

New men of wealth and the purchase of land in Great Britain and Ireland, 1780 to 1879*

by David Brown

Abstract

Of all the indicators of the integration of the bourgeoisie class and the aristocracy, the most important was the purchase of a residence and a landed estate by 'new men of wealth'. In new research, 2566 new men of wealth have been identified who purchased estates of over 1000 acres and a rental of £1000 in Great Britain and Ireland between 1780 and 1879. Of those, 1439 purchased estates of over 2000 acres in extent and £2000 in rental, which represents an estimated turnover of over 38 per cent over the century. Although there is no consensus about what level of upward mobility is required for an elite to be 'open', these figures demonstrates that there were sufficient purchasers to sustain the contemporary belief that Britain's elite was indeed open.

The relationship between plutocratic and aristocratic elites in the century of the classic Industrial Revolution has been a topic of great interest to historians. For example, Avner Offer has explored the development of the ideology of a 'free trade in land' to break the aristocratic dominance achieved through the use of strict settlement. R. J. Morris has considered the strategies adopted by middle-class families to succeed in a period where landed wealth still dominated.¹ The most divisive, and arguably the key issue about this relationship, arising from the Marxist model of conflict between the rising bourgeois elite and the declining aristocratic elite, has been the tendency of 'new wealth' to join the ranks of landowners. Time has now passed since the 1980s and 1990s when this issue excited exchanges in a range of journals such as *Albion*, *Social History* and the *Economic History Review*.² Two key players in the debate, Bill

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¹ A. Offer, *Property and politics, 1870–1914: landownership, law, ideology and urban development in England* (1981); R. J. Morris, *Men, women and property* (2005).

² E. Spring and D. Spring, 'The English landed elite, 1540–1879: a review', *Albion* 17 (1985), pp. 149–66; L. Stone, 'Spring back', *Albion* 17 (1985), pp. 167–80; R. Pahl, 'New rich, old rich, stinking rich?' *Social Hist.* 15 (1990), pp. 229–39; W. D. Rubinstein, "'Stinking rich": a response', *Social Hist.* 16 (1991), pp. 359–65;

R. Pahl, 'A further comment on Mr Rubinstein's claims', *Social Hist.* 17 (1992), p. 99. F. M. L. Thompson, 'Life after death: how successful nineteenth-century businessmen disposed of their fortunes', *EcHR* 43 (1990), pp. 40–61; W. D. Rubinstein, 'Cutting up rich; a reply to F. M. L. Thompson', *EcHR* 45 (1992), pp. 350–61; F. M. L. Thompson, 'Stitching it together again', *EcHR* 45 (1992), pp. 362–75; T. Nicholas, 'Businessmen and landownership in the late nineteenth century', *EcHR* 52

Rubinstein and Michael Thompson, have published further contributions, which have carried the debate into the twentieth-first century. A few local studies – most notably of Oxfordshire and Berkshire by Michael Havinden and Ted Collins – have been undertaken.³

To some, the relationship between old and new wealth was characterized by a rivalry based upon distinct cultural identities; to others, it was marked by growing cooperation and eventual merger into a single elite. Despite these differences, the significance of this relationship in the development of Britain's society, politics and economy has been agreed by all parties. The alleged receptivity of the landed elite to new men of wealth and its encouragement of economic development through the acceptance of bourgeois values in 'gentlemanly capitalism' has been proposed as a cultural explanation for Britain's success after 1688. The absence of political revolution in Britain after 1745 has been attributed both to the growing class solidarity of the aristocracy and conversely to its openness as an elite.⁴

There are many problems to be overcome in trying to assess the actual level of class antagonism or cooperation. Any work based on a qualitative balance of historic views could be accused of lacking tangible evidence. It is relatively easy to counter Hippolyte Taine's view of easy upward mobility with Maria Edgeworth's observations on the London middle class.⁵ Therefore there have been a series of empirical studies based upon a wide range of behavioural yardsticks including the infiltration of the *nouveaux riches* into the public schools, directories of social leaders like Burke's *Landed gentry* or Walford's *County families*, the ranks of landowners, the county magistracy, the Commons and the Lords, the ranks of armigers and even the wedding beds of aristocratic families.⁶ All of these strategies raise difficulties as absolute measures of social relations. For example, while substantial bourgeois penetration into the Commons is certainly impressive evidence of the openness of British society, it does not demonstrate necessarily that the bourgeoisie accepted landed culture and norms or that British landed society was more 'open' than its European counterparts.⁷

To counter such criticisms, some studies have looked in detail at various aspects of the behaviour of a small number of businessmen either based on an area or a set of towns,⁸ or a

Note 2 continued

(1999), pp. 27–44; Julia A. Smith, 'Land, ownership and social change in late nineteenth-century Britain', *EcHR* 53 (2000), pp. 767–76; Nicholas, 'Businessmen and landownership in the late nineteenth century revisited', *EcHR* 53 (2000), pp. 777–82.

³ W. D. Rubinstein, *Men of Property* (1981; revised edn, 2006); F. M. L. Thompson, 'Business and landed elites in the nineteenth century', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *Landowners, capitalists and entrepreneurs* (1994), pp. 139–70; id., *Gentrification and the enterprise culture: Britain 1780–1980* (2001); E. J. T. Collins and M. Havinden, 'Long term trends in landownership, 1500–1914: Berkshire and Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia* 70 (2006), pp. 27–49.

⁴ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British imperialism: innovation and expansion, 1688–1914* (1993); L. Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (1992), p. 164; cf.

G. Mingay, *English landed society in the eighteenth century* (1963), pp. 92–103.

⁵ Hippolyte Taine, *Notes on England*, transl. E. Hyams (New Jersey, 1958), p. 190; Julie Nash, *Servants and paternalism in the works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell* (2013), pp. 4–5.

⁶ E. Walford, *The county families of the United Kingdom* (first published 1860, and then annually: the editions for 1880 and 1881 were used here).

⁷ Y. Cassis, 'Bankers in English society in the late nineteenth century', *EcHR* 38 (1985), pp. 210–29.

⁸ P. Ballard, 'A commercial and industrial elite: a study of Birmingham's upper middle class, 1780–1914' (unpubl. Ph.D thesis, University of Reading, 1983); G. Sheeran, *Brass Castles: West Yorkshire new rich and their houses, 1800–1914* (1993); T. Koditschek, *Class formation and urban industrial society: Bradford, 1750–1850* (1990).

trade, or a combination of the two.⁹ Others have tried to compare the behaviour of British and European entrepreneurs especially in their purchase of landed estates.¹⁰ One major problem with such studies has been the selection of businessmen. In some cases, no criteria have been used apart from those businessmen whom the researcher has happened upon. Two studies have used trade directories and the *Dictionary of business biography* more systematically but both of these sources are flawed if used to measure the numbers of purchasers. Businessmen who adopt an aristocratic lifestyle may abandon direct involvement in business activities and therefore may not continue to be listed in trade directories. Similarly, the *Dictionary of business biography* is a retrospective study of leading entrepreneurs, the primary criteria for selection being 'business achievement' within its period of study,¹¹ but this only starts in 1860 and included the first half of the twentieth century when most authorities agree that the proportion of businessmen who bought large estates declined. Its selection criteria tend to exclude those businessmen who made their money and then decamped into landed society. Moreover, it does not include 'new wealth' generated in other ways, the most important of which were urban development, law and military service.¹²

One behavioural measure which has received considerable attention has been the penetration of the landowning elite by men of new wealth generally from whatever source. These studies have given rise to their own methodological problems. One is establishing the criteria for selection of the 'new men'. Both Bill Rubinstein and Michael Thompson used probate returns; this necessarily overlooks businessmen who made inter-vivos gifts for a variety of legal, family and business reasons or those whose efforts in penetrating the landed elite left them relatively bereft of personalty, as in the case of Sir George Philips.¹³ There is also the difficulty of assessing who actually counts as a new-wealth purchaser; sometimes it is not the wealth creators but their heirs or the husbands of their heiresses who purchased landed estates. Furthermore, there are differences in the use of probate material; Rubinstein used a lower 'cut off point' than Thompson and sampled for particular decades or individual years. Thompson, by choosing a higher cut off point, was able to consider a longer period of time. Then there is the question of what criteria to use when turning to any landed acquisitions made by new men. The Stones chose the size of the mansion acquired to support a large landed estate whereas Thompson and Rubinstein have looked at the amount of land acquired.¹⁴ Many disagreements have arisen on the issue of size, how large a mansion or how many acres to use as a measure. Another complication is that landed society had its own gradations – the gentry, the squirearchy and

⁹ D. Gutzke, 'The social status of landed brewers in Britain since 1840', *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 17 (1984), pp. 93–113; A. Howe, *The cotton masters, 1830–1860* (1984); T. Devine, *The tobacco lords: a study of the tobacco merchants of Glasgow and their trading activities, c.1740–90* (1975, 1992); R. G. Wilson, *Gentlemen merchants: the merchant community in Leeds, 1700–1830* (1971).

¹⁰ H. Berghoff and R. Möller, 'Tired pioneers and dynamic newcomers? A comparative essay in German and English entrepreneurial history, 1870–1914', *ECHR* 47 (1994), pp. 262–87; D. Lieven, *The aristocracy in*

Europe, 1815–1914 (1992); G. Gill, *Bourgeoisie, state and democracy: Russia, Britain, France, Germany, and the USA* (2008).

¹¹ D. J. Jeremy (ed.), *Dictionary of business biography* (5 vols, 1985).

