

Patterns of Estate Management in East Yorkshire c 1840–c 1880

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I

THE EAST RIDING of Yorkshire in the nineteenth century consisted of some 700,000 acres of farmland;¹ it was predominantly an agricultural county, with few towns and little industrial development.² By 1873 eleven men (with over 10,000 acres each in the county) owned 28 per cent of the land, a further 24 great landowners (3,000–10,000 acres) owned an additional 18 per cent, and 58 lesser landowners (1,000–3,000 acres) held 13 per cent.³ The largest corporate owners in 1873 were the Crown, Emanuel Hospital Westminster, the NE Railway Company, St John's College, Cambridge, and the dean and chapter of York Minster. These individual landowners and corporate owners had a sufficient number of tenants to warrant the employment of a manager, and this paper is concerned with the different patterns of management found in the East Riding in the middle years of the nineteenth century.⁴ Men who managed land were known by

several different names, land agents, land stewards, estate agents, or bailiffs (although estate agents were often property salesmen, and bailiffs were usually of inferior status). No one title became definitive.

Some estates used large firms of agents, based in London, and some employed smaller firms, working from York or Hull, or the market towns of Beverley or Malton. The men at the head of both large and small firms were commonly surveyors, but sometimes solicitors. Occasionally one man, working on his own account, had the oversight of estates belonging to several different owners. Some estates had a full-time resident agent, perhaps living in a purpose-built house with an office, near the centre of the estate. The resident agent could be a trained surveyor, a man who had served his time as a pupil in another estate office, a practical farmer, or a relative, qualified or not. In addition to the previous categories, there was always a small number of landowners who preferred to manage their own estates, with the aid of farm bailiffs.⁵

¹ Actually 706,684; this acreage, taken from the census and the Ordnance Survey, excluded wastes and commons (estimated at 4049 in 1873), woods, rivers, roads, canals, Crown property not let, churchyards, and other unrated property; *Return of Owners of Land, 1872–3*, BPP 1874 [c.1097] LXXII, pt I, pp 9, 11–12, 15.

² 'Altogether an agricultural district'; J Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850–1*, 1852, p 302.

³ *Return of Owners of Land, 1872–3*, BPP 1874 [c.1097] LXXII, pt II, and J Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1883. I have corrected the obvious faults in the Return, such as the double entry for 'Quintin, St' and 'St Quintin'. The return of 1873, although flawed, provided the first available figures for size and value of landholdings, but in Strickland's survey of 1812 he remarked that there were 9 or 11 great landowners in the East Riding, with rent rolls of about £10,000 each: H E Strickland, *A General View of the Agriculture of the East Riding*, 1812. Although the list of 11 families of 1812 was not the same as the list of 1873, the number remained the same.

⁴ The research on which this paper was founded was financed by the SSRC. I am grateful to my colleagues Jan Crowther, Alan Harris, David Neave, Michael Turner, and John Saville for helpful comments on the paper, and to the archivists of the City of Hull, the University of Hull, Humberside County Record Office, York Minster Library, and the Guildhall, London, for advice on archives in their custody.

⁵ Examples of all these categories will be found below. The literature on land agents includes A M Carr-Saunders and P A Wilson, *The Professions*, 1933, pp 194–208; E Hughes, 'The Eighteenth Century Estate Agent', in H A Cronne, T W Moody, D B Quinn, eds, *Essays in British and Irish History*, 1949, pp 185–99; G E Mingay, 'Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century Kent', *Ag Hist Rev* IV, 1956, pp 108–13; D Spring, 'Agents to the Earls of Durham in the Nineteenth Century', *Durham Univ J* LIV, 1962, pp 104–13; D Spring, *The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century: its Administration*, Baltimore, 1963; F M L Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 1963; J O Parker, *The Oxley Parker Papers*, Colchester, 1964; W Gavin, *Ninety Years of Family Farming*, 1967; F M L Thompson, *Chartered Surveyors*, 1968; F Hill, 'Squire and Parson in early Victorian Lincolnshire', *History* LVIII, 1973, pp 337–49; P Eden, *Dictionary of Land Surveyors . . . 1550–1850*, Folkestone, 1975–79; P Roebuck, *Constable of Everingham Estate Correspondence 1726–43*, Yorks Arch Soc Record Series CXXXVI, 1976; R J Colyer, 'The Land Agent in Nineteenth-Century Wales', *Welsh Hist Rev* VIII, 1977, pp 401–25; J A F Watson, *Savills. A Family and a Firm 1652–1977*, 1977; G Firth, 'The Roles of a West Riding Land Steward, 1773–1803', *Yorks Arch J* LI, 1979, pp 105–15; E Richards, 'The Land Agent', in G E Mingay, ed, *The Victorian Countryside* 2, 1981, pp 439–55; P Horn, 'An Eighteenth-Century Land Agent: The Career of Nathaniel Kent (1737–1810)', *Ag Hist Rev* XXX, 1982, pp 1–16.

Further research will be needed to see if the generalizations that emerge from this study of East Yorkshire are valid for other parts of England. The first conclusion is concerned with the importance of the firms of land agents, both national and local. The land agent is often thought of as a surrogate landowner, living on the estate as a country gentleman, and closely identified with the interests of his employer, whose deputy he was. But in the last third of the nineteenth century the majority of the estates of more than 1000 acres in East Yorkshire were managed, not by resident land agents, but in other ways, and in particular by firms, either from London or from a provincial office. Most of the firms of agents were founded in the nineteenth century. The partners were usually surveyors; but it was their corporate range of experience in different parts of the country that made them more akin to members of a profession than the comparatively isolated resident agent. So to the extent that firms of agents replaced resident agents in East Yorkshire (see Tables 1 and 2), it might appear that there was a slow movement towards a greater professionalism.

The second conclusion is that the resident agents in East Yorkshire do not appear to be more professionally qualified at the end of the nineteenth century than they were in the

1840s. There were more of them (fewer landowners managed their own estates, so that both firms of agents and resident agent benefited), but the percentage of the county administered by resident land agents rose by less than one per cent between 1873 and 1893. Both the structure of management and the managers themselves continued to represent the personal preference of the landowner. By the end of the nineteenth century most professions had succeeded in establishing a system which excluded outsiders; but land agency remained an open profession: the Land Agents' Society was not formed until 1902, and as late as 1922 the Society itself supported the freedom of the owner to employ whom he chose as his agent (whether qualified or not).⁶

II

The following table illustrates a number of patterns of land agency in the East Riding in the middle years of the nineteenth century; it includes all the estates over 10,000 acres, and samples from smaller and institutional estates. The samples have been chosen, not at random, but because of the availability of their archives.

⁶A M Carr-Saunders and P A Wilson, *The Professions*, 1933, p 207. The Land Agents' Society was re-absorbed into the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in 1970.

TABLE I
East Yorkshire Patterns of Estate Management, c 1840-c 1880

Name of family, E Riding acreage and estate	1841	1851	1861	1871
ELEVEN PRINCIPAL LANDOWNERS				
Sykes 34,010 acres Sledmere	land agent 1 resident	—————→	land agent 2 resident	land agents 3, 4 5, 6, 7, 6, 8 resident (1869-80)
Londesborough 33,006 acres Londesborough	(estate bought 1851)	no agent*	land agent 1	—————→
Cholmley/Strickland 20,503 acres Howsham, etc	land agent 1 resident	solicitor + Beverley firm of agents	no agent*	no agent*

Table 1 (continued)

Name of family, E Riding acreage and estate	1841	1851	1861	1871
Wenlock 19,453 acres Escrick	land agent 1 resident	land agent 2 resident		
Hotham 18,682 acres South Dalton	land agent 1 resident	land agent 2 resident		
Harrison-Broadley 14,877 acres Welton	no agent*	Hull firm of agents		
Bethell 13,395 acres Rise	land agent 1 resident	land agent 2 resident	land agent 3 resident	
Leconfield 13,247 acres Leconfield	London & York firm of agents			
Middleton 12,294 acres Birdsall	no agent*	no agent*	land agent 1 resident but in local firm	land agent 2 resident
Downe 11,817 acres Sherburn, etc	no agent*	no agent*	no agent*	no agent*
Constable 10,981 acres Burton Constable	land agent 1 non-resident + solicitor	solicitor/cousin + Malton firm of agents		Hull firm of solicitors

SIX LESSER LANDOWNERS

Herries 6858 acres Everingham	land agent 1 resident	land agent 2 resident	land agent 3 resident
Yarburgh 5668 acres Heslington	land agent 1 resident		
Saltmarshe 2776 acres Saltmarshe	landowner		
Sotheron-Estcourt 1896 acres Howden, etc	Howden solicitor	Wiltshire firm of solicitors	
Scholfield 1007 acres Sand Hall	landowner	land agent non-resident	

FOUR INSTITUTIONS

The Crown 12,230 acres Sunk Island, etc	Commrs of Woods & Forests (London)	London firm of agents for Crown Commrs
Emanuel Hospital Westminster 3179 acres Brandesburton	land agent 1 non-resident	land agent 2 (son of agent 1) non-resident

Table 1 (continued)

Name of family, E Riding acreage and estate	1841	1851	1861	1871
St John's College Cambridge 1996 acres various places	land agent non-resident	senior bursar		→
Dean and Chapter York 1889 acres various places	chapter clerk/ solicitor non-resident	London firm of agents for Eccl Commrs	chapter clerk/ solicitor non resident	→

Notes: The acreage of the estates is taken from *Return of Owners of Land, 1873*. The table is based on census enumerators' books for 1841, 1851, 1861, and 1871, Yorkshire directories (see note 40) and estate archives.

