dignity and inferiority of the chaplain or curate at a big country house attached to their persons and position', wrote Namier: 'they had to know a great deal and not expect too much, to be qualified to sit at the table of their chief and, in most cases, be satisfied with the lowest places at it.'[3] To Kent, however, the post's main recommendation seems to have been its 'gentlemanly' status. He even declared himself ready to serve Sir James Porter as secretary in Brussels, 'without a farthing salary', apart from board and lodging. And when Porter left Flanders at the end of 1765, Kent received from him a mere £23 6*s* 2½*d* for the full period of his service, i.e. a salary of £18 8*s* 2½*d*, plus travelling expenses of £4 18*s*.

Porter went first to the Hague, where he stayed with Sir Joseph Yorke, the British

*I am indebted to Her Majesty the Queen for her gracious permission to quote from the Royal Archives.

[1] There is a brief account of Kent's life in G E Fussell, 'Nathaniel Kent, 1737–1816' [*sic*] in *Journ of the Land Ag Soc* V, 1947, p 46. He is included in Peter Eden (ed), *Dictionary of Land Surveyors and Local Cartographers of Great Britain and Ireland 1550–1850*, Folkestone, 1975, p 154.

[2] *B Lib*, Egerton 2157, fol 143. For information on Eddowes, see *B Lib*, Add MSS 28,232, fol 117; Add MSS 28,233, fol 110; and Add MSS 38,457, fol 191.

[3] Sir Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, 2nd edn, 1961, pp 36–7.

ambassador, before travelling on to England, while Kent remained in Brussels to settle bills, arrange for the packing and despatch of furniture, books, and plate, and to wind up his employer's affairs generally. At the same time he was given temporary employment by the new minister-plenipotentiary, William Gordon, pending the arrival of the latter's German secretary. It was during these months, from December 1765 to the spring of 1766, that Kent's despair at his financial plight reached a peak. He expressed his bitter disillusionment in correspondence with Sir James Porter, as on 23 December 1765, when he gloomily assessed his current circumstances:

> after a Chain of unprosperous Events during the Space of Ten Years and Ten Months faithfull [*sic*] Service under the Government, all which time I have been the Sport of Chance, the foot-ball of Fortune, ever settling never settled, ever beginning as often interrupted and put back to begin again, I find myself with only one Friend to rely on . . . which is yourself . . . I am very sure, you will do every thing you can towards mending my Ragged Fortune, which I have too long been darning with frugallity [*sic*] and Oeconnomy [*sic*] since nothing will now do but a Speedy and thorough Repair. 'Tis hard . . . to give up all pretension and expectation from those whom I have so long served with unwearied dilligence, [*sic*] assiduous Care, Labour and risque, yet having experienced the cruel disappointment of more than a Thousand fallacious promises, I abandon them . . . such men as Mr Fiennes Eddowes, are surely the worst of Murderers, but for him, I had long since been settled in Life, now God knows when I shall.
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> If Admiral Geary had courage, equal to his regard for me, after having been upon the footing of 150£ per annum established Salary from Government surely he might obtain for me some Naval employment, they are daily disposed of, to those who have much less pretension.[4]

By this time Kent's cash resources were so limited that when he was invited by Porter to join him at the Hague as soon as his Brussels duties were completed, he had to refuse once he had learnt the cost of lodgings. As he wryly observed: 'if Heaven was now to be possessed at the Hague, my circumstances and situation would check my flying to it'.[5] Shortly afterwards he asked Porter's advice about settling temporarily in Lille: 'I am told I cannot waste time in a more cheap, or better Place, any where here about'.

Yet, despite his parlous position, Kent clung obstinately to his 'gentlemanly' status — to what he called 'that little decent Pride, which every one must observe who would wish to keep up a Correspondence and Associate with, Gentlemen'. It was on these grounds that he looked askance at a proposal from Porter that he might be employed by Sir Joseph Yorke at the Hague to manage the latter's accounts, etc. As he told Porter, it was not the task itself that he objected to, 'but the footing and sphere I should have been in'. Equally, when the new minister-plenipotentiary at Brussels seemed likely to offer him an appointment which fell short of a secretaryship, he felt he must reject it:

> if he means to keep me as a Super-Intendant over His Houshold [*sic*] without the Character of Secretary I would not stay on any consideration [he wrote to Porter], nay I would a Thousand times rather be upon the footing which I was with you without a farthing Salary than to occupy an inferior Sphere under Mr G — although he was to give me £200 a year, such a Sinking would be a disgrace to my former Services under you, Admiral Geary &c. and absolutely as disagreeable to my Brother and all my other Friends as to myself. Mr G. proposes my Boarding out of his House out of a delicacy which he has of not affronting his German secretary. The inconveniences to me will be few, but the thing itself will be prejudicial to Mr G. — His Servants seeing me excluded from his Table will begin to drop all respect to me, they will Naturally want to be familiar, and I shall have no authority over them. The English who visit here will no longer look upon me as a Gentleman, or as a Person with Creditable Connections, but as a kind of an upper Servant obliged to attach himself to Mr. Gordon by distress, tho' he had once the honor to be upon a higher footing with you.[6]

Thanks to his 'little decent Pride', therefore, Kent found himself in the spring of 1766 without either job or prospects. But salvation was now to come from an unexpected

[4] *B Lib*, Egerton 2157, fol 114. As regards William Gordon, prior to his appointment in Brussels he had been minister-plenipotentiary to the diet of Ratisbon.

[5] *B Lib*, Egerton 2157, fol 126.

[6] *B Lib*, Egerton 2157, fol 128.

direction. During the three years he had spent in Flanders he had taken great interest in the husbandry methods of the Flemish people, which he considered to be 'in the highest perfection' in any part of Europe. 'No spot was there to be found that was not highly cultivated.'[7] Enthusiasm for agricultural improvement was growing in Britain at this time, and so when Kent returned to England he was invited by Sir John Cust, then Speaker of the House of Commons, to write an account of the Flemish farming methods. The Custs were Lincolnshire landowners, and it may have been on this account, or as a result of prodding from Sir James Porter, that the invitation was extended. In any event the task was completed satisfactorily and with Sir John's support and that of Thomas Anson, MP for Lichfield and brother of the famous Admiral, Lord Anson, Kent was persuaded to embark on a career as agricultural adviser and improver. Anson promised to help him in his new work, and Kent referred gratefully to him as 'the true friend of merit, and the encourager of science wherever he found it'.[8] From an early stage Kent was given the management of Anson's property in Norfolk, and Rippon Hall, Hevingham, which was to be his residence in the county, formed part of that estate.[9]

