The Anatomy of Estate Administration

Administratively landed estates fell into two classes. The first comprised the numerous small estates. If they were very small they depended on the efforts of the landowner assisted by a bailiff. The latter, usually a farmer on the estate, was severely limited in his powers, and his responsibilities were normally confined to the big house and its grounds or farm. The collection of rents and the keeping of accounts were normally not the bailiff's responsibility, but would fall to the landowner himself. On the Duke of Northumberland's estate, a superior agent bore the title of bailiff, but this was a historical accident peculiar to that estate. A less rudimentary organization among the small estates employed in addition to the bailiff an agent from outside the estate who took over some of the landowner's functions. Either a solicitor or a professional land agent, he probably acted in the same capacity for a number of estates.

The second class comprised large estates which themselves varied much in size. Their distinctive mark was the employ-
ment of a resident land agent to whom considerable authority was delegated. As such estates grew in size or complexity of resources, or where they comprised several properties, they were likely to employ a chief or supervisory agent who presided over one or more resident land agents with their subordinate staffs. The supervisory agent was often a lawyer, either a solicitor or a barrister; and he often bore the title of auditor, for one of his functions was the customary one of examining and verifying estate accounts. In the course of the nineteenth century it would seem that the auditing function fell more and more to professional accountants, leaving the chief agent with his general function of supervision. This last varied much in its comprehensiveness from estate to estate, depending on the degree of central control exercised. The resident land agent's functions, however, tended to be much the same everywhere. Not a lawyer, he gave most if not all of his working time to the administration of one estate, to the collection of rent, the keeping of accounts, and the management of the tenantry.

Estates of either class might be diverse in their resources, and might thus encompass nonagricultural enterprise such as mining and urban development in addition to agriculture. Such estates often needed the services of specialized agents. These were either permanently attached to them or called in as consultants, depending on the volume of nonagricultural business that was transacted. There were some land agents, however, who achieved a remarkable versatility in all kinds of estate business.

I

Cruwys Morchard, the Devon estate of the Rev. G. J. Cruwys, about 1,000 acres in size, may serve as an example of the small estate where the administrative machinery was as simple as was to be found. The landowner received his own rents, the few large tenants bringing them in person to the
big house and paying them into his hands; and he himself kept the only record of such transactions in the form of jottings in his pocket diary.¹ He did not receive the rents of the smaller tenants which were collected by the bailiff, Henry Beedell, who was himself one of the large tenants. Beedell paid the laborers, bought the corn and hay for the big house, arranged for repairs on estate farms, and sold off the timber.² Occasionally, as the Rev. Cruwys wrote in his diary, he would accompany Beedell about the estate: for example, Feb. 22, 1878, “I went with Mr. Henry Beedell to Gogland plantation to look at some poles”; or May 23 of the same year, “In the morning I walked with Mr. Henry Beedell to the Orchard Hill and found that the rooks were doing damage to the potatoes.”³ Apart from such supervision exercised by the landowner, Beedell’s work apparently went unsupervised by any other agent. The Cruwys family, like every landed family, had its solicitor to transact its legal business and draw up its deeds. He happened to be the proprietor’s brother, Arthur Cruwys Sharland of Tiverton. But Sharland, it would seem, had little to do with estate management.⁴

On an estate larger than Cruwys Morchard, the landowner left more of estate business to agents. As we have seen, he delegated some of his functions to an agent from outside the estate—probably a local solicitor or land agent who acted for other estates as well. This agent collected his rents, kept his accounts, and supervised the work of his bailiff. On an estate about 3,000 acres in size Sir Roger Gresley of Drakelow in Derbyshire employed in this way his family solicitor, Mr. Mousley of Derby.⁵ On an estate of similar size John Moore Paget of Cranmore Hall, Somerset, so employed a professional land agent and surveyor, Charles Wainwright of Shepton

¹ Cruwys Morchard MSS, Diary of the Rev. G. J. Cruwys, passim.
² Ibid., Mr. Henry Beedell’s Agreement for Agency, Sept. 29, 1874.
³ Ibid., Diary, Feb. 22, May 23, 1878.
⁴ Obituary of Arthur Cruwys Sharland, Tiverton Gazette, Dec. 27, 1887.
Mallet. Wainwright regularly visited the estate to find what was needed and to keep the bailiff instructed. Sometimes Paget accompanied him on his rounds, as in June, 1861: “Viewed the quarry road with Wainwright and marked out the site of two new cottages on the Bytham road—also inspected Harrison's new buildings.”