'no agent*' should perhaps be 'no agent has been traced' as it is not usually possible to make a definite statement that there was no agent. For instance, Lord Middleton had an agent for Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire c 1860, who may have overseen the East Yorkshire estates; and Lord Downe had an agent, working either from the North Riding or from York, and a firm of solicitors in Snaith managed his lands around Cowick.

The large London-based firms employed in the Riding were Cluttons and Smiths Gore. John Clutton of Cluttons (and later his half-brother and nephew, both called William Clutton) acted for Lord Leconfield, who in 1881 held some 25,000 acres in Yorkshire.⁷ E J Smith of the firm that was to become Smiths Gore was receiver for the Crown estates in the North, and both Clutton and Smith also acted for the Ecclesiastical Commission.

John Clutton (1809–96), whose life almost spanned the century, farmer, land agent, surveyor, co-founder of the Surveyors' Institution and its first president, went into his father's business in Sussex as a land agent and surveyor in 1827, moved to London and began his own practice in 1837, and was still practising in 1893.⁸ Other members of the Clutton family lived and worked in York.⁹ E J Smith (1817–80) joined Clutton's office c 1840, but later became a partner in a separate firm, first with Pickering, then with

his son and son-in-law as Smiths, Gore.¹⁰

Cluttons, as it came to be called, was perhaps the most famous of the large firms, with many thousands of acres to manage. In 1882 John Clutton estimated that he himself managed from 130,000 to 135,000 acres for the Crown and the Ecclesiastical Commission alone: he had no idea how many additional thousands of acres his firm managed for individuals. The firm of E P Squarey, another leading agent, but without such a large practice as that of Clutton, managed a quarter of a million acres in 24 English counties in 1894.¹¹ That total acreage made Squarey's interest greater than that of any single landowner (the man with the most English acres in 1883 was the duke of Northumberland, with 186,397 acres),¹² and Cluttons was a still larger firm. Such firms influenced the management of land by the sheer size of their holdings, and by the

⁷BPP, RC on the Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests, 1881 [c.3096] XVII, p 886. The Leconfield archives are divided between Alnwick Castle, Petworth House, and the Cumbria RO at Carlisle. The archives show Clutton acting for Lord Leconfield from c 1838 to c 1883.

⁸BPP, RC on the Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests, 1882 [c.3309–I] XIV, p 351; TS history, 'Cluttons 1765–1965'; privately printed history, *Cluttons 1765–1965*, ND; obituary in *The Times*, 5 March 1896; F M L Thompson, *Chartered Surveyors*, 1968, pp 132–3, 359–60.

⁹Yorkshire directories (see below, note 40) and Yorks Agric Soc membership lists, included in the Society's journals.

¹⁰Obituaries of E J Smith in *Trans of Surveyors' Institution* XIII, 1880–81, pp 409–18 and in *The Times*, 22 July 1880; G F A Best, *Temporal Pillars*, 1964, p 425.

¹¹BPP, RC on the Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests, 1882 [c.3309–I] XIV, pp 351–3; BPP, RC on Agricultural Depression, 1894 [c.7400–II] XVI, pp 203, 439. Squarey in his evidence of 1894 gave a graphic account of the growth of his firm. He had begun as a farmer in 1844 and started the agency in 1852. 'Our business grew wonderfully, from small beginnings at Salisbury; we were taken from the plough tail, to be made land agents. . . . Nothing is too large, nothing is too small for us'. Squarey did not know how much land his firm looked after, but his office subsequently handed in a schedule to the RC.

¹²J Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1883, p 337.

number of pupils who served articles in their offices, and then took up posts elsewhere in the kingdom.¹³

Below the great London firms in the hierarchy of influence came local firms of agents. They commonly called themselves 'surveyors and land agents' but there was much overlapping, as in the profession generally, between similar occupations. A typical firm was that of Page, in Beverley, established about 1814 and still in existence in 1867.¹⁴ In evidence to the Select Committee on Agricultural Customs of 1847-48, Edward Page said he had surveyed and valued about half the East Riding; between 300,000 and 400,000 acres, he estimated. He was agent for 15,000 or 16,000 acres in 1848, was surveyor to Beverley borough, had with his assistants surveyed all the projected railway line from Hull to York in 1845, and had been employed at times on specific works to improve land of little or no value, which he subsequently let for the owners. As well as his surveying and valuing work, he drew up tenancy agreements for owners whose farms were not in his charge. Page's detailed evidence to the Select Committee showed him answering questions on a wide range of agricultural topics: on tenant right, compensation for improvements, farm size, forms of tenancies, crop rotations, and on techniques such as chalking, manuring, draining, and marling.¹⁵ Page farmed himself; he also bought land and built speculative housing around the new railway station in Beverley. He lived on his farm outside Beverley with offices in the town and his sons worked with him, in the business and on the farm.¹⁶

¹³ Other examples of the vast English acreage controlled by the firms of agents, found in the RC reports of 1881, are Huskinson (80,000 acres), Randell (50,000 acres including Welsh land), Martin (50,000 acres), John Coleman of Derbyshire (more than 40,000 acres), and Beadel (land in every county; no acreage given but he took over £20,000 each year out of Lincolnshire alone).

¹⁴ Hull Record Office, DDHB 38/32; Yorkshire directories, see below, note 40, and East Riding poll books.

¹⁵ BPP, SC on *Agricultural Customs*, 1848 (461) VII, p 143; Humberside County Council Record Office (hereafter HCCRO) DDPY 32/2.

¹⁶ K. Miller, J F Robinson, B English, and I Hall, *Beverley: an Archaeological and Architectural Study*, 1982, p 68.

A similar firm was established by Robert and John Wyse (or Wise), surveyors, land and estate agents, who practised from Malton and Norton from c 1823 to 1892.¹⁷ Robert Wyse (1819-96), already employed by Sir Henry Boynton as non-resident agent for Burton Agnes (9300 acres), was appointed in 1860 to the Burton Constable estates (11,000 acres) in addition.¹⁸ At his death, Robert was described as having 'one of the most extensive practices as a land agent in East Yorkshire',¹⁹ and he also worked in the North Riding. Another family firm was that of Donkin of Westow, land agents c 1823 to c 1860, who looked after the Watt estates at Bishop Burton (4800 acres), the Bower estates at Welham (2000 acres) and carried out work such as surveys, sales and valuations for the dean and chapter of York.²⁰ A member of this family, Edward Donkin, was by 1861 resident agent on Lord Middleton's estate at Birdsall (12,000 acres).²¹ Men such as Page, Wyse and Donkin were also involved in East Riding enclosures as surveyors or commissioners, in tithe awards and in railway surveys. Surveyors in all parts of England profited from this type of work: Clutton's London practice was established on the basis of work for the South Eastern Railways, and E J Smith's obituary in the *Transactions of the Surveyors' Institution* suggested 1835 as a time when tithe commutation, commons enclosure, and railways 'opened a vast field for surveyors'.²²

Firms that managed estates were not always firms of surveyors but sometimes of solicitors. One such firm was based in the small town of Snaith, headed by Edward Clark from c 1845 until the 1890s. Clark acted for many local organizations and

¹⁷ Yorkshire directories, see below, note 40.

¹⁸ HCCRO, DDCC 133/30, 2 April 1860.

¹⁹ Obituary of Robert Wyse in the *Malton Messenger*, 11 January 1896. I am indebted to Dr Alan Harris for this reference.

²⁰ The dean and chapter's acreage fluctuated owing to the activities of the Ecclesiastical Commission, but they may have had as much as 6000 acres in the East Riding before commutation in 1852.

²¹ Census enumerators' books, 1861.