At about the same time Kent enlisted the aid of a second valuable ally, Benjamin Stillingfleet, the naturalist, whom he described as 'the English Linnaeus', and whose acquaintance he may have made through another East Anglian landowner, Robert Marsham of Stratton Strawless, himself an enthusiastic botanist.[10] In 1760 Stillingfleet had published a book on grasses in which he distinguished between 'good' and 'bad' herbage, and provided illustrations of the specimens best calculated to produce the richest hay and sweetest pasture. With his help, Kent learned to take 'Nature' as his guide in deciding upon the innate properties of the soil. His ideas of land values were formulated 'not from local enquiry which might mislead my judgment, but from the wild plants and grasses; . . . Accordingly, when I found the oak and elm as trees, and the rough cock's-foot and meadow fox-tail as grasses, I was assured that such land was good. And where I found the birch tree, the juniper shrub, and the maiden-hair, and creeping bent-grasses, I was equally certain that such land was poor and sterile.'[11]

II

From these tentative beginnings, Kent went on to establish a major land agency business. By the 1790's he had even acquired two partners — his nephew, William Pearce, and John Claridge, and had established an office at Craig's Court, Charing Cross, London, where landowners could apply for estate valuations 'for purchase and sale . . . and calculations of every denomination that can affect them, are made upon terms of moderation; and those terms always stated before the business is undertaken'.[12] Doubtless his previous secretarial experience stood him in good stead in making these commercial arrangements.

But in the initial stages, progress was slow, with Kent heavily dependent on the interest and support of his friends. One of the first projects with which he became involved was property development in Yarmouth, probably for the Anson family, who owned land in the town. Later they were to build up a political connection there, and by 1789 Kent was assuring his employer of the possibility of 'some Branch' of the family coming forward as MP for the town: 'I think it is at least worth while to keep up a good understanding with

[7] *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXI, Pt I, 1811, p 183.
[8] Ibid; Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons 1754–1790*, I, 1964, p 23.
[9] Nathaniel Kent, *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* 1st edn, 1775, p 170. Information provided by Norfolk County Record Office.
[10] R W Ketton-Cremer, *Felbrigg: The Story of a House*, Ipswich, 1976 edn, p 146 and *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXI, Pt I, 1811, p 183.
[11] *Gentleman's Magazine*, p 183.
[12] Kent, op cit, new edn, 1793, pp 267–8.

the Corporation — for we see that Parliamentary Interest is the first Interest in the Kingdom'.[13]

Another early venture was the management of the estate of the future politician, William Windham, to whom he was probably introduced by Stillingfleet, since the latter had been appointed a guardian of Windham on the death of his father in 1761. Kent began to manage the Windham property in about 1770, when his employer was only twenty. Under his direction the parish of Felbrigg, Norfolk, which was at the heart of the estate, was entirely enclosed, with most of the 400 acres of former common and heath converted into arable or planted with trees. Initially Windham had encountered opposition to his enclosure plans from a young yeoman farmer but thanks to Kent's conciliatory approach, the difficulty was smoothed over and the farmer persuaded to sell his land, and to accept a tenancy drawn up on advantageous terms.[14] As a result of these measures, the Felbrigg property rose sharply in value, while both the population and crop yields were increased.[15] Under Kent's guidance, Windham also exchanged property in the Sudbury area of Suffolk with the Wodehouse family. In 1793 part of this land was sold for the then high figure of £11,100, though the rental had yielded only £275 7*s* per annum.[16]

As in the case of the Ansons, Kent helped Windham with his electioneering, and in November 1806, shortly before their professional relationship ended, the latter wrote to thank him for the 'votes & exertions of yourself and your Son'.[17] At the general election of 1806 Windham had been elected MP for the county of Norfolk, but the contest was subsequently declared void as a result of a petition alleging breaches of the Treating Act.[18] Over the years, Windham visited Kent at his home, and after one excursion to Kent's Fulham address, Coleshill Cottage, he declared that he must himself acquire a London residence 'out of town'.[19] Coleshill Cottage, despite its modest title, was a handsome white-fronted house surrounded by an attractive garden, and was to be the Kent family home for more than forty years. Kent first moved in during 1770, having transferred almost certainly from another Fulham address, and after his death his widow continued in occupation until 1814.[20]

Through connections like these, Kent built up his professional contacts and his expertize. In 1775, he published the influential *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property*, which described both his management methods and his philosophy. The work was based entirely on personal experience: 'Nothing is borrowed from books, or built upon hearsay-authority'. In the opinion of the *Monthly Review* it was the product of a 'very sensible man' whose advice was of particular value to the smaller landowner.[21]

At the outset, Kent firmly declared that a 'Competent knowledge of Agriculture [was] the most useful science a gentleman [could] obtain; it [was] the noblest amusement the mind [could] employ itself in'.[22] But in his view, the major requirements for any estate's prosperity were a rational layout, good drainage and a linking of soil types to the crops

[13] Staffordshire Record Office, D615/P/1/27 and information from Staffordshire Record Office concerning the Ansons owning land in Yarmouth.

[14] R W Ketton-Cremer, op cit, p 175.

[15] Kent, op cit, 1st edn, pp 257–8.

[16] *B Lib*, Add MSS 37,918, fol 191.

[17] *B Lib*, Add MSS 37,918, fol 135. See also *B Lib*, Add MSS 37,908, fol 50, for Kent's involvement in the 1790 election, on Windham's behalf.

[18] *DNB* entry for William Windham.

[19] Mrs Henry Baring (ed), *The Diary of the Right Hon. William Windham, 1784–1810*, 1866, p 43. There are several references to Kent visiting Felbrigg, as on 24 July 1784: 'Kent called while I was at breakfast', or an August entry: 'Soon after I got up, Kent came'.

[20] C J Feret, *Fulham Old and New*, 3, 1900, pp 50–1, and T Faulkner, *An Historical and Topographical Account of Fulham*, 1813, pp 274–5. Kent rented the property. See also Fulham Rate Books 1763–71, PAF I/27 and 1812–15, PAF I/38 at Shepherd's Bush Library, Archives Dept.

[21] *Monthly Review*, Old Series, LIII, 1775, p 467. The reviewer was John Langhorne, the poet, who was a prolific reviewer for the *Monthly*.