¹² Nicholas, 'Businessmen and landownership'.

¹³ D. Brown, 'From "Cotton Lord" to landed aristocrat: the rise of Sir George Philips Bart., 1766–1847', *Historical Res.* 69 (1996) pp. 62–81.

¹⁴ L. Stone and J. C. F. Stone, *An open elite? England, 1540–1880* (1984).

the aristocracy; for historians like Rick Trainor who used the Black Country as an example, businessmen made a limited entry into the landed elite. They were often gentrified but very few were ever 'squirified' or 'aristocratified'.¹⁵ Furthermore the whole basis of using land as a criterion has been questioned as new men could have invested in land as a diversification or as speculation. Nevertheless the most difficult problem to overcome is how to establish the timing, size and cost of landed acquisitions. There was no national land registry in Great Britain at this time. The *Return of owners of land*, compiled by the government between 1873 and 1876 to give details of ownership, acreage and rentals of all land in the counties of the United Kingdom outside London is a very useful tool but is only a snapshot at a particular point during the period.¹⁶

Any historian able to overcome these problems and produce a list of newly wealthy purchasers of landed estates would then have to decide what level of penetration would represent an open landed elite. So far as the author is aware, no hard and fast measure has even been suggested for this in any study of social mobility. One possible reason is that upward social mobility can be expressed either as 'inflow' figures (which represent the number of movers as a proportion of their new group) and 'outflow' figures (which represent the number of movers as a proportion of their old group). As the group the upwardly mobile leave is much bigger than the group they enter, such figures give a very different impression of the level of social mobility. Furthermore, the historian must be able to establish the total population of landowners falling into each category as a yardstick against which these new entrants could be measured.

Finally there is the problem that although the level of penetration of the landed elite may be calculated, what value has this statistic? Contemporaries would only have had an impression of the level of social mobility and so the actual level would not have directly influenced their social, economic or political behaviour.

In short, there seem to be many difficulties in the way of any quantitative study of the upward social mobility of new men. These can be reduced to the following seven questions:

- (i) What weight should be given to the various measures of upward social mobility?
- (ii) If land acquisition is the most important criterion, what amount of land would be needed to enter a particular echelon of landed society?
- (iii) How can a list of 'new-money' purchasers of land be constructed?
- (iv) How can the total population of owners in each echelon of British landed society be calculated?
- (v) In what way should the rate of social mobility be expressed?

¹⁵ R. Trainor, 'The gentrification of Victorian and Edwardian industrialists', in A. L. Beier and D. Cannadine (eds), *The first modern society* (1989), pp.167–97.

¹⁶ The return was published in three stages; England and Wales in 1873, Scotland separately in 1874 and Ireland in 1876. It formed the basis for John Bateman's handlists of landowners in the United Kingdom,

culminating in his *Great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1883). BPP, 1873, LXXII, Parts 1 and 2, *Return of owners of land in England and Wales*; BPP, 1874, LXXII, Part 3, *Return of owners of land in Scotland*; BPP, 1876, LXXX, *Return of owners of land in Ireland*; Brown, 'Philips'.

(vi) What level of landed penetration by the newly wealthy would enable the British aristocracy to be considered an 'open elite'?

(vii) Does the lack of contemporary awareness of the precise level of such upward mobility render the statistics of interest only to economic historians and historical sociologists?

In attempting to answer these questions, much will be revealed about the nature of the land market in this period and the motivation of purchasers.

I

Each of the potential yardsticks is a useful indicator to the historian but equally each is flawed as an absolute arbiter of levels of either upward social mobility or rapprochement of aristocratic and bourgeois elites. However, for entry into an aristocratic elite, the most important criterion must, by definition, be the acquisition of land. Nobility usually went hand-in-hand with ownership of land – Bateman in his *Great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1883), identified 459 peers, out of a total of 585, as having estates of over 2000 acres and £2000 – just under 79 per cent.¹⁷ This relatively small number of peers makes measuring the admission of the newly wealthy into their number a severe measure of mobility.¹⁸ The infiltration of new wealth into the lower chamber was measured by Ellis Wasson; while this is a very useful indicator of the openness of the House of Commons to the *nouveaux riches*, it obviously cannot comprehend those socially ambitious members of the bourgeoisie with no interest in politics.¹⁹ Another technique was entry into handbooks of the social elite such as Burke's *Landed gentry*. Thompson reckoned that roughly a fifth to a quarter of its over 5000 entries in 1906 were new men who acquired their estates in the nineteenth century.²⁰ Burke however, particularly in his earlier editions, might have given a misleadingly large representation of new money. As a reviewer of its second edition in 1847 commented, Burke was over-reliant upon contributions from *novi homines* for 'it is to the upward strugglers that such an opportunity of display offers peculiar temptations'.²¹ Such men were often willing to create false ancestries; Professor Freeman commented at the time that many ancient pedigrees were 'the work of deliberate invention'. Furthermore there were no specific entry criteria for inclusion in the handlists.²² Thus when John Beckett calculated from Walford's *County families of the United Kingdom* of 1895 that there were 8945 individuals listed for England and Wales, he acknowledged that such listings are imperfect measures of social distinction.²³

¹⁷ Bateman, *Great landowners*, pp. 499–515. This was a distillation of the *Return of owners of land*.

¹⁸ F. M. L. Thompson, *English landed society in the nineteenth century* (1963), pp. 294, 299; R. E. Pumphrey, 'The introduction of industrialists into the British peerage: a study of the adaptation of a social institution', *American Historical Rev.* 65 (1959), pp. 1–16.

¹⁹ E. A. Wasson, 'New wealth and the English governing class', *ECHR* 51 (1998), pp. 25–48.

²⁰ F. M. L. Thompson, 'Britain', in D. Spring (ed.),

European landed elites in the nineteenth century (1977), p. 30 and p. 43, n. 21.

²¹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1847, I, pp. 49–51; E. A. Freeman, 'Pedigrees and pedigree makers', *Contemporary Rev.* 30 (1877), pp. 12, 39.

²² Cf. J. Scott, *The upper class: property and privilege in Britain* (1982), p. 91, who reckons that ownership of an estate of over 2000 acres was required for inclusion in Burke's; he may be confusing Burke with Bateman.

²³ J. V. Beckett, *The aristocracy in England, 1660–1914* (1986), Table 1.1 (pp. 36–8); Bateman, *Great landowners*

Land was necessary for many of the trappings of the elite throughout the period, such as entry into the magistracy and hence county administration. Although a few men with little property were invited to join the bench, particularly in urbanized or industrial hundreds where it was difficult to find landed magistrates to serve, such appointments were unusual until the latter part of the period. While the shrievalty was an expensive duty that many existing owners avoided, there were few sheriffs who were not also substantial landowners.²⁴ Moving from the local to the national political scene, property ownership was an advantage in securing election to parliament through influence on tenants and tradesmen, especially if one wanted to secure a prestigious seat as a 'knight of the shire'. Ownership of manorial rights was necessary to kill game, although game could be legally bought after 1829.

Land purchase is not a perfect measure because it can have motives other than status acquisition, such as long-term investment, diversification, speculation or the avoidance of death duties. Richard Morris argues that the middle class often used land to diversify their assets – a secure 'store of value' to provide an income in retirement. Land was increasingly a poor investment for these purposes, returning 2.5 to 3 per cent at best in the nineteenth century. Both Palmer the biscuit maker and Dalgety the merchant banker found that their agricultural investments were unprofitable.²⁵ Richard Lambert, a London lawyer, complained to Peel that the repeal of the Corn Laws meant that his speculative purchase of a 271-acre farm no longer paid.²⁶ In addition, as Morris's two examples show, such 'business' purchases tended to be small but valuable urban properties. This kind of investment can be excluded by setting a sufficiently large acreage baseline for the total purchases of any individual.²⁷ Ireland after the 1849 Encumbered Estates Act presents some problems to this strategy. Some large purchases were speculative, either exploiting the very low prices when the market was saturated immediately after the passing of the act or depending on replacing cottagers by sheep farms or game reserves. By comparison, large-scale speculators in England often faced problems as the nineteenth century wore on because the market was less remunerative; William Garbutt, a land dealer, went bankrupt in 1880 owing £130,000.²⁸ The only purchases of land that could pay very handsomely were those with mineral or urban development potential. However, purchases of the former were increasingly rare – entrepreneurs increasingly preferred to form companies, and lease mineral rights – and the same applied to the latter to a certain extent. Purchases of farms present a particularly difficult problem. Some were sufficiently large for their new owners to qualify as members of the squirearchy, but the purchase may have had more of the character of a business investment in a working farm, funded perhaps by loans and mortgages. John Rowles bought a 1028-acre estate in Berkshire in 1857 but in the 1881 census he was described

Note 23 *continued*

(1883 edn), p. xv, attacked the criteria adopted by his fellow 'collaborateurs' such as Burke, Shirley and Walford for inclusion in their lists.

²⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1811, I, pp. 122 and 336; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 3 Sept. 1774, p. 3, a letter re the appointment of a brewer as sheriff: 'had you a freehold in the county when you were set over the heads of all the gentlemen of property in it to be made a pocket

sheriff? And have you anything more than an ale-house in the county now?'

²⁵ Jeremy (ed.), *Dictionary of business biography*, iv, p. 523; M. J. Daunt, *State and market in Victorian Britain: war welfare and capitalism* (2008), p. 209.

²⁶ BL, Add. Mss 40603, pp. 226–7.