²² *Trans of Surveyors' Institution* XIII, 1880-1, pp 409-18.

individuals, was steward to local manorial courts, and was land agent for several landowners in the area, which was on the borders of the East and West Ridings: Viscount Downe, the Stapletons of Carlton Towers, the Creykes of Rawcliffe and other lesser families.²³ Howden solicitors looked after the affairs of the Sotheron Estcourt family.²⁴ A similar family law firm of Iveson, at Hedon, worked for the Constable family of Burton Constable throughout the century, mainly in legal affairs, but also from time to time as land agent, sometimes in co-operation with other men.²⁵

The estates of the dean and chapter of York were managed for most of the nineteenth century by the chapter clerk, a lawyer. Charles A Thiselton was appointed clerk for life in 1839,²⁶ and in 1873 the clerk, now 83 years old, was joined by his son, who continued to hold the appointment until 1889, when another lawyer became clerk. In the middle years of the century the estates were under the control of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and their agents, Smiths Gore.²⁷

Some men, while they did not establish firms of agents, looked after several estates: an example was Charles Howard (1778–1854). Originally a tenant farmer of 1000 to 2000 acres at Melbourne and Sutton on Derwent near York, he began his career as agent by acting for his landlord when he was away. He gave up farming himself in 1823, after a series of disastrous years, and thereafter acted as agent to three small estates, all with absentee landlords, and all within 10 miles of Howard's home. He also superintended and advised on many other

estates. He was a writer on agricultural subjects, the first secretary of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society from 1837 to 1843, and gave evidence to two Select Committees in 1836 and 1837.²⁸ His diaries, surviving from 1820 to 1832, give a clear impression of the way in which he spent his days, mainly in an agricultural round, but interspersed with days of shooting and hunting, and outings to Hull or York with his family. Charles Howard did all his own work, had no clerk but wrote his own letters, and at his death the agency died with him.²⁹

The most colourful of the nineteenth-century East Riding agents who acted for several estates was John Singleton (1770–1853), agent to St John's College, Cambridge, Emanuel Hospital, Westminster, and the dean of York.³⁰ He was the son of another John Singleton, who began life as a herdsman, and became in turn the first professional jockey in England, trainer for Lord Rockingham at Newmarket and in the East Riding, and finally a landowner at Great Givendale in East Yorkshire.³¹ John Singleton the son went as a scholar to St John's College, Cambridge: a college which held lands in the next village to Great Givendale.³² By 1806 he was described as a 'local land agent' when he was asked to survey an estate at Brandesburton in East Yorkshire, and then was appointed steward and receiver by the lord mayor and aldermen of London for the same estate, which they administered for Emanuel Hospital, Westminster. Singleton

²³ HCCRO, DDCL.

²⁴ See below, p 46.

²⁵ HCCRO, DDCC.

²⁶ York Minster Library, chapter act book.

²⁷ Following the Cathedrals Act of 1840 (3 & 4 Vict c.113), the Ecclesiastical Commissioners shared control of the estates with the chapter clerk from 1842 to 1852; then returned them to the chapter clerk who managed them to the end of the century and beyond. See G F A Best, *Temporal Pillars*, 1964, and O Chadwick, 'From 1822 until 1916', in G E Aylmer and R Cant, eds, *A History of York Minster*, 1977.

²⁸ BPP, *H of Commons, SC on Agricultural Distress 1836* (79) VIII, pt 1, pp 47–62 and *H of Lords, SC on Agricultural Distress 1837* (464) V, pp 114–21.

²⁹ His papers are at Hull University Library. They include an autobiographical note (DHD 4/27c) and family diaries (DHD 2). He published *A General View of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, in the Library of Useful Knowledge, 1835. He was not a member of the aristocratic Howard family of Castle Howard but a merchant's son.

³⁰ The dean's estates were separate from those of the dean and chapter.

³¹ The history of John Singleton, the jockey, is described at more length in J Fairfax-Blakeborough, *Malton Memories*, 1925, pp 54–5, and other works by the same author.

³² BA 1793, MA 1796; R F Scott, *Admissions to the College of St John the Evangelist, Cambridge*, pt IV, 1931; J A Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigie* pt II, Vol V, 1953, p 522.

acted for the hospital until the 1840s.³³ By 1809, and perhaps earlier, Singleton was also acting as agent for his old college, for in that year St John's gave him a piece of plate for recovering lands for them in Nottinghamshire.³⁴ When the master and senior bursar visited East Yorkshire in 1816 they stayed with Singleton at Great Givendale.³⁵

In addition to his other responsibilities, Singleton was agent to the dean of York, and this may have been his most lucrative post. William Cockburn was made dean of York in 1822, and from an early stage his financial affairs were so intermingled with those of his agent that in 1842 the dean, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the court of Chancery found it impossible to disentangle them. Singleton sold leases and reversions of leases for the dean, exchanged land with the dean and lent him large sums of money (for example, £6000 in 1835).³⁶ But it was Singleton's sale of presentments to the dean's churches, 'in queer roadside meetings between curates and the dean's agent' that caused the archbishop of York to dismiss the dean for simony, after a stormy trial at York in 1841.³⁷ After the 1840s Singleton no longer acted as agent for Emanuel Hospital, St John's, or the dean, but as he was in his seventies he might have decided to retire even without the dean's trial. In 1856 he was described as lord of the manor, principal landowner, and lessee of the great tithes of Great Givendale.³⁸

III

The last type of land agency to be considered is that of the full-time resident manager, who worked from an estate office near the great house and spent all his days working for one landowner. Such agents were commonly found on great estates in the East Riding as elsewhere, and it is the image of these, men like Keary of Holkham, Haedy and Prothero of Woburn, Loch of the Sutherland estates, that has come to dominate the idea of the nineteenth-century land agent.³⁹ It is partly a matter of survival of documents: resident agents' papers, if they remained with the estate, as they normally did, are much easier to find than those of the firms of agents. But the full-time resident agent was not always present, even on the greatest estates.

Some idea of the distribution of resident land agents in East Yorkshire can be gained from the census enumerators' books of 1841 to 1871, and from the series of county directories which began in 1823.⁴⁰ Neither is an entirely satisfactory source. 'Land agent' was a separate category in the census returns of 1841 and 1851, but not thereafter, and the category of 'agent' used by both later census returns and many county directories was too vague to be helpful.⁴¹ It is possible to search the census enumerators' books and the directories for the parish in which the great house lay, and the neighbouring parishes, looking for the land agent, and this has been done for the eleven great estates in this survey; but it is not a system on which to build a statistical analysis. James Hall of Scarborough, for instance, not only lived some miles from the Hotham estate for which he was agent, and in the next enumerator's area, but he also described

³³ Guildhall, London, Emanuel Hospital archives, and *Report with Statutes, Ordinances and Laws for Emanuel Hospital, Westminster*, 1844. For an interesting account of the management of another London hospital, see B E S Trueman, 'Corporate Estate Management: Guy's Hospital Agricultural Estates, 1726-1815', *Ag Hist Rev* XXVIII, 1980, pp 31-44.

³⁴ H F Howard, *Finances of St John's College Cambridge 1511-1926*, 1935, pp 337, 447.

³⁵ Note in the master's diary, printed in Howard, *op cit*, p 158.

³⁶ *Cockburn v Singleton*, reported in *The Times*, 12 January 1842.

³⁷ *A Report of the proceedings in the visitatorial court of His Grace the Archbishop of York, which was opened on Monday, the eighteenth day of January . . . 1841, 1841*; O Chadwick, 'From 1822 until 1916', in G E Aylmer and R Cant, eds, *A History of York Minster*, 1977, p 285.

³⁸ J J Sheahan and T Whellan, *History . . . of York . . . and the East Riding of Yorkshire II*, Beverley, 1856, p 562.

³⁹ For Keary see R A C Parker, *Coke of Norfolk*, 1975, and S W Martins, *A Great Estate at Work*, 1980; for Haedy and Prothero, see D Spring, *The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century*, 1963; for Loch, E Richards, *The Leviathan of Wealth*, 1973, and R J Adam, ed, *Sutherland Estate Management*, 2 vols, 1972.

⁴⁰ East Yorkshire directories are listed in the East Yorkshire Local History Society's *Bulletin* 3, April 1977; there were 74 volumes issued by different publishers between 1790 and 1900, although many only covered towns. See also J E Norton, *Guide to . . . Directories* (Royal Historical Society), 1950.

⁴¹ F M L Thompson, *Chartered Surveyors*, 1968, pp 339-40.

TABLE 2
**Families holding over 10,000 acres in the East Riding in 1873,
 and their Method of Management in 1892**

Name	Estate	Acreage 1873	Method of Management 1892
Sykes	Sledmere	34,010	resident land agent (relative)
Londesborough	Londesborough	33,006	resident land agent (brewer)
Cholmley	Howsham & Boynton	20,503	no agent recorded
Wenlock	Escrick	19,453	resident land agent
Hotham	Dalton Holme	18,682	resident land agent
Harrison-Broadley	Welton	14,877	Hull firm of land agents
Bethell	Rise	13,395	resident land agent
Leconfield	Leconfield	13,247	London firm of land agents
Middleton	Birdsall	12,294	resident land agent
Downe	Cowick	11,817	Snaith firm of solicitors
Constable	Burton Constable	10,981	Hull firm of solicitors

Source: Information taken from *Return of Owners of Land, 1873* and *Bulmer's Directory* (1892).

himself not as land agent but as 'farmer'. Many agents, although not all, are listed in Kelly's *Directory* in editions from 1872 onwards under the classification 'land stewards', which recorded both the resident stewards (agents) and their employers.

Kelly's *Directory* of 1872 listed only 13 agents who lived on the East Yorkshire estates which they administered. Their distribution among the landed families of the county was somewhat unexpected. Of the eleven greatest landowners (all holding over 10,000 acres in the Riding in 1873) only six employed resident agents in 1872; the other five families had different management structures (see Table 1). Bulmer's *Directory* of 1892 shows a similar pattern (see Table 2). The remaining resident agents named in the directories were distributed between landowners of lesser acreages.⁴² Although the great and lesser landowners held between them 60 per cent of the county,⁴³ in 1872 only

25 per cent of the county was managed by resident land agents. In 1879 Kelly's *Directory* listed 15 resident agents in the Riding, and in 1893 there were 18 named; but the percentage of the county managed by resident agents had increased between 1873 and 1893 by less than 1 per cent.