[22] Kent, op cit, 1st edn, p 8.

they most favoured.[23] Like his fellow agrarian reformers, Arthur Young and William Marshall, he strongly advocated enclosure to replace the old system of commons and open field cultivation. Where land was enclosed and suitable crop rotations introduced, it would 'in the course of a few years, make nearly double the return it did before'.[24] He was a strong supporter of the Flemish eight-course system of rotations or, failing this, of the six-course Norfolk system, which came 'as near to the practice of the *Netherlands*, as any made use of in England'. However, he recognized that in some areas a conversion of former arable land to pastoral purposes might be the most beneficial outcome after enclosure.[25] Later he was to put forward ingenious proposals for improving common land *without* enclosure, by the use of communal labour to carry out drainage, clearance of scrub, and other necessary operations, but there is no evidence that these ideas were ever put into practice.[26]

Leases were deemed essential for the best cultivation of an estate, though Kent realized that many landowners rejected such arrangements, because they wanted to keep their tenants 'in a state of submission, and dependence'.[27] Throughout his career he remained convinced that only with leases could a 'respectable yeomanry, and a well-cultivated country' be created, with tenants secure enough to embark upon drainage work and the 'claying, marling, and chalking' which were needed to improve the soil. However, he probably exaggerated the problems of tenants-at-will in that few landlords would expel efficient farmers at short notice merely to satisfy a whim, and it was common for families to continue on the same farm for generations.[28]

A third theme of the *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* was Kent's belief in the importance of small farms. This was based upon his observations of Flemish agricultural methods. And although he admitted that the soil in Britain did not allow a '*universal plan*, of farms so low as twenty, and thirty acres, which subsists in *Flanders*', he considered that holdings of an annual value of £160 should form the maximum on any estate. Since he appeared to base his calculations on a rent of around £1 per acre, this would fix the upper limit of farms at about 160 acres; the lowest limit should be 30 acres. Overall, he believed that holdings with a yearly value of £30 to £80 ought to outnumber those of a more substantial size. On an estate valued at £1000 a year, there should be one farm rented at £160; one at £120; one at £100; two at £80; two at £60; two at £50; three at £40; and four at £30. This would support sixteen families, whereas 'the generality of estates of 1000 l. a year, do not support a third part of sixteen families'.[29] Here again, though, his pessimism seems overdone, for as late as 1830 family farmers employing no labourers made up nearly half of all occupiers, and in areas where there was access to urban markets for milk, dairy produce, poultry and vegetables, smaller men were able to hold their own.[30]

In favouring the small producer, Kent differed from most of his fellow 'experts'. William Marshall, for one, emphasized the importance of capital and of large-scale production if agricultural improvements were

[23] Ibid, pp 11–17.
[24] Kent, op cit, new edn, p 255.
[25] Kent, op cit, 1st edn, pp 71–3.
[26] [Nathaniel Kent,] 'Hints for the General Improvement of Commons, recommended to the consideration of every person concerned', *Annual Register* for 1780, 1788, pp 143–5.
[27] Kent, op cit, 1st edn, pp 95–6.
[28] William Marshall, *Review and Abstract of the County Reports to the Board of Agriculture*, III, York, 1811, p 251 noted, for example, that on the Duke of Bedford's Cambridgeshire estate, although the farms were held at will 'a spirit of improvement pervades the minds of every tenant'. David Grigg, *Agricultural Revolution in South Lincolnshire*, Cambridge, 1966, p 132, notes it was not until about 1815 that the principle of tenant right was established in Lincolnshire, at a time when tenant investment was growing considerably. See also David Grigg, op cit, p 135.
[29] Kent, op cit, 1st edn, pp 217–18.
[30] G E Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 1963, p 96.

to be pursued, noting that, '*The small Farmer* is obliged to raise such crops as will pay him best for the present, and avoid every expense of which he does not receive the immediate advantage, by which means his farm and himself are always kept in a state of poverty'.[31] But for Kent, this disadvantage was outweighed by the need to 'enable industrious servants who have saved their wages, or whose good conduct entitles them to credit, to establish themselves . . . in business; and likewise to afford settlements, for the children of greater farmers to begin the world with'. Small producers were also careful to cultivate 'every obscure corner' of their holding, while a man working on his own account was likely to operate 'more chearfully, zealously, and diligently' than if he were employed by another. 'His wife and children are likewise of great service to him, especially if his gains depend much upon a dairy. And in general, the children of these little farmers prove the most useful people the country produces. The girls make the best dairy-maids; the boys the best gentleman's bailiffs; the best head-men in larger farms; the best persons to superintend, and manage cattle; and, in a word, the most regular servants, in most capacities.'[32]

Kent was anxious to promote good relations between landlord and tenant. One way of achieving this was for owners to encourage their tenants to take an interest in the state of the farm buildings. On the Anson estate in Norfolk the tenants were allowed 'all necessary materials for repairs', though they had to bear a share of the wage costs involved, up to a maximum of six per cent of the rent. Anything above that figure was paid for by the landlord. Thanks to this arrangement the property was well maintained and relations between owner and farmers cordial.[33]

A second possible cause of friction was game preservation. The wise landlord would 'not . . . be too tenacious of his game, and where he is obliged to inflict punishment for its protection, to do it with lenity and mildness, which will secure the object better than great severity'. For farmers were the 'natural guardians of the game; and where they are treated by their landlords with confidence, they will always protect it much better than a game-keeper'.[34]

Finally, Kent showed concern for the welfare of the labourers. At a time when the as yet unreformed Arthur Young was declaring that 'every one but an ideot [*sic*] knows, the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious', and was advising: 'I would have industry enforced among the poor; and the use of tea restrained. Nothing has such good effects as workhouses', Kent adopted a very different stance. As he observed in *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property*, estates were 'of no value without hands to cultivate them'. Consequently, the labourer 'is one of the most valuable members of society; without him the richest soil is not worth owning'. To ensure the comfort of his workers must be an object 'highly deserving the country gentleman's attention'.

Cottage improvement constituted one important area of reform. 'The shattered hovels which half the poor of this kingdom are obliged to put up with, is [*sic*] truly affecting to a heart fraught with humanity', he declared. 'We are all careful of our horses, nay of our dogs, which are less valuable animals; we bestow considerable attention upon our stables and kennels, but we are apt to look upon cottages as incumbrances, and clogs to our property; when, in fact, those who occupy them are the very nerves and sinews of agriculture. . . . Cottagers are indisputably the most beneficial race of people we have.'[35] To assist would-be improvers, he

[31] Marshall, op cit, I, York, 1808, p 132, quoting from J Bailey and G Culley, *A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cumberland.*

[32] Kent, op cit, 1st edn, pp 214–15.

[33] Ibid, p 170.

[34] Ibid, new edn, p 278.

[35] Ibid, 1st edn, pp 228–30. The earlier quotations from Young are in John G Gazley, *The Life of Arthur Young 1741–1820*, Philadelphia, 1973, pp 72–3.

included plans of model cottages at the rear of the book.

Next to accommodation, food was of prime importance. Where small farmers had dwindled in numbers, labouring families found difficulty in buying milk, butter and other small items in their own parish. For 'the great farmers have no idea of retailing such small commodities, and those who do retail them, carry them all to towns'. The result was that they had to pay higher prices at the market or to the local mealman and baker.[36] To combat this, Kent favoured cottagers being supplied with plots of land on which they could keep a cow and a pig, and raise vegetables. In his view, the labourer who had such concessions was a more faithful servant to his employer. He had 'a stake in the common interest of the country, and is never prompt to riot in times of sedition, like the man who has nothing to lose'. Clearly on grounds of self-interest the propertied classes should make such provisions, and where the farmer proved reluctant to supply plots, the landowner should endeavour to meet the deficiency.