²⁷ R. J. Morris, *Class, sect and party. The making of the British middle class, 1820–50* (1990), p. 322.

²⁸ *Estates Gazette*, 1880, p. 57

as a 'farmer and landowner' and only employed one domestic servant.²⁹ The influence of such business-based motives can be limited by excluding purchases without a residence or of minimal duration – like William James Goulton who bought Massingham Parva in Norfolk in 1872 only to resell quickly to William Walker.³⁰ By such filtering, genuine buyers can be separated from the residue. The next problem is how to categorize the buyers precisely.

II

The amount of land required to enter particular echelons of the landed elite has been the subject of some debate but the views of contemporary observers and modern historians, together with some consideration about what certain levels of landownership meant in terms of prestige and authority, can establish a secure definition of different grades of the landed elite. Rubinstein employed a benchmark of 5000 acres (without consideration of rental) for entry into the landed elite, which brought him into sharp disagreement with historians of landownership, particularly Thompson (who chose a threshold of 2000 acres) and the Springs.³¹ However to employ a single entry point overlooks the existence of distinct bands within the landed elite identified by John Bateman in 1876: the 'nobility/peerage', the 'aristocracy', the 'squirearchy' and the 'gentry'. The two most successful attempts to produce a profile of these gradations have been those of Gordon Mingay and John Beckett; for Mingay, the rental value of land was the key factor conferring status; for Beckett, who used Bateman's categorization, this had to be matched by a commensurate acreage.³² The gradations adopted by Bateman and Beckett form the basis of Tables 1 and 2. What is noticeable is that Rubinstein's baseline of 5000 acres appears too high; someone who purchased that much was entering into the higher levels of the aristocracy. To illustrate the point, a squire was the dominant landowner in a parish and would normally be a lord of the manor. The average size of parishes in England and Wales in 1811 was 3340 acres,³³ and a parish often contained several manors. Therefore a person could become a manorial squire by purchasing a manor with 1000 acres, or perhaps much less.

III

The creation of a list of purchasers is a difficult and lengthy task. While the *Return of owners* is the single most useful source to the historian, simple reliance on its entries and acreages can be misleading in several ways. As Bateman recognized, there were errors in transcription both in terms of acreage and in names as well as multiple entries for the same estate. Furthermore there were additions and omissions in the return; for example, neither the census nor the Warwickshire Record Office name index records a Mr Howard of Birmingham who in the return owned 1798 acres and £3183 rent; the Earl of Derby found that the *Return* omitted nearly

²⁹ VCH Berkshire, IV, p. 224; 1881 census.

³⁰ *Estates Gazette*, 1872, p. 473.

³¹ W. D. Rubinstein, 'New men of wealth and the purchase of land in nineteenth-century Britain', *Past & Present* 92 (1981), p. 136 Table 2; Thompson, 'Life after death', pp. 40–61; E. Spring, 'Businessmen and

landowners re-engaged' *Historical Res.* 72 (1999), p. 80.

³² Mingay, *English landed society*, p. 26; Beckett, *Aristocracy*, pp. 50–2.

³³ A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and society in industrial England. Church, chapel and social change, 1740–1914* (1976), pp. 100–02.

10,000 acres of his Lancashire estate which he included in his entry in Bateman's handlist of 'great landowners' of over 2000 acres and £2000 rental published in 1883.³⁴

Another major problem with the *Return of owners* was the source from which it was compiled. It was based on the valuation of estates as compiled by parish officials for rating purposes. In industrial areas like the Black Country, these officials often only recorded the rental value, not the acreage. This has led many historians to underestimate the acreage owned by landowners – often newcomers – in industrial areas. For example, Sir Horace St Paul is recorded as owning only 40 acres in Staffordshire, worth £6978 per year. Comparison with tithe commutation surveys show that a generation earlier he already owned 772 acres in Staffordshire. When this is added to his 1332-acre estate in Northumberland, he should have qualified for inclusion by Bateman: however he is omitted from the book.³⁵

Reliance on Bateman's handlist of 1883 can mislead historians in other ways. For example Rubinstein discounts several new men of wealth as non-landed – Crawshay the ironmaster, MacCalmont the stockbroker and Gretton the brewer – because their names were not listed by Bateman.³⁶ Discounting individuals on this score takes no account of heirs of different names who purchased land. Benjamin Hall, a son-in-law of the first Crawshay, used his inheritance to buy an aristocratic estate from 1808 onwards. Purchases after Bateman's book was published are also ignored. MacCalmont's heir bought 7041 acres in the six years after his uncle's death in 1887 largely at Cheveley in Cambridgeshire. Gretton himself bought 4600 acres at Stapleford for £150,000 in 1894.³⁷ In another instance, Rubinstein attacks Dauntton's statement that the merchant banker Dalgety invested heavily in land. Rubinstein based this on the fact that Dalgety's purchases before 1872 were only 1195 acres, insufficient to gain entry into Bateman. However, the *Victoria County History* (VCH) of Hampshire reveals that in 1879, Dalgety bought Goldsmid's estate at East Tytherley, which in 1873 had been measured at 1607 acres and rented at £1295. Before 1878 he had also bought at least 200 acres at Gambledown from W. M. Harvey. Therefore by 1879 Dalgety owned at least 3000 acres with a rental of £3500 and possibly more, which would have secured his entry into Bateman's book. Certainly his spending of £172,006 on Hampshire land by 1884 would equate to an estate of roughly 6000 acres. Dalgety had simply not bothered to inform Bateman of his purchases.³⁸

The *Return of owners* must be augmented by additional sources not only to identify the extent of the purchases but also further details such as the source of a purchaser's wealth. Even where available, estate papers are time-consuming to use. The Stones suggested that VCH *Warwickshire*, one of the few of the series to have been completed, could be trawled to

³⁴ J. Vincent (ed.), *A selection from the diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826–93): between September 1869 and March 1878* (Camden fifth ser. 4 (1994), pp. 276, 379 and 436.

³⁵ Birmingham Reference Library, B/A/15, tithe awards for Wednesbury, Tipton and West Bromwich.

³⁶ Rubinstein, *Men of Property*, pp. 134–5.

³⁷ West Suffolk RO, hb 510/2/9, Sale of Cheveley estate, 1893 to H. L. B. MacCalmont. *Estates Gazette*, 1894, p. 522.

³⁸ M. J. Dauntton, 'Firm and family in the city

of London in the nineteenth century: the case of F. G. Dalgety', *Historical Res.* 72 (1989), pp. 154–77; VCH *Hampshire*, IV, pp. 501–2, 506–7; *Hampshire Advertiser*, 24 Aug. 1872 and 6 Apr. 1878. This disregards other purchases for which no date is known. M. J. Dauntton, "'Gentlemanly capitalism' and British industry, 1820–1914', *Past & Present* 122 (1989), pp. 119–158; W. D. Rubinstein, "'Gentlemanly capitalism' and British industry, 1820–1914: comment', *Past & Present* 132 (1991), p. 153; M. J. Dauntton, 'Reply', *Past & Present* 132 (1991), pp. 170–87.

provide a full county list of new-wealth purchasers to add to the three they had studied in other ways.³⁹ This strategy obviously could only be employed in a few counties and, in its early days, the *VCH* was largely a manorial history, which excluded some large landed estates. In the nineteenth century, manors were often bought separately from their demesne either to lease game rights or enfranchise copyholds.⁴⁰ Furthermore the names of purchasers are often supplied without any statement of their occupation, and purchases after about 1700 lack precise dating, restricting proper analysis. *VCH Sussex IX* gave full details of the descent of the Fullers' estate at Rose Hill until about 1790 but ignored its purchase around 1877 by the banker, Percy Tew.⁴¹ Nevertheless by combining the *VCH* information with data from other sources – existing research, parish histories, architectural studies, deeds, trade directories and listings of businessmen, county families and the landed gentry – a nearly full study is possible. These methods in Warwickshire alone between 1780 and 1879 yielded 28 new men of wealth with their main home in the county who had purchased estates of over 1000 acres or rental value of £1000, including 12 manufacturers and 10 merchants or bankers.⁴²

The problem remains of those English counties not fully covered by the *VCH* or those counties in Wales, Scotland and Ireland that lie beyond its remit. Fortunately many counties in England and Wales have antiquarian studies to serve as a substitute, and the land market has interested historians of landlord-tenant relations in the more socially antagonistic Celtic fringe of the British Isles. These sources supplemented with others – Burke's *Landed gentry*, Walford's *County families*, the obituaries in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, newspapers and journals (particularly the *Estates Gazette* after 1858) can allow the diligent historian to discover most large-scale purchases of land which took place between 1780 and 1880; a full list, particularly of purchases of gentry estates, would require an enormous research effort, even with the emergence of searchable resources via the internet. However, it is hoped that the overwhelming majority of major purchases between 1780 and 1880 have been caught.

There are several other complications to bear in mind. Precise dating of purchases is difficult because it could take several years to sort out problems over title or completion of the payment. Actual purchase could follow months or even years after newspaper reports of a contract to purchase being agreed. Furthermore secondary sources can be unreliable because some new men rented estates before buying them and the change in status might not always be obvious. Another difficulty is the treatment of those whose purchases straddled either 1780 or 1880. In such cases, the deciding factor was when the bulk of purchases and a mansion were acquired; thus Samuel Cunliffe Lister had only assembled an estate of 300+ acres/rent before 1880,

³⁹ Stone, 'Spring back', p. 70.

⁴⁰ As two examples, *VCH Cambridgeshire*, IX, p. 246; *VCH Huntingdonshire*, II, p. 225.