An example of a family which used full-time resident agents comes from the Sykes estate at Sledmere, which with 34,000 acres was the largest estate in the county. Here a succession of agents lived across the park in an eighteenth-century Gothic house called 'Sledmere Castle'. The agent was appointed by the head of the family, and worked for no-one else. During the nineteenth century the Sykes family, unlike many of the other great landowners, never varied from this arrangement. Perhaps because the Sykes family were themselves very interested in agricultural improvement, the agents never established an independent position and came and went (especially in the mid century) in rapid succession. Between 1840 and 1880 there were eight different agents (including one who was dismissed and then reinstated after another had failed).⁴⁴

⁴² Although Kelly's *Directory* of 1872 does not name James Hall as Lord Hotham's agent, it is clear from the archives that he held the office; Lord Hotham's estate is therefore included in the estates with resident land agents. The other resident agents (outside the list of the eleven great landowners) were on the estates of Lord Muncaster at Warton (7994 acres), Col Osbaldeston-Mitford at Hunmanby (7949 acres), Lord Herries at Everingham (6858 acres), Lord Yarburgh at Heslington (5668 acres), Col Preston at Moreby (5142 acres), Watt at Bishop Burton (4798 acres), Strickland Constable at Wassand (3293 acres), and Stourton at Holme on Spalding Moor (3151 acres).

⁴³ See above, page 29.

⁴⁴ Hull University Library (hereafter HUL), DDSY, and B English, 'On the eve of the great depression: the economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* XXIV, 1982, pp 24-47.

The estate of Lord Hotham, some 15 miles away from Sledmere, was also managed by a resident agent, but here a different pattern emerged, that of the hereditary agent. Whereas the Sykes family kept employing new men, the Hotham agents were all members of the Hall family: father, son and grandson in succession for a hundred years. The first Hall to be steward was William, son of a wheelwright; he was a house servant, then house steward and eventually land steward. In 1794 Charles Hotham wrote to William Hall:

I am desir'd by my Father to acquaint you . . . of the satisfaction he feels in committing the care of his estates in Yorkshire to a person who for so many years has occupied the Office of Steward to the family and whose conduct has ever been that of an honest and upright man.⁴⁵

In the year that letter was written William Hall died and was replaced by John his son.⁴⁶ He prospered and bought land and property in Beverley, and (with dowries of £10,000) married both his daughters to members of the Bower family, minor gentry, and country bankers. John Hall's will, proved in 1831, left personal estate of £80,000–£90,000, in addition to government stocks and property.⁴⁷ John's son, James, was even grander. The family lived in a large house surrounded by the moat and park of the former Hotham manor house at Scorbrough; James Hall paid J L Pearson to rebuild the parish church at a cost of £7000; he was Master of the Holderness Hunt for thirty years, and became senior partner in the banking firm of Bower, Hall. James Hall was agent to Lord Hotham from 1831 until 1870. The third baron Hotham eulogized the Halls as 'able and zealous agents (who, having been born and bred in connection with our family, have taken a more than ordinary interest in its

welfare and prosperity)'.⁴⁸ But the fourth baron broke the connection with the Halls, employed a new agent, moved the estate account away from the Hall bank, and pressed James Hall to leave his house and farm. A 'dynasty' of agents also existed at Heslington, where successive members of the Carr family, surveyors, were agents to the Yarburghs; and there was another 'dynasty' at Burton Constable, where men of the family of Iveson, solicitors and sometimes surveyors, acted in turn for the Constable family.

The most outstanding of the East Yorkshire resident agents in the nineteenth century was John Coleman (1830–1888). Son of a member at Lloyds, he was the first pupil to enter the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester, which was founded in 1846 partly on the initiative of Coleman's uncle, Robert Brown, a local wine merchant. While still a student, aged eighteen, Coleman acted as agent for his uncle; he then moved to Albury Park near Guildford. In 1855 from Deene, Northamptonshire, he won the Royal Agricultural Society's essay prize with a contribution on 'The Causes of Fertility or Barrenness of Soils'. Aged 26 he was made professor of agriculture at Cirencester, where he began a life-long co-operation in agricultural experiments with Augustus Voelcker, professor of agricultural chemistry. He succeeded in running the Home Farm at the college at a profit: a feat not achieved by his successors. In 1863 he left the college, along with most of the other staff,⁴⁹ and he became in 1866 land agent to Lord Wenlock who had an estate of 20,000 acres in East Yorkshire, centred on Escrick. At Escrick Coleman continued his experiments for Voelcker and made many improvements to the estate. He took part in judging at major agricultural shows in England, and judged

⁴⁵ HUL, DDHO 13/11.

⁴⁶ HUL, DDHO 13/11.

⁴⁷ Will at Borthwick Institute, York. I am indebted to Jan Crowther for this and the preceding references. See also HUL, DDHO; and J H Hudson, 'Sporting Scraps and Reminiscences' (notes on local families), Beverley Local History Library, c 1890–1902, unnumbered pages. This last reference was given to me by David Neave.

⁴⁸ HUL, DDHO, 8/63.

⁴⁹ There is no general history of the Royal Agricultural College, and most of the archives disappeared in the course of two world wars, so the exact reason for this exodus remains unclear. See however G H J Watkins, 'The Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester', MEd thesis, University of Bristol, 1979.

agricultural machinery at Philadelphia in 1876 and Paris in 1878. He was agricultural editor of *The Field* for twenty-three years, and a regular contributor to agricultural journals. Almost inevitably, he was called to give evidence to Royal Commissions, and was appointed to the duke of Richmond's Commission in 1879 as assistant commissioner for 7 northern counties.⁵⁰

He remained at Escrick until 1885, when he left to go into business on his own account at York, as a land agent in charge of several estates, and farm valuer. He lived only three years after he left Escrick. It is interesting that after so long on great estates, Coleman, one of the outstanding agricultural men of his time, decided that the future lay with a town-based firm rather than the individual post. He died in 1888, leaving £14,600 to his three unmarried daughters. Another John Coleman (perhaps a son or nephew, although the relationship has not been established), after training at Holkham and Woburn, established an agency business in Derbyshire in the last quarter of the century.⁵¹

Some landowners preferred to run their estates themselves with the aid of bailiffs, and Kelly's *Directory* of 1872 (and later editions) gave a list of 'Farm Bailiffs of Gentlemen farming their own land'. There were always landowners who belonged to agricultural societies and farmers' clubs, and took a close interest in the improvement of their estates. Such men were competent to answer the searching questions of central government commissioners on agricultural questions; in the East Riding, for instance, Harrison-Broadley, Lord Herries and Bethell gave

evidence themselves to the Royal Commission of 1867, and Lord Leconfield did so in 1881. The Saltmarshe family ran their own estates for most of the century, collected the rents, kept the accounts, wrote their own letters, and pursued agricultural improvement.⁵² A neighbouring squire, Scholfield, managed his own estate until c 1846 when he (according to his brother) 'at last consented to have an agent . . . a very honest, but not, as the Yankees say, a very smart fellow'.⁵³ The estate letter books of Dunnington Jefferson and his agent, at Thicket Priory, surviving for the 1850s and 1860s, show that the landowner could have had as detailed a knowledge as his agent of his estate and its agricultural needs.⁵⁴

Why did one landowner choose one system of land management in preference to another? The answer must lie in the predilections of the man in control of the estate. A choice could be made because of a recommendation by another landowner: the way in which Sir Clifford Constable of Burton Constable replaced his agent in 1860 was described by one family lawyer to another:

You have probably heard from Mr Leonard, that Sir Hy Boynton has said so much about his Agent, Mr Wise of Malton, that Sir Clifford has determined to see what he can do for him; and that Mr Leonard will be obliged to make way.⁵⁵

Personal recommendation was an important element in the agent's selection, as the landowners were obsessed with the fear that their agents cheated them. The occurrence, throughout the century, of retired army officers and relatives as agents, may have been because such men were thought more trustworthy. It was also safer to trust a firm of several men than an individual, as if one member of a firm defaulted, the others could make good the loss, as Cluttons did in 1894.⁵⁶ Greater reliability may also have

⁵⁰ BPP, RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests, 1882 [c.3375-V] XV. He also gave evidence to RC or SC in 1867, 1877 and 1886. This account of John Coleman is based on his obituaries in *The Times*, 20 February 1888, in *The Field* of 25 February 1888, in the JRASE 2nd ser XXIV, 1888, pp 688-91, in the *Trans of the Surveyors' Institution* XX, 1887-8, pp 390-1, and on his evidence to the RC. See also J A Scott Watson and M E Hobbs, *Great Farmers*, 1951, pp 286-7. Coleman wrote or edited *A System of Book-keeping for Farmers*, 1862; *The Cattle of Great Britain*, 1875; *The Sheep and Pigs of Great Britain*, 1877, and numerous articles.

⁵¹ The pamphlet on 'Land Tenure: security for capital and increased production', 1873, was written by the other John Coleman, of Park Nook, Derbyshire.

⁵² Saltmarshe archives, in HCCRO DDSA (catalogued), and in Hull Central Library, two boxes (uncatalogued).