In 1797, in a broadsheet on *The Great Advantage of a Cow to the Family of a Labouring Man*, he developed the theme further. Not only would such a scheme enable cottagers to obtain their milk more cheaply, and, where a pig was kept, their meat, too, but it would benefit the health of the families. 'Milk is the natural Food for Children, . . . For my Part, I have been for many Years, so impressed with the Propriety and good Policy of this Plan, that I have never failed giving it all the Encouragement I possibly could; and flatter myself, that in the different Estates which I have had the Regulation of, with the Assistance of my Partners, . . . we have been instrumental in establishing a great Deal of real Comfort.' One of the firm's recent successes in this regard was the Earl of Egremont's property in Yorkshire, where extensive reorganization had been carried out in 1796. As a consequence a high proportion of cottager tenants had secured small closes on which they could keep a cow. Here, as elsewhere, he believed much good could be done merely 'by paring off a few Acres from a large Farm, or by breaking up one Farm out of Twenty, which may frequently be done, without Injury to any Person, it is rather a Matter of Surprize, that this Thing is not oftener done than it is'.[37]

In fact as early as 1775–76, when Kent was employed by the second Earl of Hardwicke to revalue his estate at Hardwick and Haresfield in Gloucestershire, one of the changes proposed was for a cottager, hitherto paying a rent of £1 5*s* a year for a house and garden, to have this doubled and to receive a small orchard as well, 'to assist him in keeping a Cow, as this small portion may be of great comfort to the Poor Man'. The land was to be taken from a farmer whose holding was about 118 acres and for whom its loss would be of 'no material consequence'.[38]

However, Kent recognized that not all cottagers could obtain land, or, when they had such access, could afford to purchase a cow or pigs to stock it. In these circumstances, one possibility was for larger farmers to run a few cows for their labourers with their own herd. A rent of 2*s* a week could be levied for each animal by the farmer, who would also keep any calves born. The merit of the system was that the cow's milk would in these conditions 'be more certain, by her being more regularly kept, and having greater Scope and Change of Food; and no Time in mowing

[36] Kent, op cit, 1st edn, pp 263–4.

[37] Kent, *The Great Advantage of a Cow to the Family of a Labouring Man*, broadsheet, 26 December 1797, in British Library, 1865.c.14(29). Survey of the Yorkshire Estate of the Earl of Egremont by Kent, Claridge and Pearce, vols I and II, Petworth House MSS 3075 and 3076, consulted at West Sussex Record Office. On p 5 of vol I it was noted that taking six acres from a nearby Farm had 'made two very comfortable Places for Two industrious Labourers, by enabling each of them to keep a Cow'.

[38] The Survey and Valuation is in the British Library, Add MSS 36,236. The survey was carried out in the autumn of 1775 and the spring of 1776 (fol 72). Kent also noted (fol 66) that the farmers were to be given notice to quit 'so that their farms could be remodelled', after which they would be readmitted.

and making Hay for her, would be lost by the Labourer'.[39]

It was also essential that labourers should have flour at prices they could afford. Farmers ought, where possible, to supply their own men with cheap bread corn, when the market level was 'high and oppressive to them'. 'It is but reasonable that the human servant should fare as well as the animal servant', Kent averred: 'a farmer does not give his horse a less quantity of oats because they are dear, nor is it reasonable that the ploughman or the thresher in the barn, should have less for his penny, because his master gets a great price'.[40] Significantly, when in 1791 Kent came to manage Windsor Great Park on behalf of George III, one of his early improvements was the erection of a small water-mill where flour was ground and sold to the estate labourers at 16*d* a stone. It was an arrangement which represented 'a saving of at least twenty per cent from what it would cost them to buy it from the mealmen or shopkeepers'.[41]

Lastly, Kent was concerned with the broader aspects of the contemporary debate on poverty. Perhaps with his own early struggles in mind, he wrote in a new edition of his book, published in 1793: 'There are two principles, which should be kept alive as much as possible, in the minds of the poor; pride, and shame, the former will lead them to the attainment of comfort, by honest means, and the latter will keep them from being burthensome to their neighbours.'[42] A distinction must be drawn between 'the lazy and profligate wretch' and the hard-working man who had fallen on difficult times through no fault of his own. For this reason, he opposed the houses of industry (i.e. workhouses) which were being established by incorporations of parishes in certain parts of England, particularly East Anglia, during the second half of the eighteenth century. 'A man born to no inheritance, who assiduously devotes his whole life to labour,' he declared, 'has as great a claim upon the neighbourhood, where the labour of his youth has been devoted, as the worn out soldier or sailor has to Chelsea or Greenwich; and this reward ought to be as honourable, as it is comfortable, and not to be administered in a way that is repugnant to that natural love of rational freedom which every human mind sympathizes in the enjoyment of.'[43] One solution was to establish a pension scheme to which men would contribute during their active years and whose funds could then be invested to provide a small income for the old and decrepit. In this way, 'the latter part of a poor man's life would terminate in comfort'. Another possibility was the setting up of friendly societies. Here the 'rich and opulent' could give encouragement by adding 'little donations to the poor man's nest egg'. Lord Harcourt's example at Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire was particularly worthy of imitation, for there 'if a poor man puts a penny into the social box', Harcourt contributed another: 'if a farmer or tradesman contributes a shilling, he adds another; and by this means the poor rates are kept low, and the spirit of the peasantry unbroken'.[44]

Kent's anxiety about the welfare of the poor was clearly evident in the first edition of the *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* when it appeared in 1775, but a number of his ideas were refined and developed during the succeeding two decades. Unlike such fellow writers as the Rev David Davies, Kent was never a simple paternalist. He believed in fostering a spirit of self-help and independence among labouring people, and in upholding the dignity of their position. Perhaps this was a lesson learnt during his own earlier struggles. Nor did he favour resort to the poor rates to provide sustenance for needy

[39] Kent, *The Great Advantage of a Cow*, pp 2–3.
[40] Kent, *Hints to Gentlemen*, new edn, p 285.
[41] Kent, *Some Particulars of the King's Farm at Windsor in 1798*, Oxford, 1802, p 26. William Pearce, *A General View of the Agriculture of Berkshire*, Board of Agriculture Report, 1794, pp 68–9.
[42] Kent, *Hints to Gentlemen*, new edn, p 283.
[43] Kent, *A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Norfolk*, 1796, p 171.
[44] Kent, *Hints to Gentlemen*, new edn, p 283.

families, along the lines of Thomas Gilbert's proposals, and later those of Speenhamland itself. Many of his arguments were, indeed, echoed in the debates on poverty and social reform at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.[45] In his own day they were to be largely ignored.