⁴¹ *VCH Sussex*, IX, p. 227.

⁴² Stone 'Spring Back', p. 170. Stone believed that Warwickshire would probably have few newcomers to the elite because he was informed by Professor Mandler that 'no man with vaguely commercial or industrial connections represented either division of the county as MP before 1857'. In this he was misinformed: apart from

the landowner/industrialist Sir William Dugdale (MP North Warwickshire, 1832–46), there was Sir George Philips, a new-wealth purchaser (MP South Warwickshire 1833–35, Brown, 'Philips'), Richard Spooner, the banker (MP North Warwickshire, 1847–64, *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1865 (i), pp. 240–2) and Edward Greaves, banker and new-wealth purchaser (MP Warwickshire, 1852–65 and 1868–74, Burke's *Landed gentry*, 1937 edn, pp. 965–6).

although in 1882 he bought the 22,678-acre Swinton Park estate for £457,000. He is therefore excluded. Robert Harvey, the Norwich banker, was included because, although Thorpe Lodge was bought in 1779, the bulk of his landed purchases were after 1780. With more difficulty, Samuel Whitbread was included because of the size of his purchases after 1780 and the acquisition of a mansion; the nabob, James Alexander of Caledon, however, was excluded as his mansion and some of his large estates were bought before 1780. Similarly there are 24 families in the database who make a secondary rise through new wealth. The goldsmith Francis Tyssen invested much of his profits in buying Hackney manor; his heiress married John Amherst, who bought Foulden Hall – under 2000 acres – in Norfolk in 1754. However the family's substantial purchases of land occurred in the 1850s when their descendant used the wealth gained from the development of Hackney to buy over 7000 acres based on Didlington Hall. In such cases, only the purchases made after 1780 are counted in determining the notional status acquired.

Then there is the problem of how to classify purchases by the heirs of wealth creators; these fall into three categories. First, in many cases, an estate was bought for an heir through a trust, showing the new man's clear intention to establish a landed dynasty. Second, in others, where the heirs themselves decided to buy estates, they were rejecting the option of using their inherited capital in business. These can be difficult to determine where the heir marries an independently wealthy man or woman. For example, the wealthy Rothschild heiress married the Earl of Rosebery, who soon bought the Malleny estate, seemingly with Rothschild wealth but in the absence of proof, this case was excluded.⁴³ Third, there are the purchases of estates in trust for female heirs. Some married non-landed gentlemen like the Brownes of Newcastle-upon-Tyne who married the heiress of the Forman family of ironmasters who were thereby catapulted into the landed elite. Others married persons who were already landed but who were propelled by the marriage into a much higher echelon of landed society. In all cases the purchases were made by new wealth and so fall within the remit of the research; the contribution of men like the ironmaster and financier William Thompson (1793–1854) to the estate of someone like his son-in-law the Marquess of Headfort should be disaggregated from Headfort's lineal estate and ascribed to the wealth creator.⁴⁴

Short-term owners of estates present another set of problems. It is true that some 'birds of passage' were simply speculators often in mineral or urban estates; even mansion house estates could be an investment as they had an economic value; however maintenance costs meant that such purchases were inevitably short-lived. Obvious speculators can be excluded but there were those who acquired landed estates only to resell after a short period of time due to financial difficulties. For example, those shooting stars of the railway mania, Betts,

⁴³ For an alternative view, see W. D. Rubinstein, 'Businessmen into landowners', in Negley Harte and Roland Quinault (eds), *Land and society in Britain, 1700–1914: essays in honour of F. M. L. Thompson* (1996), pp. 96–7.

⁴⁴ William Thompson was an ironmaster and financier whose only child was a daughter, Amelia. She married the Earl of Bective, the son of the Marquess of Headfort, already a landowner in Ireland. Thompson

came from the Lake District and spent the latter years of his life acquiring a landed estate based in that area, spending at least £218,000. He then established a trust to purchase more estates. By 1888 Thompson and his trustees had bought 25,000 acres of land in 226 individual purchases. Clearly new wealth was being used to acquire land on a massive scale and an estate separate from Headfort's had been established. BPP, 1888, Select Committee on Agriculture, Evidence of F. Punchard.

Peto and Hudson were forced to liquidate their country estates within two decades in order to satisfy their creditors. Such men seem to deserve inclusion because their intention was to establish themselves as landowners and they lived as such for a period. Perhaps the most debatable inclusions on this score are John Farquhar and Albert Grant. Farquhar (1751–1826), the notorious miser and government contractor, seems to have had no dynastic motive. He left no will, so his estate was divided equally among nephews and nieces. Furthermore he retained Fonthill Abbey for just four years. Nevertheless he did reside there and only rid himself of his bargain when its tower collapsed.⁴⁵ Albert Grant (1831–99) owned Horstead in Norfolk for only a few months in 1872 and was a great speculator in fraudulent companies – was Horstead yet another of his speculations? This disregards his vanity and financial circumstances. ‘Baron Grant’ was really Albert Gottheimer, the son of a Jewish pedlar turned London merchant, who ruined himself in attempts to acquire social standing through a massive London townhouse and conspicuous philanthropy. It was mounting financial pressures that obliged him to re-sell his landed estate as the first of his fruitless attempts to avert bankruptcy.⁴⁶

There were more complicated ways that new money could find its way into land. Gladstone made himself a landed gentleman by buying out the heir in tail of the Glynne estate with Gladstone’s share of his father’s mercantile wealth. While Gladstone is included, examples of the infusion of new wealth through marriage to prevent the destruction of estates are excluded because this motive would be impossible to demonstrate. Some cases almost defy classification. The Tierney brothers, a lawyer and a society doctor, lent money to the Earl of Egmont and gradually secured a stranglehold over his affairs; he arranged that he should leave them his Irish estates, seemingly in settlement of his debts. The Tierneys enjoyed these estates (worth over £12,000 a year in Cork) for 22 years until Chancery overturned the will. Thomas Pemberton, another lawyer, developed his own estate but was given a life interest in another as a reward for legal services. Pemberton has been counted as a buyer but the Tierneys have been excluded both because of their fragile claim to ownership and the question over whether they acquired the estate through loans or inheritance.

Difficulties in counting purchasers can also arise. Richard Arkwright II and David Ricardo bought respectively around 25,000 and 10,000 acres to provide landed estates for their sons – should these be counted as one large purchase or several? In these cases, if the estates were bought as separate estates in which to install progeny they are counted severally; if however they were bought and enjoyed by the wealth holder and then divided they are counted to full size by him and then separately among others. On those occasions when estates were created but then were added to others through marriage or inheritance, they are labelled ‘subsumed’.

The need to have a commensurate rental component causes a difficulty as rental details are only available for 1873 and there was considerable inflation especially over the early part of the century. To allow proper comparison, 1873 rentals are used as a standard where possible or the average rental of the area estimated at 1873 levels.

A final problem is to define a ‘new-wealth’ purchaser, a question perhaps most clearly

⁴⁵ For Farquhar see ODNB.

⁴⁶ For Grant see ODNB. His failed landed ambitions were satirized by Trollope in the personality of

Augustus Melmotte, the villain of *The way we live now* (1874).

illustrated by Arthur Wellesley. The future Duke of Wellington was the fourth son of an Irish nobleman and his properties were either bought by a parliamentary commission or were the gifts of grateful rulers. Nevertheless while he was of an 'old' family, his money was 'new' and 'earned' through conspicuous military service. Moreover his acquisition of money was considerable, and he left over £500,000. This problem applies to perhaps ten of the 'new-wealth' purchasers.⁴⁷

Turning to the source of new wealth, this is often difficult to identify. The newly rich were often at pains to obscure the source of its wealth in publications like Burke's *Landed gentry*, preferring to stress its aristocratic connections and ancestry. Others (such as George Addison Cox, the Dundee jute and linen manufacturer) preferred to describe themselves as merchants when in reality their business was based upon manufacturing and they were only merchants inasmuch as they bought raw materials and sold finished products. In this context it is worth remembering that the organizers of the domestic system of manufacture were described as merchants.⁴⁸ Indeed many individuals diversified their interests into a variety of remunerative employments and so are very hard to categorize. For example, many early manufacturers like Sir Robert Peel became bankers in order to obtain capital for their concerns. Sir George Philips' contribution to the manufacturing concern of Philips and Lee was buying and selling and so he became involved in peripheral mercantile and banking activities; nevertheless the bedrock of his wealth was manufacturing.

IV

The results of this research has been organized into a database. After a preliminary examination of existing studies and volumes selected effectively at random largely from the *VCH*,⁴⁹ the precise dates at which 352 new men of wealth acquired, in a single acquisition, an estate of over 1000 acres/£1000 rental value (in 1873 terms) in England between 1780 and 1879 were established. The results (see Figure 1) clearly show a marked increase in the number of purchases of landed estates in the 1850s and 1860s, roughly corresponding to the 'Equipoise decades' of Burn. Although Burn did not subscribe to the theory of an 'open elite', the figures strongly suggest that if the period was one of relative social stability, the opportunities for new wealth to acquire landed status contributed in some measure to it. It also conforms to Beckett's impression that 'property accumulation was taking place more successfully in the nineteenth century than in the eighteenth'.⁵⁰

Other trends emerge from a more detailed study of the 'Equipoise' period. Further research identified a group of 423 new-wealth purchasers during the years 1850 to 1869.⁵¹ A study of

⁴⁷ Rubinstein, *Men of property*, p. 72.