⁵³ HCCRO, DDSA 349(f).

⁵⁴ HUL, DDJ 40/4.

⁵⁵ HCCRO, DDCC 144/30.

⁵⁶ See below, p 47.

been the reason for employing a solicitor. During the nineteenth century it was often said that many estates were run, and run badly, by lawyers.⁵⁷ Using lawyers as agents was not particularly common in the East Riding, but an interesting reason for their employment generally was recorded by the Royal Commission of 1881. A witness, John Coleman (of Derbyshire), had alleged that many large estates were managed by lawyers, and managed disgracefully, and when Coleman was asked by Earl Spencer if he believed

that landlords when they put their estates in the hands of agents select lawyers entirely by choice, or are they driven to do so in some cases on account of the difficulties about mortgages? —

he answered that: 'I think it is in general a case of necessity.'⁵⁸ Coleman believed that non-resident agents, even those living in London and coming only twice a year to the estates for rent days, could manage estates successfully as long as they were practical farmers.⁵⁹ Established tenant farmers, who had often held the same farm for many years and almost always came from farming backgrounds, did not need constant advice or supervision, and on many estates the contact on rent days between tenant and management was sufficient to enable any necessary changes to be discussed and set in motion. Sir Charles Gore, in charge of the Crown estates, believed the London agent was better than any local agent, because he had business in every part of the country, and was 'rubbing against all the intelligence of the country every hour', a view that might have been regarded with scepticism in other parts of Britain.⁶⁰

IV

The duties of the land agent were repeated in innumerable books of the nineteenth and earlier centuries.⁶¹ Management of the tenants and collection of the rents remained the basis of the agent's duties. For most of the nineteenth century, direct farming on great estates was rare, and almost all the landowners' acres were farmed by tenants. Some estates (such as Sledmere and Birdsall) ran a Home Farm,⁶² and in the 1880s some estates were forced by lack of tenants with capital to take over farms formerly tenanted, but this was a situation to be avoided if at all possible; landlords made great concessions to the tenantry rather than see them leave. If the agent or landowner wished to carry out agricultural experiments, as Coleman did at Escrick, it was possible to find a tenant who would co-operate.⁶³

On occasion the agent would be asked to take a particular piece of land in hand, which might be of low or no value, to improve it. Page described how he was employed by a York banker to do this at Newbald in the 1840s; the improvement costs were £16 an acre, but the land, formerly valueless, was afterwards let at 27s an acre.⁶⁴ But in the vast majority of cases it was not through this kind of activity or through direct farming that agricultural policy was made on the great estates, but through the relationship between management and the tenant. This relationship in East Yorkshire for most of the nineteenth century was governed by the yearly tenancy agreement, often unwritten, reinforced by the custom of the country

⁵⁷ Eg J M Wilson, ed, *The Rural Cyclopaedia* I, Edinburgh, 1851, p 67; J Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-51*, 1852, pp 27-8, 418; J C Morton, *Cyclopaedia of Agriculture* I, 1863, p 45; F Hill, 'Squire and Parson in early Victorian Lincolnshire', *History* LVIII, 1973, p 337.

⁵⁸ BPP, *RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests*, 1881 [c.2778-1] XV, p 212.

⁵⁹ The administration of provincial estates by the large London agents is a topic which I hope to explore on another occasion.

⁶⁰ BPP, *RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests*, 1881 [c.2778-1] XV, p 9.

⁶¹ See, for instance, list in O R McGregor's introduction to Ernle, *English Farming*, 1961.

⁶² For Sledmere, see B English, 'On the eve of the great depression: the economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* XXIV, 1982, pp 24-47.

⁶³ JRASE contains accounts of experiments made by Coleman and a tenant both at the Home Farm and also at Menagerie Farm, Escrick, into clover seed, mangolds, potatoes, etc, in the 1860s.

⁶⁴ BPP, *SC on Agricultural Customs*, 1848 (461) VII, pp 145, 151.

which gave tenants some compensation for unexhausted improvements.⁶⁵

It was through the tenancy agreement, with its covenants to ensure a certain type of farming practice, that the estate showed its ideals of management. The covenants of written agreements can be used by economic historians to illustrate changing patterns of agriculture; but the analysis of East Riding covenants is too long to be undertaken here. The agreement was the path by which alterations could be made, and also the means by which the tenants' unauthorized changes could be resisted. A progressive agent would introduce new improved covenants; his fellow agents might follow his example, for agents seem to have collected the forms of agreement used by all the surrounding landowners.⁶⁶ The agreement would be made after consultation with the landowner and the estate solicitor; once in existence, it was the agent's duty to guard the covenants (they were not always rigidly enforced),⁶⁷ and some estates kept 'cropping books' to make sure the prescribed rotations were followed. There are examples in the Sledmere archives of tenants asking for permission to vary the rotation, and being refused; and St Quintin took a tenant to court in 1871 for breaking the rotation.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ In 1788 the agent to Emanuel Hospital's estates in the East Riding reported that 'the country was unacquainted with leases'. *Report with Statutes, Ordinances, and Laws for Emanuel Hospital, Westminster*, 1844, p. 104; land was 'let from year to year'. C Howard, *A General View of the agriculture of the East Riding of Yorkshire*, 1835, p. 131; 'from year to year . . . mostly let upon agreements, not leases'. G Legard, in BPP, *SC on Agricultural Customs*, 1848 (461) VII, pp. 145, 151; Edward Page told the same SC that a great number of agreements in the Riding were unwritten (op cit, p. 151); in 1882 John Coleman told the RC that there were still 'no leases as a rule'. BPP, *RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests*, 1881 [c.3096] XVII, p. 124; and in 1928 the majority of the East Riding farms were still held on a yearly tenancy. G C A Robertson, 'Farming in Yorkshire', *JRASE* LXXXIX, 1928, p. 65. Some of the corporate bodies used beneficial leases; a particular kind of lease which provided a nominal rent but a cash sum (a 'fine') on renewal. Emanuel Hospital gave up beneficial leases in the eighteenth century; St John's Cambridge in 1851, the dean and chapter of York not until 1870.

⁶⁶ HCCRO, DDCL; Page and Legard's evidence in BPP, *SC on Agricultural Customs*, 1848 (461) VII, pp. 143-52, 417-23.

⁶⁷ Lord Leconfield's evidence in BPP, *RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests*, 1881 [c.3096] XVII, p. 892.

⁶⁸ HUL, DDSY 101/77, 79, 80; 'Important Trial in Farming; St Quinton v. Lett', York, c. 1871; W Harwood Long, 'Some Farming Customs and Practices in the late 1860s: the Case of St

If a tenant left the farm, it was the agent's duty to find a replacement, often from within the estate, or a recommended man from the same district. It was not until the 1880s that tenants were difficult to find, and for the most part the agent had merely to select the best applicant, finding out if he had sufficient capital, knowledge of farming, and was of good character.

Although in the late eighteenth century the Emanuel Hospital's agent was offered a bribe for renewal of an East Riding lease,⁶⁹ there is no known example from the nineteenth century. Nor is there any trace in the archives of political or religious pressure on tenants; if the agents directed the tenants on these matters, it is not recorded. The Constables of Burton Constable, an old Roman Catholic family, were said to favour their co-religionists as tenants, but they also leased a farm year by year for 150 years to members of the Quaker Stickney family, who improved it as if it were their own freehold, 'no lease ever having been executed, a fact alike honourable to both parties'.⁷⁰ Sir Tatton Sykes II, a High Anglican and ardent church-builder, also helped the Methodists to build chapels in his estate villages.⁷¹

It was the agent's duty to collect the rents and to advise his landowner about rent rises or rebates, about delay in payment or selling up a tenant. It was customary for most of the nineteenth century for tenant farmers to pay the rents personally, at the great house or estate office, at twice-yearly rent days, related to (but not exactly at) Lady Day and Michaelmas. Often there would be a ceremony attached to the payment; it was a time for the tenants to discuss repairs and improvements, to give or receive notice to

Quinton v. Lett', *Ag Hist Rev* XXIII, 1975, pp. 78-83. The family name was actually St Quintin.

⁶⁹ Emanuel Hospital archives, Guildhall, London, 3.11. The lease in question was a beneficial lease for 3 lives.

⁷⁰ G Poulson, *Holderness II*, 1841, p. 369; A M Markham, *Back of Beyond*, Hull, 1979, p. 1.