III

In the meantime, Kent's professional reputation and his business activities were growing apace. Unlike most other land agents of his day, he never became exclusively associated with one employer but always retained his professional freedom. Here, too, the hardships of his earlier years, when he had been dependent on the vagaries of patronage, may have influenced his decision. But inevitably this policy involved him in much travelling and in explanations to would-be clients about the tightness of his schedule. Thus an invitation in August 1774 to value part of the Earl of Hardwicke's estate in Gloucestershire was answered by an offer to undertake the work some months later: 'my time is all carved out till the very end of November, but if as I said before, the intire completion of it on this side Christmas would answer his Lordship's purpose, he should not be disappointed and I should think myself much obliged to him'. Lord Hardwicke decided to accept these assurances, and was evidently so satisfied with the outcome that he extended the contract in the following year.[46]

Kent, for his part, was anxious to establish a system of management which could be easily maintained after his departure. 'When the Estate is thus regulated', he told the Earl, 'your Lordship will have a perfect Knowledge of its condition, and it may afterwards be superintended by any Person with little trouble.' At the same time, he felt himself 'more capable of suggesting proper Covenants and defeating Tenants' objections, than a Lawyer, whose experience may have been less in such kind of business'.[47]

Kent specialized in the improvement of estate layouts. But, where necessary, he also suggested appropriate crop rotations and techniques of animal husbandry, as well as supervising the sale of timber and agricultural produce. This applied, for example, during the 1790's on the royal estate at Windsor. Elsewhere he and his partners undertook the collection of rents and the drawing up of leases on behalf of clients. Even in the 1770's, Kent was providing these services for Sir Charles Cocks on his estates in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.[48]

Where reorganization was carried through, an estate's value could be increased sharply. On part of the second Earl of Hardwicke's estate during 1775–76, Kent raised annual rents from £1171 19*s* 6*d* to £1482 12*s* 3*d*. On one farm, where the rent jumped from £85 17*s* 6*d* to £118 14*s* 6*d*, he noted that the holding had been made more convenient by adding to it part of a neighbouring property. In addition, as 'several small Closes are laid together, there might be a great many Pollards taken down and disposed of, which would be an Improvement to the Land'. On another farm of 139 acres, the rent was increased from £110 10*s* to £146 11*s* 6*d* a year. Here essential drainage work was to be carried out and thistles eradicated.[49]

The revaluation of the Earl of Egremont's estate in Yorkshire brought even more substantial changes. This was completed in 1796–97, largely by Kent's partner, John Claridge. A survey of the 24,000-acre estate

[45] Maurice Bruce, *The Coming of the Welfare State*, 3rd edn, 1966, p 152. See, for example, Lloyd George's comment in 1909 that it was hard that an old workman should have to find his way to the gates of the tomb, bleeding and footsore, through the brambles and thorns of poverty'. Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, 1973, p 32.

[46] *B Lib*, Add MS 35,612, fol 43; Add MSS 35,695, fol 57; Add MSS 35,695, fol 66; and Add MSS 35,695, fol 71.

[47] *B Lib*, Add MSS 35,695, fol 71.

[48] In April, 1775, Kent noted that he was 'going into Worcestershire to collect Sir Charles Cocks's Rents', *B Lib*, Add MSS 35,695, fol 66. See also Kent, *Hints to Gentlemen*, 1st edn, p 191.

[49] *B Lib*, Add MSS 36,236, fols 27 and 36.

revealed that much of it was seriously under-rented, the only exception being a thousand or so acres held around Tadcaster, where the previous agent had been guided by the suggestions of enclosure commissioners. As a result of Kent & Co's proposals, the rent was raised from £12,850 to £19,099, and during the course of the next fourteen years, further increases were secured. By 1811 the gross rental was above £25,000, or approximately twice the 1796 figure. For managing the estate, Kent, Claridge and Pearce charged their customary 3½ per cent on its net yield. This gave fees ranging from £465 5*s* 1*d* in 1803 (a year when outgoings 'incident to the estate' were particularly heavy at £4734 13*s* 6*d*) to £704 18*s* 8*d* in 1806 (when the estate outgoings were a mere £161 7*s*). From 1804 the payment of property tax also adversely affected net yields and hence the partners' commission.[50]

For this fee, Claridge supervised the running of the estate, controlled the payment of bills, and had oversight of the plantations and of timber sales. He was allowed a good deal of latitude in his professional judgments, but when he appeared to be embarking on a radically new policy, his actions were queried by the Earl of Egremont's auditor. Thus in October 1797 the presentation of two inn signs to publican tenants was raised. In his reply, Claridge pointed out that in one case (the Angel Inn, Topcliffe) improvements had been carried out which had turned this 'House . . . on the Great North Road . . . from being a miserable Pothouse' to 'as comfortable a Public House, or small Inn, as any between London and Edinburgh'. In the second case, the sign had been given 'as an Ornament to the Village and an Improvement to the place'. Similarly, the loan of two guineas to a poor tenant was queried on three separate occasions in 1799–1800, even though Claridge emphasized that by his action the man had been able to pay his rent, and had been 'able to go on the ensuing year . . . if a seizure is made he becomes a charge on the parish and the House is considered as held by the overseers'. However, to the auditor, such an innovation was a matter for Lord Egremont himself 'who alone can decide on its propriety'. In spite of the smallness of the sum, the principle of granting aid 'without his Lordship's previous concurrence seems to demand consideration'. On a further occasion, when discussing rent arrears, it was pointed out by the auditor that the tenant should always be reminded 'of the old fashioned principle, that the Landlord's rent is the very first payment, to which he is above all others to attend'.[51]

Yet, despite these queries and criticisms, the firm continued to superintend the estate until Kent's death in 1810, and thereafter Claridge appears to have managed it on his own. During the 1790's, therefore, the partners were simultaneously supervising estates as far apart as the Windham and Anson properties in East Anglia; the Egremont property in Yorkshire; and, most prestigious of all, George III's estate at Richmond and Windsor. The scrupulous care with which the surveys were conducted and the reports drawn up also suggests that alongside the three principals — Kent, Claridge, and Pearce — there must have been a considerable staff of subordinates to assist with measuring and with the writing up of material. Certainly G F Thynne, who became a partner in the business some years after Kent's death, was already engaged on clerical and valuation work by 1808, while Kent refers to help given by a clerk named Wright when he was surveying the Windsor estate in December 1796. There is also evidence that in minor valuation cases, the

[50] Yorkshire Abstract in the Petworth House MSS, Document 404, and Survey of the Yorkshire Estate, Vol II, Petworth House MSS, Document 3076, p 299.