⁴⁸ Walford, *County families* (1880 edn), sub George Addison Cox.

⁴⁹ The effective randomness being the product of whatever volumes happened to be available at those libraries accessible to the researcher. For more detail see D. Brown, 'Equipoise and the myth of an open elite. New men of wealth and the purchase of land in the

equipoise decades 1850–1869', in Martin Hewitt (ed.), *An age of equipoise? Reassessing mid-Victorian Britain* (2000), Appendix.

⁵⁰ W. L. Burn, *The age of equipoise* (1964), pp. 8, 253, 303–7, 314, 317–8, 322–3; J. V. Beckett, 'The pattern of landownership in England and Wales, 1660–1880', *EcHR* 37 (1984), p. 22.

⁵¹ Brown, 'Equipoise'.

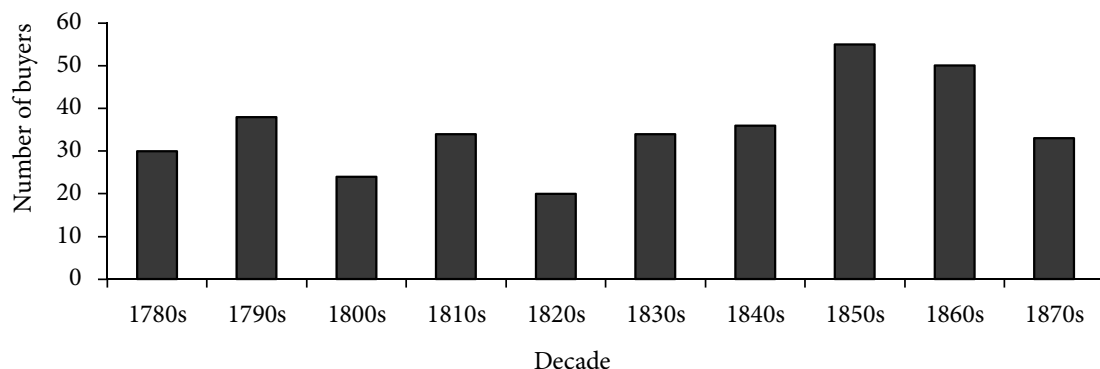


FIGURE 1: Numbers of estates purchased by new men of wealth in the United Kingdom, 1780–1879

Source: Author's database.

the source of their wealth, broken down into four general areas produces the result shown in Figure 2. The figures show that individuals whose trade and finance formed just over a third of the group identified, much smaller than might have been anticipated from the work of Rubinstein. The size of estate acquired varied a good deal but there was no apparent correlation between the size of the estate and the source of the purchaser's wealth.

Turning now to the century under study, we find that the motivation of the purchasers varied. After 1845, some wanted to prove that they could make agriculture pay in a free-trade environment, and William Hanbury Sparrow, especially, entered into large-scale farming with an element of class rivalry. A few tried to run their estates as industrial concerns – most famously in the case of Robert Campbell who established an 'industrial farm' at Buscot, whose losses obliged the estate's eventual sale.⁵² In some cases, the impulse to purchase a landed estate owed much to health considerations, obliging purchasers to go ever further afield. In the 1790s, Matthew Boulton invited a friend to his new mansion only three miles from Birmingham, saying that 'the quietude and fresh air of Soho will do you more good than ye smoak and Noise of Birmingham'. His son, Matthew Robinson Boulton bought Great Tew in Oxfordshire in 1815 while retaining Soho; but Robinson Boulton also established a trust so that his own son could abandon Soho for one of the largest estates in Oxfordshire. In the case of James Tertius Dugdale, it was his wife who persuaded him to buy Sezincote in Gloucestershire in 1884 to escape the smoke around his cotton factory.⁵³ Wives often had social ambitions that could drive their husbands to disaster. In the opinion of his banking partners, the nagging of his wife helped to drive William George Prescott to commit suicide as he could not face assuming the life of a landed gentleman. After his death in 1865, his wealth was used to establish his son-in-law Decie as a landed gentleman in Worcestershire.⁵⁴ A variety of motives could apply

⁵² J. R. Gray, 'An industrial farm estate in Berkshire', *Industrial Arch.* 8 (1971), pp. 171–83.

⁵³ William Salt Library, SMS 478, Matthew Boulton to Mrs. Dibbs (undated); B. Hall, *Lower House and the*

Dugdales (1976), p. 25.

⁵⁴ *VCH Worcestershire*, IV, p. 243; D. Kynaston, *The City of London, 1815–1890*, I, *A world of its own, 1815–1890* (1994), pp. 61, 232–3, 381.

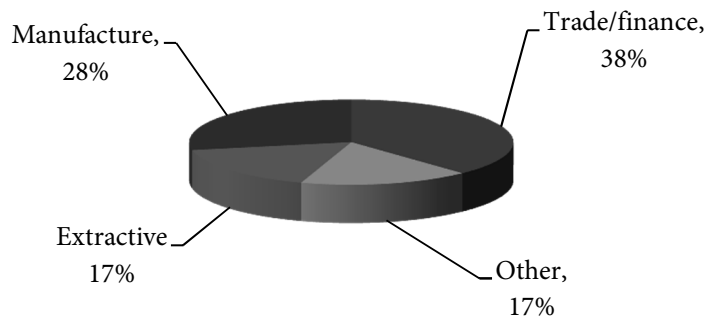


FIGURE 2: Sources of wealth of *nouveau riche* land purchasers (1850–69)

in some individual cases; for the cloth merchant Dearman Birchall, aesthetic and social considerations for himself and his daughter led to his purchase in 1868 of Bowden House, which gradually grew into a gentry estate.⁵⁵

The two most prominent of all motives were the acquisition of status and dynastic ambition. For example, Sir George Philips expended £700,000 in his desire to become a landed gentleman and as the result of his inter-vivos gifts he died ‘insolvent’ for probate purposes.⁵⁶ Significantly, men acquiring land with this ambition in mind were often eager to restore their families’ landed status that had been lost over time, like the Hanburys of Ilam Hall.⁵⁷ Many who did not themselves buy established trusts to purchase landed estates for their heirs. In the view of one such purchaser, the possession of a large landed estate ‘is with a view to the permanent settlement and position of the family. The safest and best investment a man can make is in the land of his own country; this being so, he desires to accumulate land and as far as he can continue in his family’.⁵⁸ In his opinion, economic advantage and social position went hand in hand.

How far men of new wealth had ambitions to buy land has been questioned by Tom Nicholas. He based his analysis on those 26 businessmen in the *Dictionary of business biography* born between 1790 and 1840 who owned landed estates, including those with inherited aristocratic estates. He compared their probate wealth with the value of their landholdings in Bateman (calculated by using 20, 30 and 40 years’ purchase as multipliers of the rental value) to show their landed assets represented a relatively small proportion of their wealth; at 20 years’ purchase they represented only 18 per cent of their personalty. He argues that Thompson’s estimate for the purchase of a landed estate of £100,000 is too large, mainly by applying a 20-year purchase multiplier to the rental value of their estates. Nicholas’s analysis tends to understate the commitment of new men to landed status in four ways. Firstly 20 years’ purchase is far too low a figure for estates with mansions or the potential to build a mansion house: estates of this quality often commanded over 30 years’ purchase. Some sale prices reveal

⁵⁵ D. Verey (ed.), *Diary of a Victorian Squire. Extracts from the diaries and letters of Dearman and Emily Birchall* (1983), *passim*.

⁵⁶ Brown, ‘Philips’, pp. 79–81.

⁵⁷ D. Brown, ‘The motives for business enterprise: the Hanburys of Norton Canes’, *Staffordshire Stud.* 6

(1994), pp. 45–71. For an earlier example, re the Fynneys of Fulshaw, see J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire past and present* (2 vols, 1877–80), I, pp. 142, 154.

⁵⁸ Royal Commission on Agriculture (PP 1882, XV), Evidence of Henry Ray Freshfield, q. 58149.

the scale of investment put into buying landed estates. In the early 1870s, the cotton manufacturers John Fielden and Abraham Foster paid nearly 40 and 45 years' purchase respectively to buy aristocratic estates costing over £200,000.⁵⁹ Second, the rental value in the *Return of owners* often seems to exclude the value of the mansion; in most cases the owner lived in the mansion and so either a notional rental value or no rental value at all was given for it. As Wilson and Mackay have shown, the cost of house building (and, by extension, of buying the house) amounted to £7000 on average for a 3–5000 acre estate between 1770 and 1880. This cost was increasing by the 1870s, Nicholas's period of interest; Franklin found that £7–10,000 was a minimum price between 1835 and 1914, and many mansions cost between £50,000 and £100,000.⁶⁰ Moreover the mansion would need to be furnished, and surrounding it with a park would probably cost a third of the price of the house. Third, as Nicholas is aware, in many cases the Bateman entry understates the total *lifetime* acquisition of land by individuals: it catches them only part way through the acquisitive period of their lives. A businessman born in 1840 would almost certainly not have had the time to accumulate the profits with which to purchase a landed estate by 1873 – when he might have been in business for only a decade. Bateman understates the total landed acquisitions of at least seven of the 26 businessmen.⁶¹ For example, George Palmer, the biscuit manufacturer, is credited by both Bateman and Nicholas as having purchased only 2001 acres; already by 1880 he owned over 3000 acres and by his death owned nearly 5000. Altogether the 'non-counted' landed purchases by these seven men amounts to roughly 70,000 acres costing some £1.5 million. Finally, as the case study of Sir George Philips illustrated, the cost of entering landed society could include more ephemeral investments such as the provision of large dowries to promote social integration.