⁷¹ H Woodcock, *Piety among the Peasantry . . . Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds*, c. 1889; B English, 'On the eve of the great depression: the economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* XXIV, 1982, pp. 24-47.

quit, and for the agent to suggest changes. There was a rent or audit dinner on many estates, and the expenses can be found in estate accounts; in 1889–90 Sotheron Escourt gave his tenants champagne, perhaps to encourage them after a time of great agricultural depression. The cottage tenants on this estate could opt for an allowance in lieu of the dinner.⁷² Cottage tenants' rents were often collected separately at central points in the villages. Some of these arrangements were inefficient; for instance, the dean and chapter's rents from one small estate at Topcliffe reached the chapter clerk through five different collectors.⁷³

How much was estate management the policy of the agent and how much that of the owner? This varied considerably, depending on the characters of the men involved. One man might be prepared to leave everything to his agent, while another made all the major decisions himself. Unfortunately the decision-making process is rarely recorded, for it was so often the result of a meeting between the two men; and as most English landowners in the nineteenth century spent a large part of the year in the country, they would meet their agent frequently, even daily. According to Bateman's survey of great landowners of 1883, among 1363 English landowners there were only 32 who did not give an address in the country as their principal residence.⁷⁴ Few took so little interest in the lands on which they lived and over which they rode and shot as the Constables of Burton Constable (Sir Clifford, 1806–70, and his son Sir Frederick, 1828–94). According to Sir Clifford's uncle, who was his first agent, he never listened to business, never answered letters, and was interested only in sport and the money his rents produced. Later in his life, faced with financial difficulties, he made sporadic attempts to control his agents by querying every out payment in the accounts, but he did

not understand matters enough to plug the leaks,⁷⁵ and his agents continued to deceive him. Sir Frederick, too, wrote to his agent in 1885 the same kind of letter his father could have written:

I am much disappointed to find that further reductions in my already diminished Rent Roll are asked for and apparently advised by you as necessary, and I see nothing but ruin staring me in the face. I had far better sell the East Riding Estate altogether than carry it on with great anxiety and as I much fear I am doing at a considerable loss.⁷⁶

Most landowners had far more understanding of their estate affairs than the Constables, and some in East Yorkshire were energetic improvers, breeders of prize animals, active members of agricultural societies and aware of the latest ideas in farming.

On corporate estates it is sometimes easier to see how decisions were made than it is on private estates, as the consultation process was more formal. For instance, on the Emanuel Hospital estates (the archives are particularly good), the agent in 1841 made radical and detailed recommendations for 'the enclosure of the commons, — drainage of the lands, — concentration of the occupations, — apportionment of the tithes, — and a improved mode of cultivation'.⁷⁷ Major decisions were taken, however, only after a committee of the Corporation of London had visited the Yorkshire estate with the agent, which they did in 1841 and at about four-yearly intervals thereafter.⁷⁸ Similar visits were made by the senior bursar, and sometimes the master of St John's College, Cambridge, to their East Yorkshire estates, where, after the departure of John Singleton in 1841, the College employed bailiffs but no agent.⁷⁹ Both Hospital and College lands

⁷² HCCRO, DDSE.

⁷³ York Minster Library, dean and chapter archives, U2/4.

⁷⁴ J Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1883.

⁷⁵ HCCRO, DDCC.

⁷⁶ HCCRO, loose paper in account book, DDCC(2) box 16.

⁷⁷ Report . . . for Emanuel Hospital, Westminster, 1844, p 106.

⁷⁸ Emanuel Hospital archives, Guildhall, London.

⁷⁹ St John's College Cambridge archives, estate files, no 126; H F Howard, *Finances of St John's College Cambridge 1511–1926*, 1935.

appear to have been well managed.⁸⁰ The dean and chapter of York, on the other hand, with lawyer agents and beneficial leases until 1870, for a large part of the nineteenth century were hardly managing their estates at all.⁸¹

The resident land agent, with a resident owner, such as Sykes, Wenlock or Middleton, was not likely to develop much independence of thought. Archer, the Sledmere agent, wrote in 1879 to Sir Tatton Sykes II:

During the time I was with you, my study was to carry out all your instructions and orders, and I studied your interest in every way, and which by so doing, I got myself a very bad name and was twice threatened (with yourself) to be shot or killed. . . .⁸²

Agents could advise and remonstrate, as Sir Clifford Constable's uncle did; but he was a relation, and other resident agents for the most part regarded themselves as being 'in service' as one of the applicants for the Sledmere post wrote in 1878: a term used of domestic servants.⁸³

The firms of agents were in a much more independent position, seeing their role as one with responsibilities to the tenants as well as the employers.⁸⁴ In 1882 John Clutton, the doyen of his profession, gave a Royal Commission this remarkable statement of his philosophy:

What are your ideas of the duties of the agent to his employer? — To make not the best arrangement as regards the amount of rent, but a fair arrangement so as to get a substantial tenantry, and to keep the estate managed and occupied without change as far as possible. A change of tenants is always accompanied by a vast amount of trouble to an agent, and an agent would never, if he could help it, change a tenant.

What are your duties to the tenantry? — I consider it my duty as agent to be a sort of stakeholder between the two parties. Although I am paid by the landlord I

always have a view to the interests of the tenants. If it were otherwise I should only make the landowners' estates more difficult to manage, and eventually more unprofitable.⁸⁵

As Clutton knew, the whole relationship between landowner, management and tenantry had to be based on reasonableness and trust. The landowners had to trust that their agents were honest: many of them did so to a surprising extent, allowing the accounts to pass for years without audit, and leaving large balances in the agents' hands. Trust, too, was essential between management and tenant in a county where for so much of the century the tenants were on annual agreements. Even in 1880 it was reported to a Royal Commission that 'on the old estates the confidence in fair treatment was so general that tenants often laid out their money on landlords' work without security'.⁸⁶ It was the agent's business to maintain that confidence, and if it once broke down, as it did at Sledmere in 1879, it was difficult to restore.⁸⁷

V

The social background of the agents was very varied, as was inevitable in a barely defined profession which ranged from aristocratic relations to farm bailiffs. John Clutton, son of a surveyor, went to a grammar school which taught him little; of the 20 founders of the Institution of Surveyors in 1868 only one had been to public school, and the greatest common factor between the men was that they came from families of surveyors. Clutton owned to a sense of inferiority when mixing with 'educated men' and sent his sons to Harrow and Marlborough.⁸⁸ John Coleman's father was a member at Lloyds and his uncle a wine

⁸⁰ 'Well-managed' covers such matters as investment in draining, in new buildings, rent rebates in time of distress, the provision of a village school.

⁸¹ Comment based on reading the minutes of chapter, York Minster Library.

⁸² HUL, DDSY 101/77, 10 December 1879.

⁸³ HUL, DDSY 101/77, 6 November 1878.

⁸⁴ E Richards, 'The Land Agent', in G E Mingay, ed, *The Victorian Countryside* 2, 1981, p 445.

⁸⁵ BPP, RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests, 1881 [c.3096] XVII, p 353.

⁸⁶ BPP, RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests, 1881 [c.2778-II] XVI, p 130.

⁸⁷ B English, 'On the eve of the great depression: the economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* XXIV, 1982 pp 24-47.

⁸⁸ TS history, 'Cluttons 1765-1965', p 4; F M L Thompson, *Chartered Surveyors*, 1968, pp 131-3, 234.

merchant; his obituary by Earl Cathcart describes the social skills possessed by this agent 'in the drawing-room of the country house, in the common room of the busy inn, in the trial field, in the crowded show-yard and always . . . the same modest, self-possessed, agreeable, energetic, well-informed man'.⁸⁹ Charles Howard was the son of a Hull merchant, educated (until expelled) at Hull Grammar School.⁹⁰ Farming and surveying backgrounds were more common than commercial origins, but often the social origin of the agents is not known.

Once they had become agents the status the men attained varied widely. Some of the East Riding men were housed and paid no better than a farm bailiff, but some lived the life of a country gentleman. The agents to the Strickland Constables, at Wassand, were housed in one of the estate lodges (which was later the home of an agricultural labourer) and had no living-in servants. The children of the agent there of the 1840s and 1850s were employed as a cooper and a dressmaker. At the other end of the social scale, James Hall of Scarborough employed a butler and two footmen, was famous for his sporting achievements, and through his wealth and connections became a member of the landed gentry. Although the English agent never achieved the same status as those who represented their masters in the Celtic lands, it was still a profession which allowed some men to move up the social scale.⁹¹

The training of agents, where it existed at all, was most usually by serving articles in an estate office.⁹² Although many of the young men who passed through colleges such as Cirencester and Downton became agents,⁹³ the only one identified in East Yorkshire at this period was John Coleman. The only

university graduate found was John Singleton. Many young men were placed in the London firms such as Cluttons or Rawlence and Squarey, paying premiums of £100 to £300 for their articles.⁹⁴ One such was Arthur Arnold, later Radical MP for Salford, who gave evidence to a Royal Commission that he had been 'a pupil, at great cost to myself. . . of one of the largest land agents in the country . . . in Great George Street, and there for some years I had very unusual and extensive opportunities of becoming acquainted with a great number of landed estates throughout the country'.⁹⁵ Local agents, too, trained young men in their firms; a pupil was staying with the Donkins in their East Riding house on the night of the 1851 census, clearly distinguished from the land agents' clerk, also in the house but classified as a servant. H L Chowen, who became agent first to Lord Hotham and then in 1892 to Lord Londesborough, began his professional career in the Sledmere estate office.⁹⁶ Estate offices on famous estates, such as Woburn and Holkham, often took pupils. There were many agents who had not gone through any large office, but had been trained as farmers. Charles Howard was boarded with a succession of farmers to learn how to farm, until he took a tenancy for himself.⁹⁷

There were men who combined land agency with other occupations, the commonest being surveying. Lord Londesborough's agent for his 33,000 acres in the East Riding, the second largest estate in the county, was from c 1860 to c 1892 Col Thomas Young, a brewer, which suggests two additional interests.⁹⁸ Christopher Corner, agent in 1823 to the Barnard estate of Cave Castle (2735 acres later in the century),

⁸⁹ JRASE 2nd ser XXIV, 1888, p 691.