[51] Petworth House MSS, Document 404; the 1799/1800 example in Petworth House MSS, Documents 3099–3101; the comment about rent occurs in Document 3099, June 1800.

firm sub-contracted part of their work to local agents.[52]

IV

Not surprisingly, the intervention of a firm of outside professionals was sometimes resented by the permanent stewards of the landowners concerned. On the Earl of Hardwicke's estate in the mid-1770's, Kent's efforts to meet the agent were repeatedly frustrated. Although he announced his arrival at Gloucester on three separate occasions, the man always evaded him. The third time he decided to apply to the bailiff instead and was given 'a candid account of every thing I asked'. Kent therefore made no further effort to meet the agent, 'and he was as shy on his part, for though I was in Gloucester part of five days the last visit which I made, and which he knew the first day from Fryor [the bailiff], he never came near me'. However he added in a placatory vein: 'I should . . . be sorry that he should forfeit your Lordship's good will by any rudeness . . . to me'.[53]

On William Windham's estate in the early 1780's, there was similar ill-feeling between Kent and the steward, William Cobb, though the latter had originally been engaged on Nathaniel's recommendation. On one occasion Cobb was sharply reproved by his employer for his attitude:

> Your letter to me was foolish, that to Mr Kent was not only absurd but in the highest degree impertinent. You seem totally to have forgot the distinction due to the different ranks of life. Mr K. has always done you justice. He gives you full credit for your good qualities: but knows what I could not fail to perceive that you have a most unbounded share of vanity together with as great (or greater) a degree of obstinacy. [I]n the original dispute I shall not at all interfere.[54]

A third example of these conflicts of interest, this time to Kent's disadvantage, occurred in 1806–07, also on the Windham estate. By that date Windham had become dissatisfied with Kent's methods, believing his property to be under-rented and under-valued compared to its true market position. So he called in another agent, a Mr Budd, as a second opinion. Kent anxiously predicted that the new man would 'endeavour to bring a separation between us'. The point at issue was Windham's estate near Sudbury, and Budd came up with a much higher figure than the £40,000 minimum put forward by Kent. Windham sharply expressed his discontent to the latter: 'you cannot be surprized . . . when a property which you had valued at £40,000, I was immediately after offered between 60 and 70 thousand & should now be induced with difficult to take £80,000 — & [with] the loss which for some 3 or 4 years I have been sustaining in Rent . . . partly, tho' not entirely in that proportion'. Kent defended himself by declaring that if the estate had been sold on his recommendation it would have been auctioned in four lots, and 'by means of the Hammer' would have fetched its full value. He also suggested that any prospective purchaser who had offered over £60,000 for the property probably cherished 'a delusive hope of forming a [political] Interest' in the nearby borough of Sudbury and was, therefore, not concerned with its agricultural potentialities.[55] He advised Windham to close with the offer immediately, for he would 'never afterwards' have so good a one. But Windham was not persuaded and in the autumn of 1807, he took his business away from Kent, thereby ending a connection which had lasted more than 36 years.[56]

Fortunately, most of Kent's business relations ended more happily than this. His connection with the Holkham estate in Norfolk, for example, apparently began in 1785, and continued during the 1790's, when

[52] A letter from John Claridge, 14 April 1803, refers to the valuation of copyhold property in Warwickshire by a Mr Eagle, a sub-agent. British Library, Add MSS 40631C, fols 220–221. For Thynne, Shepherd's Bush Library, Archives Dept, DD/303/16/3, and information provided by Staffordshire Record Office.

[53] *B Lib*, Add MSS 35,695, fol 71.

[54] R W Ketton-Cremer, op cit, p 175, and R W Ketton-Cremer, *The Early Life and Diaries of William Windham*, 1930, p 211.

[55] *B Lib*, Add MSS 37,918, fols 135, 149, 191, 231, and 239.

[56] *B Lib*, Add MSS 37,918, fol 149.

he was employed on several occasions to carry out valuation work or to arrange for the leasing of property. In 1791, a payment of £241 12*s* was made to 'Messrs. Kent, Claridge & Co. for valuing different farms'; in 1795, the sum was £76 10*s* 11*d*, and in 1796, £63 16*s*.[57] Later, Holkham's owner, Thomas Coke, chaired a meeting of the Norfolk Agricultural Society held in March 1808 at which Kent was presented with an embossed silver goblet, adorned with the emblems of Agriculture and Justice, on behalf of the county's landowners and tenants. At the presentation, reference was made to the respect and esteem in which he was held 'for his integrity and impartiality between landlord and tenant, in his profession as a surveyor of land, and for his liberal and upright attachment to the interests of Agriculture'. In his reply, Kent picked up this theme, declaring that when a gentleman put his estate 'into my hands, I considered it was the highest trust he could repose in me; it was leaving it to me to mete out his fortune by allotting him what I thought proper upon the object submitted to me'. However, he admitted that when in doubt as to the rival claims of landlord and tenant, he had always given 'the turn of the scale' to the latter. He emphasized, too, his concern for land improvement, pointing out that an embankment between the washes in neighbouring Lincolnshire which had 'secured land from the sea, to the amount of 200,000 l. in value, was principally brought about and effected by my advice'.[58]

V

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the pinnacle of Kent's career was his management of the royal estates at Windsor and Richmond. It is to this we must now turn. The proposal for the former project was first made in a letter from General Harcourt, then groom of the royal bedchamber, in February 1791. At the time Kent was in Norfolk on business, and so John Claridge, who opened the letter, contacted Harcourt on his behalf. After discussion, it was agreed that Kent should be interviewed on 24 February. In the meantime the strictest secrecy was to be observed, for Harcourt warned that if the matter became public knowledge 'applications innumerable may be made from other quarters'.[59]

Kent paid his first visit to Windsor on 1 March. At that date the four thousand or so acres of the Great Park were covered with ant-hills, moss, fern and rushes, interspersed with dangerous bogs and swamps. Under Kent's direction, a new and more productive régime was to be introduced, with the King's support and encouragement. Among the major changes was the conversion of about 1400 acres of former parkland into two farms — one organized on the Norfolk system of crop rotations, and the other on a modified Flemish system.[60] In addition, extensive drainage work was to be carried out in the Park itself. To execute this, the Kent partnership hired John Ridgeale, an Essex expert. Ridgeale was 'to bring at least six good workmen' with him and was to be paid on a piecework system, plus a salary of £1 1*s* per week to act as supervisor. Interestingly, despite the importance of his task, Ridgeale was unable to sign his name, save with a mark. Nevertheless, he carried out his work efficiently and continued to be employed for several months each year during the next decade.[61]

Other alterations were also set in hand and by 18–20 July 1791, Kent noted that he had '*Measured* and staked out all the intended

[57] Holkham estate audit books on microfilm at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Film 691 for the 1791 figure and MS Film 955 for the period 1795–96. Peter Eden, 'Land Surveyors in Norfolk 1550–1850,' *Norfolk Arch*, 36, Pt II, 1975, p 147.