To get a clearer view of the motives of purchasers, it is worth considering the behaviour and motivation of wealthy non-purchasers. Some wished to acquire status but achieved it through domination of their industry. Richard Crawshay argued when his son William built Cyfarthfa House that it would prevent his family achieving the goal of being 'the head of the iron trade ... A great house and expensive establishment will not fight our battle in trade'. Nevertheless the Crawshay Empire gave rise to five aristocratic estates. For Titus Salt, the decision was more difficult: when asked why he did not retire to a country estate at the age of 50 instead of establishing his Saltaire factory, he replied:

I had made up my mind to do this very thing, but on reflection I determined otherwise. In the first place, I thought that by the concentration of my works in one locality I might provide occupations for my sons. Moreover as a landed proprietor I should be out of my element ... outside of my business I am nothing. In it, I have considerable influence. By the opening of Saltaire I also hope to do good to my fellow men.

It was conspicuous that Salt chose to commemorate his name by philanthropy. Indeed, Saltaire, like Hartshill of the Mintons and Bournville of the Cadbury family, could be seen as an urban

⁵⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 6 July 1872; *Tamworth Herald*, 26 Oct. 1872; *Estates Gazette*, 1875 p. 297.

⁶⁰ R. G. Wilson and A. L. Mackley, 'How much did the English country house cost to build, 1660–1880?', *EcHR* 52 (1999), pp. 436–68; J. Franklin, *The gentleman's*

country house and its plan, 1835–1914 (1981), p. 124.

⁶¹ W. G. Armstrong, Samuel Courtald, Cunliffe Lister, Lord Overstone (as well as overlooking his purchases for his son-in-law), Sir Charles Mark Palmer, George Palmer and Lord Nunburnholme.

landed estate, with the factory owner fulfilling many of the functions of a paternalist squire in return for deference and status. Put crudely, their ambitions were similar to those who bought landed estates; they were simply adapted to an urbanizing and industrial society.⁶² Others responded to change by a deliberate political rejection of landed for civic status. Joseph Chamberlain rejected the advice to buy a landed estate and bought a 20-acre suburban estate near Birmingham, feeling that 'he wanted to dwell among his own people' because 'his political fortunes were linked to the city and his animosity to the landed aristocracy'.⁶³ Prominent critics of the landed interest could hardly buy themselves a landed estate.

For others the sheer enjoyment and challenge of making money predominated over any dynastic instinct and so they often allowed their wealth to be scattered by partible inheritance. Sometimes this was forced on the wealth-holder by the lack of a direct male heir. The dynastically ambitious could overcome this by leaving their money and land to a protégé on condition he took his name. This was the case with Albany Wallis the lawyer and his heir Captain Lewis Bayly.⁶⁴ Others chose to commemorate themselves through charitable foundations. William Richard Sutton⁶⁵ and the merchant George Peabody established housing trusts.⁶⁶ John Rylands' cotton wealth established the John Rylands Library and a large public park.⁶⁷ Others like John Owens,⁶⁸ Henry Robinson Hartley⁶⁹ and Josiah Mason⁷⁰ founded colleges that grew into universities. From this research a trend emerges; many of the super-wealthy who failed to buy land lacked a close male heir to succeed them. This tends to confirm the opinion that dynastic motives were crucial in the decision whether or not to purchase land.

Turning from the purchasers to their purchases, other patterns emerge. The typical 'Equipoise' buyer (based on the median) was spending £53,760 on acquiring an estate of 1285 acres, so joining the squirearchy. There was also a tendency over the whole century for the same mansions to change hands multiple times; in the case of Hylands in Essex, the house was sold four times, forming the nucleus of an estate that varied from 436 to 4289 acres. Each successive purchaser intended to make it his long-term residence but business fortunes led to its sale either to pay creditors or to help fund a larger purchase. One owner in particular illustrates some of the problems encountered by newcomers in maintaining a permanent presence in landed society. John Attwood lost the £600,000 allegedly tricked from the British Iron Company who had purchased his extensive Black Country industrial interests on unwise political, landed and stock market investments. He was forced to sell Hylands within fifteen years of its purchase. Apart from the rapid turnover of some estates, others had to be assembled

⁶² J. Reynolds, *The great paternalist* (1983), p. 432; P. Booth, 'Herbert Minton', *Staffordshire Stud.* 3 (1990), pp. 163–84.

⁶³ G. L. Garvin and J. Amory, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (6 vols, 1932–69), I, p. 311. See also Maureen Perrie, 'Hobby farming among the Birmingham bourgeoisie: the Cadburys and Chamberlains on their suburban estates, c.1880–1914', *AgHR* 61 (2013), pp. 111–34.

⁶⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1800, II, pp. 908–9, 917, 1000; F. Jones, *Historic Carmarthenshire houses and their families* (1987), p. 156; R. J. Moore-Colyer (ed.),

A land of pure delight: selections from the letters of Thomas Johnes of Hafod, 1748–1816 (1992), p. 206. Jones E. Inglis, 'Derry Ormond', *Ceredigion* 2 (1952–5), p. 132.

⁶⁵ P. L. Garside, *William Sutton* (1999).

⁶⁶ Kynaston, *City of London*, I, pp. 116–17, 187–8, 196–7, 216–17, 226.

⁶⁷ D. A. Farnie, 'John Rylands of Manchester', *Bull. John Rylands Library* 56 (1973), pp. 93–129.

⁶⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1846, II, p. 662.

⁶⁹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1850, II, p. 331.

⁷⁰ J. T. Bunce, *Sir Josiah Mason, a biography* (1882).

piecemeal, with either a mansion then being erected upon the estate or an old mansion being refurbished. These two trends seem to reflect the hunger for such estates and the success of strict settlement in preserving landed estates,⁷¹ which restricted the availability for purchase of large 'ready-made' estates. Encumbered tenants for life could only obtain estate acts to allow sales with the compliance of the tenants in tail and were often obliged to make economies, marry well or sell properties out of settlement (which were often smaller and distant from the main estate) to cope. In Ireland, the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849 shows what could happen when there was free trade in land: over a quarter of the country changed hands in the 30 years thereafter.⁷²

Ireland and Scotland probably saw greater social mobility than England during the period of study, in part because the replacement of crofting by sheep farming encouraged land sales. Although in Ireland many of the purchases were speculative and were often by Irish people themselves, the sales of estates sufficiently large to merit mention in Bateman were often to British buyers or Irishmen who had made their money in England. A common feature was that junior branches of impoverished Irish and Scottish families sometimes bought back their estates from senior branches with money made through business. In Ireland an additional impetus to the purchase of estates was the 1778 Papists Act, which allowed Catholics once again to own land. By 1825 it was claimed by knowledgeable witnesses that Catholic merchants and professionals had bought a substantial number of estates in southern Ireland since the Act of Union of 1801, so much so that in Galway they formed 'a new race of landed proprietors'.⁷³

The number of these purchases in Scotland and Ireland is probably under-represented in this research for several reasons. One is the relative lack of evidence in both countries. In the case of Ireland, this was partly because such land transfers were rarely recorded publicly. As Wakefield noted in 1814:

What transfers take place are generally made by private bargain, as Irish gentlemen have a particular aversion to advertise their estate for sale by private auction. In this respect, the difference between England and Ireland is particularly striking.⁷⁴

A second problem is that in Ireland, the rental values given in the 1876 *Return of owners* actually used the rateable value in 1852, which was based on the low agricultural prices of the time: 'consequently the valuation cannot be compared in any way with the "gross estimated rental" given in the return for England and Wales'. For the purposes of this study, the 1876 figures have been used.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Thompson, *Landed society*, p. 68, suggests that nearly half the area of England was subject to settlement at this time.

⁷² J. S. Donnelly jun., *Landlord and tenant in nineteenth-century Ireland* (1973), pp. 50–1.

⁷³ BP 1825, VIII. SC to inquire into the state of

Ireland, evidence of Daniel O'Connell, pp. 523, 525 and 535; Hugh O'Connor, p. 294 and John Dunn, p. 43.

⁷⁴ E. Wakefield, *An account of Ireland, statistical and political* (1812), pp. 307–8.

⁷⁵ *The Standard*, 22 June 1876, p. 3.