⁹⁰ HUL, DHD 4/27c.

⁹¹ E Richards, 'The Land Agent', in G E Mingay, ed, *The Victorian Countryside* 2, 1981, pp 439-56.

⁹² See, for instance, evidence given in BPP, *H of Lords, SC on the Improvement of Land*, 1873 (326) XVI, pp 6-7.

⁹³ BPP, *RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests*, 1882 [c.3309-1] XIV.

⁹⁴ F M L Thompson, *Chartered Surveyors*, 1968, p 203.

⁹⁵ BPP, *RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests*, 1882 [c.3309-1] XIV, p 188. He was a pupil c 1854-63; Great George Street suggests the firm was Rawlence and Squarey.

⁹⁶ Obituary in *Trans of Surveyors' Institution* XXXII, 1899-1900, p 608.

⁹⁷ HUL, DHD 4/27c.

⁹⁸ East Yorkshire directories (see note 40 above). D Neave, *Londesborough*, York 1977, p 56.

was also a shop-keeper in South Cave marketplace.⁹⁹ Several were solicitors. In 1851 the agent to Lord Herries at Everingham was a half-pay army lieutenant aged 60.¹⁰⁰ James Hall, Lord Hotham's agent, was also a banker, farmer and landowner. Finally some landowners employed their own relations (the Constables of Burton Constable; and, at the end of the century, Sir Tatton Sykes II's agent was his sister's son).

Once trained, however sketchily, there was a large number of societies to which agents could belong and through which knowledge could be exchanged: surveyors' clubs, national and local agricultural societies, farmers' clubs and chambers of agriculture. There was also a Yorkshire and North of England Land Agents' and Surveyors' Association, founded in Leeds in 1866, consisting of some 20-30 members mainly from the West Riding but including some from Hull and York.¹⁰¹ Francis Carr, the Yarbrough agent at Heslington, was a founder member and President in 1876. Other East Riding men were Lord Londesborough's agent, one of the Sledmere agents who set up his own practice first in Beverley and then in Hull, and Robert Wyse of Malton. In addition to their contacts with their colleagues through clubs and societies, it is clear from estate correspondence that agents were constantly in touch with other agents on neighbouring estates.

The applications for the Sykes agency in 1878 give an idea of the qualifications men thought suitable to offer.¹⁰² Twenty-five men applied in writing, and others may have applied personally, for one man certainly took the train to the nearest station to Sledmere the day after he had heard of the vacancy. The post was never advertised, but within days of the former agent being

dismissed, it was widely known through other Yorkshire land agents or through men involved in agriculture such as Bailey Denton, the drainage expert, who mentioned the vacancy to an agent he met in London.

Twenty-one of the applicants were practising land agents, or temporarily unemployed land agents. One had only a commercial career, and two had farming experience only (one of these being a Singleton from Great Givendale). The strangest applicant was Alfred Watts, schoolmaster at Garton on the Wolds, on the Sledmere estate. He had already worked for the estate in connection with the cottage tenants and the estate brickyard, and felt that the last agents had been too gentlemanly to be successful. He wrote that he would regard it his duty 'to add to the Income of his Employer by all *legitimate means* and . . . exercise Equal Care and Caution in the Expenditure'.

Only one applicant mentioned his school: Harrow. No-one claimed university or college training, although one Scottish factor had been in the legal profession. Two wrote that they were 'churchmen', and no-one mentioned politics. None of the applications made any reference to terms of employment or salary.¹⁰³ None of the applicants was appointed, for Sykes decided to employ his London accountant (who was a complete failure and was dismissed within a few months).

Contracts between a landowner and his agent seem to have been rare. One, not typical, was made early in the century between two Legard brothers, by which the elder made the younger his agent and leased him the mansion house and all his property in return for an annual sum. This arrangement lasted from 1802 to 1810.¹⁰⁴ When Sir Tatton Sykes dismissed his agent in 1879 he wrote 'to the best of my recollection no agreement

⁹⁹ E Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County of York II*, 1823, p. 187.

¹⁰⁰ Census enumerator's return.

¹⁰¹ Pamphlet on the Association (1924) in Royal Inst of Chartered Surveyors, corres. box 25. Minute books used by F M L Thompson, *Chartered Surveyors*, 1968, pp. 240-1, cannot now (1982) be found.

¹⁰² HUL, DDSY 101/77.

¹⁰³ The two most distinguished applicants were Charles Grey, receiver for Greenwich Hospital, who wanted to run the estates from his London office, and Robert E Brown, author of *The Book of the Landed Estate*, 1869.

¹⁰⁴ J D Legard, *The Legards of Anlaby and Ganton*, 1926, p. 124.

about notice to leave was made on either side', which was countered by 'you very likely forget that our arrangement when I engaged with you was six months' notice on either side'.¹⁰⁵ The exchange suggests a verbal agreement only. The Hothams had employed the Halls as their agents without any formal agreement; but in 1870, on the succession of the fourth baron, a new agent was appointed and an agreement was drawn up by a local solicitor.¹⁰⁶

The income of the agents varied widely. The London firms invariably charged their clients a percentage of the rents: in 1881 Cluttons and Smiths Gore, for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, took 4 per cent on land and 4½ per cent on tithes.¹⁰⁷ The system was criticized by a Royal Commission in 1881 as tending to make the agents more interested in the size of the rent roll than in good farming; but Gore defended the method of payment, which he claimed he would use on estates of his own.¹⁰⁸ Earlier in the century, in 1811, Lady Bessborough strongly recommended 'making the agent's salary a percentage of what he actually pays in to your banker as a clear profit of the estates'.¹⁰⁹ Payment by percentage is the normal way of paying land agents in the 1980s. John Clutton earned £600 in his first year in London (1837); by 1848 he had a net income of £9000 from a gross income of £13,000, figures increased by 1873 to £22,000 for the partnership (of John Clutton and his brother) on a gross income of £46,000.¹¹⁰ These sums are much greater than those of

the full-time agents on even the largest estates, whose income rarely reached £1000 a year. Whereas John Coleman, the outstanding East Riding agent of the period, left only £14,600, the estate of John Clutton (who had inherited £3000 from his father) was proved at £150,000.¹¹¹

The East Yorkshire firms of agents seem to have charged piecework rates: so much a day and expenses, and a percentage on rent collection or sales. John Singleton in 1841 remarked 'I never heard of a land-agent being allowed less than three guineas in my life' (he was trying for a fee of five guineas a day plus expenses of two guineas).¹¹² In 1842 Thomas Donkin charged three guineas a day.¹¹³ In the 1870s the Inclosure Commissioners paid their inspectors, who supervised works under improvement loans, three guineas a day plus expenses.¹¹⁴ The clerk to the dean and chapter of York was paid 5 per cent of the rents he collected, which averaged about £60 a year between 1839 and 1851.¹¹⁵ By a combination of fees and percentages local firms of agents could build up a profitable practice and handle large amounts of money annually; the Hull agent Hebblethwaite, who acted for the Harrison-Broadleys and several other families, had an annual turnover varying from £46,170 in 1856 (the first year for which figures are available) to £156,173 in 1873, the year of highest turnover between 1856 and 1880.¹¹⁶ No resident agent dealt with amounts of that magnitude.

In spite of Lady Bessborough's advice, most resident land agents were given salaries. The Sledmere agent was paid £600 in the middle of the century, raised to £750 about 1879. John Coleman, agent to Lord Wenlock, was paid £500 a year in the 1860s; his predecessor, Jelly, had £300, raised to £350 in

¹⁰⁵ HUL, DDSY 101/77, 10 October 1879.

¹⁰⁶ HUL, DDHO 13/16.

¹⁰⁷ Under his original contract of 1851, Clutton was to be paid 4 per cent on certain categories of rents and 5 per cent on other categories, and on timber sales and manorial dues, the commission to include travelling expenses: *Cluttons: Some Historical Notes*, 1948, pp 147-8.

¹⁰⁸ BPP, *RC on Depressed Condition of Agricultural Interests*, 1881 [c.2778-1] XV, p 11.

¹⁰⁹ E Hughes, 'The Eighteenth-Century Land Agent', in H A Cronne, T W Moody, D B Quinn, eds, *Essays in British and Irish History*, 1949, p 193.

¹¹⁰ *Cluttons: Some Historical Notes*, 1948, p 7; F M L Thompson, *Chartered Surveyors*, 1968, p 133. By comparison the duke of Bedford's agents in 1861 were paid £760, £750 and £800: D Spring, *The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century*, Baltimore 1963.

¹¹¹ Wills at Somerset House.

¹¹² *A Report of the proceedings in the visitatorial court of His Grace the Archbishop of York . . . 1841, 1841*, p 77.

¹¹³ York Minster Library, dean and chapter archives, H 10/2.

¹¹⁴ BPP, *H of Lords, SC on the Improvement of Land*, 1873 (326) XVI, p 7.