[58] *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXI, Pt I, p 183. The Lincolnshire project may have been the drainage of fens around Boston for Sir John Cust and others in the later 1760's. Lionel Cust, *Records of the Cust Family*, Series III, 1927, p 290.

[59] Royal Archives, RA Add 15/359.

[60] Kent, *Some Particulars*, p 9. William Pearce, op cit, pp 65–6.

[61] Royal Archives, RA Add 15/371.

Buildings, upon the Norfolk Farm, which I shall now be able to explain to his Majesty'.

Alongside his supervision of the overall layout and cultivation of the farms and Park, Kent was concerned with staff recruitment. This included the bringing in of Norfolk youths to help with ploughing on the Norfolk Farm, the appointment of an expert from Dorset to carry out thatching work, since Nathaniel considered the art of reed-thatching to be 'remarkably well understood' in that area, and the recruiting of a shepherd from Wiltshire.[62] Because of their general land agency commitments, he and his partners were able to spend only a few days each week or fortnight at Windsor. So the day-to-day running of the farms was put into the hands of bailiffs — one for each — with a steward in overall control. But it is clear that Kent intended to keep a careful eye on them. On 31 May 1792 he noted that the 'Norfolk Men' had been particularly glad at his arrival because 'the state of their Land designed for Turnips requires the utmost attention at this crisis — I am sorry to remark that they have not had the assistance they ought to have had . . . *Gave* the most urgent orders to Mr. Frost, [the steward] to bend his whole Strength to the preparation of the Land . . . but I do not mean to rely upon promises, but either to go down myself or send Mr Pearce a day or two almost every Week, till these Seeds are sown and to do it at such irregular intervals, as may not be known before hand to any Person but His Majesty, which I have no doubt will insure all the Success that can be derived from zeal and precaution.'[63]

Early in 1793 he began to issue journals to his supervisors, with directions on how to enter in them each day the work done by the different teams of men and horses: 'told them, that I should compare the Work with the Entries every Monthly Visit, and if I should find any deficiency, I should think it incumbent on me to report the same to *His Majesty*. Gave them likewise to understand that if any of the Men should at any future time absent themselves from their Work, except from Illness, and they should neglect to represent the same to Mr. Frost . . . so that they may be stated proportionably short in the Monthly Pay List *His Majesty* will be acquainted by me with such neglect, and either of them who shall be found to connive at any neglect or Idleness must expect to be removed from his Posts.'[64] A similar policy had been introduced on the Richmond estate just over a month before, with the Kent partnership assuming the management of that property from the end of March 1792, following the death of the former Ranger, the Earl of Bute.[65]

Another innovation was the use of a stock book to ascertain which animals were making the best returns; Kent thought it would also serve the purpose of guarding 'against *Imposition* and *Collusion*' — presumably on the part of the bailiffs.[66] Cropping and field books were likewise introduced, while in 1796 a new system of issuing orders was brought forward. Under this Kent and his partners wrote their instructions in the steward's order book and also on duplicate cards. These were to be handed to the various sub-agents, and on the first Sunday in every month a report was to be prepared as to how far the instructions had been carried out. In addition, so that the most senior workers could gain practical experience of Norfolk farming methods, Kent arranged for them to pay brief visits to that county.

[62] Nathaniel Kent's Journal of Windsor Great Park, vol I, 1791–92, p 80 in the Royal Library, Windsor; *B Lib*, Add MSS 42,072, letter dated 31 August 1794, and William Pearce, op cit, p 66.

[63] Nathaniel Kent's Journal, vol I, pp 142–7.

[64] Kent's Journal of Windsor Great Park, vol II, pp 59–61.

[65] Kent's Journal of the Progressive Improvements in Richmond Park, p 35. This volume is also in the Royal Library, Windsor.

[66] Kent's Journal of Windsor Great Park, vol I, pp 120–1. However by August 1793 (vol II, pp 167–9), it was discovered that 'two Oxen which originally cost Nine Pounds and two Steers, which cost Eight Pounds each, could not be made out, and . . . they were by His Majesty's permission given up'. Kent sternly added that in future 'the whole' was to be settled 'in a way to guard against mistakes'.

Care was taken to examine the background of the labourers and in July 1791 a detailed list of those employed at Windsor was drawn up. Of the 44 males working in the Park or on the farms, 12 had been with the estate for 15 years or more. Kent noted that he 'had taken the age of each Artificer and labourer . . . with a View, to put the heavy and quick Labour upon the strong and active Men . . . Their residence I took, to enable me hereafter to dispose of the Work, in such a Manner as to save as much unnecessary walking in the Morning and Evening to and from the Work, as possible. — And my reason for taking their Families and the length of Time they had worked on the Spot was to see which may be most intitled to any little indulgencies or confidence.'[67]

Kent's anxiety about the labourers' welfare likewise led to the provision of model dwellings on the Flemish Farm and, as we have seen, to the sale of cheap flour from the estate water mill. Indeed, during the famine years of 1795, workers were given the option of receiving part of their wages in flour instead of in cash alone. On other occasions, oxen and sheep were killed, and their meat sold at cheap rates to the men. Nevertheless, his concern for their well-being did not prevent him from dealing severely with those who transgressed. One man who, without permission, had gone upon 'an idle Frolick to London' was dismissed, 'partly as a punishment for his bad behaviour, and partly as an example to other labourers'.[68]

Among the main agricultural experiments carried out on the Windsor farms was that of using oxen instead of horses as working animals. The object was to economize in the consumption of fodder, and, at the same time, to increase the supply of meat, since at the end of their working life, the oxen could be sold to the butcher. The King himself took a personal interest in this project, and among the Royal Archives is a memorandum from him, suggesting improvements in the feeding of the animals.[69] Other schemes included the bringing in of implements from different parts of the country for trial purposes, so that Norfolk ploughs were used on the Norfolk Farm, while Suffolk ploughs were imported from their county of origin for use on the heavier soil of the Flemish Farm.[70]

The main reorganization of the Windsor estate (which was a far more substantial task than that at Richmond) was completed by Michaelmas 1797. In the autumn of the following year Kent reported on the progress made. On the credit side, formerly barren land had been brought into cultivation and several 'useful Experiments' carried out, while the fact that the work 'may in some Measure have contributed to His Majesty's Amusement and Health' was 'of all Things the most valuable to the Community'. Only one thing was wanting and that was to make a profit. Kent confessed himself 'surprised and mortified' that 'instead of a surplus *each Farm* should be minus'. But he added significantly: 'I know that the Rents shod. be returned, and would be returned if the Responsibility could be so impressed upon the Minds of all the different Superintendants, so that they might act with the same Zeal as a Farmer does for his own immediate Interest . . . *Suffice it*, that on my Part nothing shall be wanting to point out from Time to Time what is proper to be done to promote good and profitable Husbandry and to avoid Error.'[71] In this there is an echo of Kent's old faith in the diligence of the small farmer working on his own account as compared to that of the hired hand, who had to be carefully supervised.