The agent might come from farther afield than the neighboring county town. When David Ricardo became a landed gentleman and purchased an estate in Gloucestershire, he hired as his agent Edward Wakefield, who as early as 1814 had set up office in Pall Mall, in London. Wakefield described himself as a “general land agent for the sale and purchase of land; acting as steward, and in the receipt of rents, for several large estates; and a land valuer.” He regularly visited Gatscombe to collect the rents and oversee Walker, the bailiff. It is not clear why Ricardo should have chosen not to make use of a local man; but it may be that he knew Wakefield earlier in life before becoming a landowner, or perhaps that Wakefield purchased the estate for him and remained in his service.

II

It would seem that a landed estate of a size somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 acres began to feel some inadequacy in this rudimentary organization. Burton, the sixth Lord Monson's Lincolnshire property, was about 7,000 acres in size, and its administrative arrangements were at times something like those of a large estate. In the 1840's, for example, in the

6 Paget MSS, Diary of John Moore Paget, June 6, 1861.
8 British Parliamentary Papers (hereafter designated B.P.P.), Report from the Select Committee on the Petitions complaining of the depressed state of the agriculture of the United Kingdom (1821, IX), p. 206.
9 Ricardo MSS, passim.
10 6,892 acres in 1841-42; see Monson MSS, 8/64.
place of a bailiff it had a resident agent, a tenant farmer named Brown, who received the rents, kept accounts, dealt with his fellow tenants, and undertook estate improvements; in addition it had a supervisory agent, a London solicitor named Gem, who presumably was meant to oversee Brown. In the 1850's, having abused the authority delegated to him, Brown was removed, and his place was taken by another farming tenant on the estate. The new man, however, was demoted to the position of bailiff, and such functions as receiving rent were taken over by a local solicitor in Lincoln. No more was heard of Gem. That this arrangement proved unhappy may suggest that Burton needed something more than the administrative organization of a smaller estate.\footnote{Monson MSS, Lord Monson to his eldest son, Sept. 9, 1858.}

Keele in Staffordshire, the estate of the Sneyd family, was about 2,000 acres larger than Burton,\footnote{In the 1870's Keele was 9,232 acres, and was presumably about the same size in the 1840's and '50's.} and its resources were more diverse. There was no question here of trying to make do with the administrative organization of a small estate. Keele thus employed a resident land agent, Andrew Thompson, who apart from acting as an Assistant Inclosure Commissioner served the Sneyds exclusively.\footnote{See D. Spring, "Ralph Sneyd: Tory Country Gentleman," \textit{Bulletin of the John Rylands Library}, March, 1956.} Keele also regularly employed an auditor, a Mr. Hartley of Birmingham, who was a professional accountant; and occasionally employed a firm of mining engineers to advise on the letting of the mines.

It would seem that an estate larger than Keele almost invariably employed a resident land agent. Netherby in Cumberland, owned by Sir James Graham, about 26,000 acres in size,\footnote{In 1845 the estate was 26,133 acres in size; see Netherby MSS, "General Statement of the Extent of the Estate of Netherby."} put most of its administrative burden on the shoulders of its resident land agent, John Yule; unlike Keele it does not seem to have regularly employed an auditor. Sometimes Sir
James acted as his own auditor; sometimes—how often it is not clear—there was no auditor at all. On the Lambtons' estate in county Durham, however, an estate midway in size between Keele and Netherby, there was usually to be found both a resident land agent and a supervisory agent. But the Lambtons' estate put heavy demands on its agents since it was the scene of a large colliery enterprise, one of the few estates on which its owners mined rather than let coal. What was more, its owners were less energetic in estate administration than was Sir James Graham.