¹¹⁵ Church Commissioners archives, Millbank, 8083/1048/52.

¹¹⁶ Hull Record Office, DBHT 3/1-7.

1859. Lord Hotham's agent, James Hall, was paid a constant £380 a year from 1838 to 1870. He claimed annually 10 gns for stamps, but no other expenses. Vessey, who looked after the Emanuel Hospital estates from his home in Lincolnshire, was paid £150 a year and expenses, with additional sums for extra work such as surveys.¹¹⁷ The agent to the Grimston estates in 1830 (who practised from Hull) was paid £80 a year, although Colonel Grimston told the agent when he appointed him that he thought it 'a very large sum', for 'Mr. Collett's charges for the last two years have not amounted to more than Thirty seven pounds per Ann.' including valuing farms and tithes.¹¹⁸ The cut-price Mr Collett worked from an office in Beverley, charging piece rates, although the colonel may well have underestimated the expense to make his point. Charles A. Thiselton, the chapter clerk at York, was paid by fees on the renewal of beneficial leases worth about £172 a year until the era of the Ecclesiastical Commission (c 1844); he was then paid 5 per cent of the rents he collected, which brought him only £60 a year, about which he complained constantly.¹¹⁹ In 1921 Thiselton's successor was paid 'about £380' to keep the accounts and chapter records, collect rent and other income, pay bills, let property and act as secretary and receiver for the chapter.¹²⁰

The Sotheron family, with property in Gloucestershire and East Yorkshire, employed as their East Yorkshire agents from 1824 to 1831 a father and son successively, both called Sam Spofforth, members of a firm of solicitors in the small town of Howden. Spofforth senior, who was paid £80 a year for his services, and also farmed on

his own account, died in 1827, leaving debts (which took all his circle by surprise) of more than £50,000. His son continued as agent, being paid £140 a year, a sum raised in 1831 to £160. Admiral Sotheron rarely audited the agents' books, and allowed the Spofforths to keep (on paper at least) credit balances of thousands of pounds, out of all proportion to their income. In 1831 Spofforth junior, who was probably involved in his late father's difficulties, became bankrupt, owing the Admiral £2307. He was kept on as bailiff at £1 a week, with a horse provided too, but the agency was moved to another solicitor in Howden, who was paid £80 a year, increased to £100 in 1836. The agency was moved again in 1845 to a Devizes (Wiltshire) solicitor, who was paid 2½ per cent of the rents, with expenses, and an assistant at 10 gns a year. The Devizes law firm kept the agency until the end of the century, payment increasing to 3½ per cent of the rents in 1890. The local bailiff was paid £8 a year in the 1890s.¹²¹

In addition to payment, many resident agents received other benefits. At Sledmere the agent lived rent-free at 'Sledmere Castle', an eighteenth-century farmhouse disguised to look like a medieval gatehouse. Lord Hotham's agents, men of the Hall family, lived in a house on the site of the old Hotham manor house at Scarborough. Birdsall and Londesborough, both estate villages, had agents' houses. John Coleman lived at Riccall Hall which belonged to the Wenlock estate. Some agents lived on farms, and at Wassand the agent lived in a lodge to the great house.

Often a horse was provided for the resident agent, and his travelling expenses would be paid. The estate office was often in the agent's house, but in the last third of the nineteenth century several estates built separate offices (for instance, at South

¹¹⁷ HUL, DDSY, DDFA, DDHO; Emanuel Hospital archives, Guildhall, London.

¹¹⁸ M E Ingram, *Leaves from a Family Tree*, Hull 1951, p 150.

¹¹⁹ Church Commissioners archives, Millbank, 8083/1048/ esp 51, 52.

¹²⁰ O Chadwick, 'From 1822 until 1916', in G E Aylmer and R Cant, eds, *A History of York Minster*, 1977, p 290; R Cant, 'From 1916 until 1975', op cit, p 543. Many agents' salaries, ranging from £150 to £1850, are given by F M L Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 1963, pp 161-2.

¹²¹ HCCRO, DDSE.

Dalton, Birdsall and Sledmere).¹²² In the office was kept the archives of estate management, so often the greater part of the landed family's records, and the source of so much estate and family history.

VI

It seems appropriate to look briefly at the common belief that land agents cheated their masters (a belief that is found in every century).¹²³ Admiral Sotheron was robbed by his agents in the 1820s and 1830s; it was partly his fault for not insisting on regular audits, but there seems no doubt that Spofforth speculated with his master's balances. Members of the family of Iveson, agents to the Burton Constable estates (sometimes jointly with others) from c 1800 to 1862, were clearly cheating the Constables, although they were never prosecuted. William Iveson went to prison for debt, but it was not Constable who put him there.¹²⁴ His brother John, steward to the marquess of Ailesbury's Wiltshire estates, cheated his master on a grand scale but was never prosecuted.¹²⁵ At Sledmere, Archer was dismissed for the unsatisfactory audit of his accounts (although he was subsequently re-employed), and his successor Salton disappeared with the books. Salton was prosecuted and became 'quite penniless'.¹²⁶ The Halls at Scarborough rose from being house servants in the late eighteenth century to landed proprietors by the 1830s; their rise was due to their connection with the Hothams and the opportunities offered them. The Hothams, like the Sotherons, did

not settle their accounts annually but left large balances to be transferred from year to year. Sometimes Hotham owed Hall money, but more often the reverse was the case, and in several different years Hall owed Hotham over £4000. As Hall was also partner in a local bank, he must have been able to make such large sums earn money.¹²⁷ In the estate accounts of the Sotherons and Hothams interest was not charged on the balances left from year to year. The chapter clerk at York complained in 1852 that as his accounts and remittances had been settled half yearly 'the amount in my hands has never been a source of profit'.¹²⁸

The owners of corporate estates were also inclined to let matters drift along without proper check or audit. John Singleton became rich at the expense of his client, the dean of York. St John's College, Cambridge was cheated by its senior bursar, who secretly leased some of the college farms to himself and kept the profit; this and defects in his accounting system led to his premature retirement to an East Riding living in 1846. Nevertheless, it was not until the close of the nineteenth century that St John's accounts were fully audited.¹²⁹ In the 1820s John Clutton's father, William, got the accounts of his Suffolk practice into a 'fearful tangle' and it took several years to prove that William's clients owed him money, rather than the reverse. The partners, even in the most prestigious firm, could still be let down by their employees; in 1894 Cluttons found that over a number of years a clerk had embezzled £14,000 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners by preparing imaginary accounts and vouchers for work done. The partners immediately refunded the money and improved their system of checks.¹³⁰ From the small sample of East Yorkshire agents represented here there does seem to be sufficient evidence (even though the agents

¹²² The Sledmere estate office built in the village in 1894 was to contain the agent's room and private lavatory, a clerk's office, a waiting room (all on the ground floor) with a store room and a map room above: J Hobson, 'Sledmere and the Sykes Family', dissertation for Hull School of Architecture, 1978.

¹²³ For the nineteenth century, see F M L Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 1963, pp 154-5.

¹²⁴ HCCRO, DDCC 133/27.

¹²⁵ John Iveson was 'not merely uncontrollable, oblivious to repeated peremptory instructions, but a rascal'; F M L Thompson, 'English Landownership: the Ailesbury Trust 1832-56', *Econ Hist Rev* 2nd ser XI, 1958, pp 125-6.

¹²⁶ HUL, DDSY. See B English, 'On the eve of the great depression: the economy of the Sledmere Estate 1869-1878', *Business History* XXIV, 1982, pp 24-47.

¹²⁷ HUL, DDHO (2) 3/105.

¹²⁸ Church Commissioners archives, Millbank, 8083/1048/52.

¹²⁹ H F Howard, *The Finances of St John's College Cambridge 1511-1926*, 1935, p 172.

¹³⁰ Cluttons: *Some Historical Notes*, 1948, pp 5, 17.

themselves kept the books) to support the landowners' view of the propensity of their agents to defraud them. The system of audits on private estates remained unaltered until the end of the century.

VII

Two main conclusions emerge from this brief survey of patterns of land management in East Yorkshire in the nineteenth century. First, the role played by firms of agents, both those based in London and those in the country, was of far more significance than has been generally recognized. Their agencies were better paid and presumably more independent of the individual landowners than the resident agents. If this pattern is true of England as a whole, as the large firms acted for so many thousand acres, then it will be through a study of the management decisions of these firms, as well as those of landowners and resident agents, that the path

to understanding agricultural policy on the great estates must lie.

Secondly, the century did not see, at least in this county, the expected movement towards greater professionalism in the qualifications of the resident land agents. The change from relative to farmer to solicitor to surveyor went backwards as well as forwards; the 1890s saw the largest East Riding estate, Sledmere, in the hands of a relation, which had not been the case for all the preceding years of the century, and it also saw Burton Constable in the hands of a solicitor. The main change that had come about was in the gradual substitution of firms of agents for individuals. Resident agents may have been no better qualified in 1880 than in 1840, but more East Yorkshire acres had passed into the care of firms of agents, whose members were perhaps more efficient, not necessarily through formal qualifications, but through the corporate range of experience. What we now need is a serious study of these important organizations.