That is the last of Kent's detailed reports to the King on the Windsor estate, though the firm continued to handle its financial disbursements until at least the autumn of 1801, and to examine the accounts for two further years. Happily by 1799–1800 a profit had

[67] Kent's Journal of Windsor Great Park, vol I, p 10.
[68] Ibid, pp 143–5.
[69] Royal Archives, RA Add 15/389 (1 January 1797).
[70] Kent's Journal of Windsor Great Park, vol I, p 88.
[71] Kent's Journal of Windsor Great Park: The Farms. There is only one Report in this volume.

been earned on both farms, amounting in the case of the Norfolk holding and a small adjoining property to £575 16*s* (or £40 16*s* over and above a suggested 'rent' figure); for the Flemish farm it was £831 16*s* 9*d*, or £246 16*s* 9*d* above the 'rent'. The partnership likewise supervised Richmond Park and Farm to the end of the century, with the agricultural enterprise here concentrating on dairying and the grazing of store stock. Significantly some of the Richmond labourers had earlier worked at Windsor, including the bailiff, Thomas Gooch.[72]

VI

But if these royal improvement schemes were the most prestigious contracts undertaken by Kent and partners, his importance as a land agent and valuer was recognized by others. In 1801 he was even described in an Act of Parliament as 'an eminent Land Surveyor', when he was employed to value the late Earl of Orford's estate in Norfolk.[73] He was also involved in the purchase and sale of urban land, as in 1800 when he was concerned with the disposal of property at North End, Fulham. A few years later his firm was extensively involved with the Clerk of the Goldsmiths' Company in negotiations over property leases in Fulham.[74]

As recognition of his professional achievements, Kent was elected a member of the Society of Arts, a body which since its inception in 1754 had sought to promote agricultural improvement. And when the Board of Agriculture was formed in 1793, he was one of the first to be invited to write a county report — that upon Norfolk. A revised version of the work was published in 1796, and on 24 May in that year the Board wrote to congratulate him on 'presenting them with so interesting a work, so creditable both to them and to its author'.[75] Subsequently he was paid £300 to cover publication expenses, 'he accounting with the Board for what had been sold by other booksellers', apart from the publisher, George Nicol. He also communicated with the Board on such topics as the cultivation of potatoes and spring wheat, the desirability of labourers being allowed to keep a cow, and the need for a general enclosure bill to cheapen and simplify the legal procedures associated with that operation.[76]

Kent died of apoplexy in October 1810, but almost to the end of his life he remained actively engaged in his profession. From 1804 his eldest son, Charles, began to take part in the business, and after Nathaniel's death, he and William Pearce continued in partnership together.[77]

When he died Nathaniel Kent left an estate valued at more than £24,000.[78] It was a far cry from the impoverished young man of 45 years before who had been forced to contemplate 'wasting time' in Lille because of its cheapness. There is little doubt that this change of fortune was attributable to the businesslike manner in which he had conducted his affairs, and the way in which he had raised land agency, for the first time, to the level of a distinct and honourable profession. Thanks to his management of

[72] Windsor Great Park Accounts 1799–1800, pp 30 and 40, and Kent's Journal of the Progressive Improvements in Richmond Park, p 35.

[73] Local and Personal Acts, 41 Geo 3 *c*119, 2125 (bound volume at the British Library). I am indebted to Dr Peter Eden for drawing my attention to this reference.

[74] Shepherd's Bush Library, Archives Dept, DD/191/6 and DD/303.

[75] Board of Agriculture Letter Book, B XIII at Museum of English Rural Life, Reading, fol 134.

[76] Board of Agriculture: Register of Letters, etc, received 1793–1822, B XII, entries for Nathaniel Kent, and Letter Book, B XIII, entry for 3 March 1795; also Minute Book of the Board of Agriculture, vol I, B I, entry for 1 June 1798.

[77] Information provided by Staffordshire Record Office; Peter Eden, *Dictionary of Surveyors*, p 302, and *B Lib*, Egerton 3007, fol 128.

[78] PRO, PROB 11/1515, fol 508 and IR 26/164, item 184. Mrs Armine Kent outlived her husband by almost 16 years and was buried at Fulham in August, 1826, aged 78. See All Saints parish records at Fulham. In 1795/96, William Pearce became a close neighbour of Kent, by moving into the house next door. Fulham Rate Book PAF/1/34 at Shepherd's Bush Library, Archives Dept.

large estates he had been able to advance general farming standards and to point the way towards further improvements. In his careful and methodical fashion, with his emphasis on administrative efficiency, and on the proper recording of experiments, he had made a significant contribution to the progress of the 'agricultural revolution' itself. It was to this his contemporaries paid tribute at his death.

Notes and Comments

WINTER CONFERENCE 1981

The Winter Conference was held in London on Saturday 5 December. As in previous years, it was shared with the Historical Geography Research Group of the Institute of British Geographers. A student sit-in forced a last minute change of venue from the Polytechnic of Central London to the Institute of Historical Research, and the Society owes thanks to Professor F M L Thompson and the staff of the Institute for making a room available. For the first time in several years the conference was attended by fewer than 50 people, but those attending heard an interesting and varied range of papers on the theme 'Government Policy and Agriculture'. Speakers were as follows: Dr Lucy Adrian (Cambridge) 'The market in domestic wheat in the closing years of the Corn Laws'; Dr John Kingsbury (City), 'Central-local relations in English Land Reform, 1888–1930'; Dr Peter Dewey (Royal Holloway), 'Government policy and farm profits in Britain, 1914–18'; and Professor Andrew Cooper (Waterloo, Canada), 'British agricultural policy in the inter-war years — a study in Conservative politics'. Thanks are due again to Drs Baker and Phillips for organizing such a successful conference.

SPRING CONFERENCE 1982

The Spring Conference will be held at Hamilton Hall, University of St Andrews, 5–7 April 1982. Speakers include Dr Michael Ryder 'Medieval sheep and wool types', Dr R B Weir, 'Distilling and Agriculture 1870–1939', Ms Sarah Banks, Ms Lisa Frierman and Dr Ian Whyte. The conference will include an excursion into northern Fife led by Dr Graeme Whittington. Full details and a booking form are inserted into this issue of the *Review* but any enquiries should be addressed to the Secretary.

LOCAL HISTORY AT LEICESTER

Members may be interested to hear of the publication of a bibliography, edited by Alan Everitt and Margery Tranter, entitled *English Local History at Leicester 1948–1978*. This contains references to more than 1200 publications by past and present staff and students of the Department of English Local History at the University of Leicester, together with an introduction by Professor Everitt which surveys the work of the Department in its first 30 years. Copies are available from Professor Everitt price £1.85, and the bibliography will be reviewed in a future issue of the *Review*.