V

Altogether at least 2556 estates of over 1000 acres/£10000 were bought by men of new wealth in the United Kingdom between 1780 and 1879. This begs the question: why have some historians been persuaded that there was little upward social mobility? Two explanations suggest themselves. For reasons already stated, many Victorian antiquarians, upon whom some modern studies rely, concentrated on land transfers of earlier centuries than their own. Further, those 'new men of wealth' who bought land often left their own districts and so did not leave long traditions of their activities; those who stayed behind and remained active in business and the locality tend to be the ones recorded in newspapers and local histories. Thus Trainor's otherwise excellent studies of Black Country businessmen tend to overlook those families who bought estates outside the immediate area. These men were very substantial in their time. George Jones and James Foster were co-founders of the massive Chillington Ironworks; William Hanbury Sparrow was the largest local coalmaster of his time; Thomas Walker, the owner of the Patent Shaft and Axle Tree Works, which produced many of the bogies used in Victorian railways; Benjamin Gibbons a leading banker with an excellent reputation. Their reputation diminished as a consequence of their moving away. An obituarist reported that the death of Thomas Walker:

removes another of the old Staffordshire princes of commerce, who in the palmy days of the South Staffordshire iron trade and the ten-yard coal did so much to make the Black Country famous. To the rising generation of Wednesbury he has perhaps been little more than a name, he having for many years been living away from the town, and in comparative retirement, very largely leaving the management of the great concern which he, mainly, had built up into the hands of others; but 40 years ago or so, his wide-reaching aims, bold enterprises and, for those days, astounding development of trade, necessitating continual enlargement of his works, made him somewhat of a marvel to the quiet plodding manufacturers by whom he was surrounded.⁷⁶

This problem is compounded by changes of name. Although the name Perry is virtually forgotten in the Black Country now, they were the wealthiest bourgeois family of the area in the early 1800s eclipsing even the Boultons and Watts. They had invested the proceeds of transatlantic trade in promoting the canal system, the arteries of West Midlands industry until the Railway age. Their heir, Thomas Perry, was an odd mixture: while having a large landed estate in Herefordshire, where he was a dutiful landlord and served as sheriff in 1820, he also lived in a bad house in a second-rate street in Wolverhampton. Their estates and huge wealth (estimated by one knowledgeable party at £2.5 million) were inherited in 1853 by a member of the minor but long-established gentry family, the Herricks of Beaumanor, who used this enormous inheritance to further augment his own estate.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 17 Dec. 1887, p. 4.

⁷⁷ W. White, *Leicestershire* (1863 edn), p. 646 and (1877 edn), p. 142. Walford, *County families* (1881 edn), p. 700; *Estates Gazette*, 1860, p. 108; C. Hadfield, *Canals*

of the West Midlands (1985), pp. 28, 50 and 53; Staffordshire RO, D260/M/F/5/26/13, 1 Oct. 1836; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1853 (i), p. 553; C. J. Robinson, *History of the castles of Herefordshire and their lords* (1869), p. 48;

Having identified a list of new-wealth buyers of land and explored some trends among them and their purchases, it is necessary to try to relate their numbers to the total population of persons in each social category.

VI

When John Bright used the occupational descriptions in the 1861 census returns to claim that England was owned by only 30,000 persons, it prompted the Earl of Derby to call for a modern Domesday to refute it. The resultant *Return of owners* allowed John Bateman to estimate the total population of owners in each echelon of the landed society of England and Wales. The *Return* is not without its flaws. It omits London but also land of unascertainable value such as wastes. Further, the method of compiling the *Return* led to multiple entries. Parishes were responsible for providing lists of their owners, which were then combined at a county level. Many parishes returned all individuals with interests in an estate – widows, heirs, trustees and so on – and made separate entries for business premises. At the county level, individual parishes often made slightly different entries for the same owner – perhaps a misspelling of the surname or using initials instead of a single Christian name – which led to further duplication. Finally the county basis of the return meant that owners with property in different counties had several entries. When *The Times* tried to compile a list of large landowners, its figures were compromised by the failure to take any account of these problems.⁷⁸ Bateman on the other hand recognized these difficulties but only countered them to a certain extent. Moreover his calculation for the acreage owned by each social group is based upon a multiplier whose basis is unclear. Further, Bateman did not include a rental equivalent for each of his categories although he certainly did so for his 3000-acres category. A simple sum illustrates this. In his calculation of ‘noble’ estates, Bateman reckoned that there were 400 individuals in England and Wales who owned over 10,000 acres; however, if the number of 10,000-acre/£10,000 estates in England and Wales is counted in his handlist, the number reduces to 347.⁷⁹ This exercise has been repeated for estates whose acreage and rental exceeded 3000 and 2000.⁸⁰ All these points suggest that Bateman’s 1876 figures overestimate the total number of landowners and therefore underestimate the total acreage held by individual owners. Indeed Lord Derby was surprised not only by the high concentration of land in the possession of large landowners but also that his entry grossly understated his estate. Although further research to correct Bateman’s figures is still in progress, they largely form the basis for Tables 1 and 2.⁸¹

Note 77 *continued*

Bodleian Library, Oxford, Mss Eng. History b 216, c 474–84; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 19 Mar. 1853, p. 5, ‘Death of a millionaire’.

⁷⁸ *The Times*, 7 Apr. 1876.

⁷⁹ Thompson, *Landed society*, pp. 28–9 calculates 363 but seems to exclude a rental equivalent.

⁸⁰ This includes those owners with over 10,000 acres/£10,000 with estates elsewhere in Britain, which are counted as ‘mixed’ in Table 2. Bateman’s handlist figures for England and Wales are 347 10,000+ acres/

rental, 1150 3000+ acres/rental, 736 2000+ acres/rental. The additions to 3000+ are 14 (7 enlargements and 7 omissions) and 2000+, 9 (16 additions minus the 7 enlargements). The 300–999 figures are Bateman’s and the 1000+ figures represent Bateman’s estimate of 1000 to 2999 minus my figures for 2000+.

⁸¹ Vincent (ed.), *Derby diaries*, pp. 276, 379 and 436. Derby’s Lancashire acreage was increased from 47,269 to 57,000 acres in Bateman; there is no hidden entry for Derby in the county.

TABLE 1: Penetration of the landed elite in England and Wales, 1780–1879

<i>Social category</i>	<i>% of land owned</i>	<i>Size of estate acres/rental</i>	<i>Total population^a</i>	<i>New rich entrants^b</i>	<i>New rich as % of total^b</i>
Nobility/peerage	16.5	10,000+	347	49 (56)	14 (16)
Aristocracy	24.5	3000+	1160	344 (447)	30 (39)
Squirearchy	13.0	2000–2999	746	301 (420)	40 (56)
		1000–1999	1886	495 (754)	26 (40)
Landed elite	54.0	Total 1000+	4139	1190 (1677)	29 (41)
Gentry	14.5	300 to 999	9589	914 (1284)	9 (12)
Landed society	68.5	Total 300+	13,728	2104 (2961)	15 (22)

Notes:

^a According to Bateman's calculation; the total population figures represent the total numbers in 1873.

^b Figures in () include dispersals and subsumed.

Sources: BPP, 1874, LXXII Parts 1 and 2, *Return of owners of land in England and Wales*; J. Bateman, *The great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1883); author's database.

TABLE 2: Penetration of the landed elite in the United Kingdom, 1780–1879

Size of estate acres/rental	Location of estates								Total number of estates	New rich entrants	New rich as % of total
	England and Wales		Scotland		Ireland		Mixed				
	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b			
10,000+	297	51	86	26	99	10	129	8	611	95	16
3000 to 9999	1094	448	293	145	387	113	132	10	1906	716	38
2000 to 2999	739	421	199	110	316	85	37	12	1291	628	49
Total 2000+	2130	920	578	281	802	208	298	30	3808	1439	38
1000 to 1999	1886	759		207	938	155		6		1127	
Total 1000+	4016	1679		488	1740	363		36		2566	

Notes:

^a Total numbers in 1873.

^b Numbers of newcomers, including dispersals and subsumed.

Sources: Author's own database based on J. Bateman, *Great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1883) and U. H. Hussey de Burgh, *The landowners of Ireland: an alphabetical list of the owners of estates of 500 acres or 500 pounds valuation and upwards in Ireland, with the acreage and valuation in each county* (c.1878).

Bateman then turned from England and Wales to the entire United Kingdom to compile his handlist of landowners, categorizing major landowners as either 3000+ acres/rental and 2000+ acres/rental. The research for this study has uncovered several omissions, with a variety of reasons. Once they have been added, it has been possible to count the total

number of landowners in each category in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, in conformity with the 10,000+ category used elsewhere by Bateman, these 'aristocratic' owners have been disaggregated for the purposes of this research. These owners were then further subdivided into those in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland and those who owned estates in more than one country. The calculations for England and Wales form the basis for Table 1, which presents figures for the total population in each category for 1873, including the squirearchy. Table 2 represents figures for the whole United Kingdom, excluding the squirearchy. The differences between the 'England and Wales figures' in the two tables is because, in Table 2, some are counted as 'mixed'; for example, Guest's purchase of Canford in 1846 catapulted him into the 10,000+ category for England and Wales alone; however his descendant's subsequent purchase of immense deer forests in Ross render his a truly 'mixed' estate.

VII

The choice of either outflow or inflow figures to express social mobility can have a dramatic effect on the appearance of the level of mobility. Howe in his study of a sample of 351 'leading Lancashire cotton masters' between 1830 and 1860 chose the former. Thus Howe's figures of 39 of 351 cotton masters gaining estates of over 1000 acres seems a small proportion, only 11 per cent, especially as there was no consideration of rental. The research for this paper indicates that 70 Lancashire cotton masters (excluding purely cotton merchants) gained estates of over 1000 acres/£1000 between 1780 and 1879, most of whom were active businessmen during Howe's period of study. Moreover Howe's presentation of his results reduces the purchasing tendencies of successful cotton manufacturers. Only 207 of his subjects had traceable descendants and so the 'outflow' figures should have been presented as a proportion of these masters – which produces a more substantial return of 19 per cent. Thompson selected a much narrower sample of the upper middle class, those who left estates probated for over £1 million between 1809 and 1893 and over £500,000 between 1809 and 1860. A study of this elite group produced a much larger proportion; over 76 per cent of his subjects dying between 1809 and 1879 either bought landed estates themselves of over 1000 acres/£1000 or their heirs used their wealth to do so. Indeed, the research for this study shows that this figure should be increased to 81 per cent. Furthermore it can take no account of men like George Philips who expended nearly £700,000 on founding a landed family and made inter-vivos gifts of the rest of his non-landed interests and who therefore appeared as 'insolvent' in the probate returns.⁸² As the prime consideration here is the permeability of the landed elite, inflow figures form the basis of Tables 1 and 2, although it is noticeable that when the recruitment is restricted to the super-wealthy, outflow figures are also impressive.

A further consideration is the length of time over which this mobility occurred. The figures presented here cover a century. Sociologists often consider mobility in terms of a single generation; if this period is subdivided into five generations the rate of inflow reduces to a seeming trickle. Nevertheless if a longer view is taken, the trickle swells to a flood. In East

⁸² Howe, *Cotton masters*, pp. 29–30; Thompson, 'Life after death', pp. 59–60. For details of the corrections to Thompson's figures, see Brown, 'Equipoise'; id., 'Philips', pp. 62–82.

Yorkshire, Barbara English found an almost total change among its leading ten landowners and an even faster turnover among the lower levels of its elite during the Stones's period of study (1540–1880). The recent *Historical atlas of Staffordshire*, reveals a similar pattern of transition since 1660.⁸³

VIII

The main results of the 20 years of research that underpin this paper have been reduced to two simple tables for convenience. Table 1 deals solely with purchases of estates in England and Wales and shows that between 1780 and 1879 a considerable turnover of landed estates occurred. Nearly half of the membership of the 'squirearchy' had changed over the century. This should be treated as a minimum figure as more research would probably establish further changes, especially at the lower end. Even though the rank of a 'noble' estate was clearly harder to reach – simply because more resources would be required to do so – 16 per cent of these estates moved into the hands of the newly wealthy. This indicates very strongly the existence of an 'open elite' in English and Welsh society.

Turning to Table 2, which looks across both Great Britain and Ireland, similar results are obtained. Although figures for the total population of groups below 2000 acres/£2000 outside England, Wales and Ireland have never been calculated, the remaining figures are of a similar order across the board. Scotland is particularly noticeable for its permeability, with 30 per cent of its 'nobility/peerage' estates, 49 per cent of its 'aristocratic' estates and 55 per cent of its larger 'squirearchy' estates being transferred to 'new men'. This reflects the research of Tom Devine, who identified a turnover of 60 per cent of estates of over 3000 acres in the west Highlands outside of Sutherland. English buyers figured largely amongst the new purchasers although there were large-scale purchases by many Scots families like the Bairds, Mathesons, and the Jardines.⁸⁴ The purchase of such estates for game may lead some to question whether this represents true social mobility as many were not intended as permanent residences. However the estates would usually include a well-appointed hunting lodge and the pursuit of game was in itself a mark of a landed gentleman. The proportions of Irish estate purchases are lower than the rest of the British Isles but the problems of identifying Irish sales have already been commented on. While perhaps a quarter of Ireland changed hands in the 30 years after the passing of the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849, many properties were sold to tenants. This in itself represented a huge rise of social mobility but into the yeomanry rather than the landed elite. Potential purchasers from abroad had a powerful disincentive to buy from the regular reports of outrages and murders of landlords.⁸⁵

Despite these caveats, taken as a whole, the two tables indicate that throughout the United Kingdom there was a large-scale transfer of large landed estates into the hands of 'new-wealth' purchasers. This would have enormous social consequences.

⁸³ B. English, *The great landowners of East Yorkshire* (1990), pp. 36–7, 55; A. D. M. Phillips and C. B. Phillips, *An historical atlas of Staffordshire* (2011), pp. 130–1.

⁸⁴ T. M. Devine, 'The emergence of the new elite in the western Highlands and Islands, 1800–60', in

T. M. Devine (ed.), *Improvement and enlightenment* (1989), pp. 108–42.

⁸⁵ S. Clark, *Social origins of the Irish Land War* (1979, repr. 2014), pp. 171–2.

Nevertheless, the level of circulation of membership of the landed elite in England and Wales is the equivalent of a complete change over 250 years and the 'nobility/peerage' over 625 years; it is worth noting that the Havinden and Collins figures would constitute a turnover in 166 years. Put another way, during the period of study covered by the Stones's book, the equivalent of roughly half of the 'nobility/peerage' and all of landed elite of England and Wales would be replaced. However, these figures are only minima, and in the case of the gentry and of Scotland and Ireland, they are probably far below the actual totals. Thus it seems hard to sustain the view of a closed British elite either during the Stones's or Rubinstein's periods of study. While such mobility was greater towards the lower end of the landed elite, this is a natural result of the level of resources required to enter the topmost echelons and also reflects the findings of Wasson about the social origins of MPs.⁸⁶

IX

These figures have been very difficult to produce even with modern facilities like large public libraries and the Internet. Contemporaries could only have had a general impression of the level of social mobility. That being the case, are the figures generated here simply of interest to historical economists and sociologists seeking to understand the nature of the nineteenth-century economy and social structure?

There are two strong reasons to suggest that they are also of interest to those seeking to understand the mindset of people in the classic Industrial Revolution. First, the figures reveal much about the aspirations of many new men of wealth. Second, they show that the general impression of contemporaries was founded on fact – Britain did enjoy a relatively open elite. While there were contradictory views, the balance of qualitative evidence suggests that contemporaries believed it to be the case and indeed that there was a fusion – indeed a confusion – of classes. Let one literary example suffice: in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, on the one hand Sir Thomas Bertram, who appeared to be a country gentleman, was also a colonial sugar proprietor; on the other hand the Crawfords, with their urbanized, metropolitan ways, had wealth based on Norfolk land.⁸⁷ This admixture would have fundamental consequences for British economic, social and political development and may have contributed profoundly to the relative stability that Britain enjoyed compared to our continental neighbours.

X

Myths fulfil an important function in sustaining social cohesion; 'the myth of the open elite' as the Stones put it, played such a role in British society. Most myths are founded on an element of truth; otherwise they are fatally undermined. In nineteenth-century Britain this myth had a substantial basis. Far from the caste-like appearance it is given by the Stones and Rubinstein,⁸⁸ the landed elite was open to newcomers despite the effects of strict

⁸⁶ Collins and Havinden, 'Berkshire and Oxfordshire', p. 47; Wasson 'Governing class', p. 44.

⁸⁷ For more examples, see R. Williams, *The country*

and the city (1985), pp. 113–15.

⁸⁸ Stones, *Open elite?*, pp. 220–1; Rubinstein, 'New men of wealth', pp. 127 and 147.

settlement. As a character in an 1867 play said, 'Caste is a good thing if it's not carried too far. It shuts the door on the pretentious and the vulgar; but it should open the door very wide to exceptional merit'.⁸⁹

While many new landowners continued their business activities, so too did many old-established families. Small landowners had for generations supplemented their landed income by positions in the army, church, land agency, the law, and more occasionally brewing, mining or banking. Others had to engage actively in estate management, buying and selling properties, developing urban properties and moving their money between various securities to sustain their lifestyle. Families, through accident of marriage or death of elder sons, combined landownership and business activities without contemporary surprise. Admiral Smith Child combined a naval career with running a pottery, and his descendant also acquired a landed estate – all through accident of marriage. In Ireland and Scotland, in particular, several old families restored their dynastic fortunes through commerce. Some families like the Hanburys of Staffordshire see-sawed between the bourgeoisie and landed gentility, rising on the tide of woollen trade and coal mining and falling as their resources ebbed away through over-expenditure.⁹⁰ Indeed this mutability is reflected in the difficulty of definition, as in the case of the Duke of Wellington or that of the Montagus of Ingmanthorpe cited by Richard Wilson.⁹¹ A virtually seamless transition occurred at the bottom end of landed society – what Thompson has called an aristocratic-bourgeois fusion.⁹² Echoes of this can be found in the alliance of land and business forged during the later part of the period by the Conservative party. In short, there seems to have been a continuum – not a chasm – between landed society and the upper middle class in the century of the classic Industrial Revolution. This would have profound implications for the development of Britain's society, culture, politics and economy.

Appendix

Here we offer a brief note of clarification about the dataset, which has over 16,500 entries, and explain the reason for the two sets of figures, for England and Wales and for the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The remit of the research was the whole of the United Kingdom and Ireland from 1780 to 1880. The dataset contains entries for purchasers before and after these dates and for wealthy individuals who did not purchase estates, so that some trends might emerge about the characteristics of non-buyers.

It became clear during the research that there were a fair number of individuals who made their wealth in one part of the United Kingdom and invested it in another part – in the earlier period this tended to be Scottish wealth into English estates whereas the opening up of the Highlands for game by improved transport reversed this process. Thus it was necessary to consider the United Kingdom as a whole, particularly as it was effectively a single state over the

⁸⁹ Robertson, 'The outsider', quoted by G. Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851–75* (1973 edn), p. 274.

⁹⁰ Brown, 'Hanburys', pp. 45–71.

⁹¹ R. G. Wilson, review of L. and J. C. F. Stone, 'An open elite?', *Social Hist.* 11 (1986), pp. 107–8.

⁹² Thompson, 'Life after death', p. 41.

period. Table 2 reflects this national picture, although local trends emerged from the research and these are briefly mentioned.

It also became clear during the research that the greater wealth of sources, the greater number of suitable residential estates and existing figures for the total population of the gentry in England and Wales made some analysis of 'gentry' estates in this part of the kingdom feasible on some sort of reasonable scale, although a comprehensive study of nearly 10,000 estates was not possible.

For a journal article, it was not possible to develop all the possibilities of the dataset; however the significance of the main statistics drawn from the data seemed to make the article important to offer for publication.