On a great estate, like that of the Percies in Northumberland which was over 150,000 acres in size, or even on estates half that size, every sort of agent was likely to appear—supervisory, resident, and others. With organization so complex and on so large a scale, one might expect to find some thought taken about administrative arrangements. This happened, in fact, on the Percy estate shortly after the fourth Duke of Northumberland succeeded in 1847. Practitioners of administrative theory in the twentieth century will find the lucubrations of the Duke and his agents disappointing. They were highly tentative and pragmatic. But they may be briefly considered for what light they throw on the administration of the Percy estate and on that of great estates generally.

Traditionally the Percy estate had been administered by an establishment of Commissioners (or supervisory agents) at Alnwick Castle and of bailiffs (or resident agents) in the localities. The former varied in number from one to three, and the latter usually were twelve or thirteen. Nine of the bailiwicks, as the local estates were called, were under 6,000

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15 Netherby MSS, J. Yule to Sir James Graham, April 3, 1843: "I am really desirous to have my accounts of last years affairs audited by your­self, or some other competent person, as soon as may be convenient."

16 When the auditor retired in the 1850's it would seem that the accounts were not audited by anyone. See Lambton MSS, H. Morton to Lord Lambton, March 16, 1856: "I have often thought since Mr. S[teephenson] retired that my accounts sh[ould] be regularly examined."

17 Alnwick Castle MSS, "Minutes on local Agencies of the Northumber­land Estates," June 26, 1848.
Acres in size, and four ranged from 9,000 to 58,000 acres.\textsuperscript{18} The bailiffs were tenant farmers on the estate who held farms at nominal rents in return for their services which (it was understood) would be devoted to the Duke exclusively.

Traditionally the duties of the bailiffs were as follows.\textsuperscript{19} They collected rents. They saw to the cultivation of the estate farms, reporting annually to the central estate office at Alnwick and recommending repairs and improvements. They kept a watch on estate boundaries and prevented encroachments. They settled disagreements between entering and outgoing tenants. They received applications for farms and reported on them to the central estate office. They attended the Commissioners and valuers on their rounds of the estate, submitting information about land values and about the capacities of tenants. In general, they were expected to send information of all sorts on request to Alnwick and to carry out all orders emanating therefrom.

Various proposals were put forward—some in criticism and some in commendation of the system of bailiffs. It was suggested, on the one hand, that there were advantages to be gained by consolidating the bailiwicks and replacing the bailiffs with fewer agents of a more professional calibre. Such men were likely to have a better education than the bailiffs, to be more intelligent, and therefore in a position to relieve the central office of some of its burdens. They were likely to have “a more general knowledge of business, though it cannot be expected that they should possess the same thorough practical acquaintance with Agriculture.” They were also likely to be better acquainted with the scientific aspects of farming. Finally, not being tenants, “they may be considered more independent and less identified with the interests of the Tenants.”

On the other hand, it was suggested that there were good reasons to keep the old system. The great extent of the North-

\textsuperscript{18} See Appendix I.

\textsuperscript{19} Alnwick Castle MSS, “Minutes on local Agencies of the Northumberland Estates.”
umberland estate, with its various soils and its several kinds of farming, almost demanded that "men should be born on the property to understand it thoroughly." In the past fortunately, each generation of farmers on the estate had produced enough men to fill the ranks of the bailiffs. Their "thorough local knowledge" was of great value, especially in the letting of farms. Finally, being men born and bred on the estate, there was really no question of their loyalty to the Percy family: they were "peculiarly the Duke's own men, whose attention has never been diverted from the Estate, and who are more devoted to it than probably any others that might be appointed; for the latter, not being fixed upon the property, would no doubt seek for more lucrative employment and leave as soon as they could meet with it."

Such were the considerations put forward for and against the old system. After reviewing them, the Duke's Commissioner concluded that either the bailiffs or the professional men would do well enough. In the end he recommended that the Duke keep the old system—which in fact was done. He had decided that among its virtues was, first, the fact that it was proved; second, that it was no more expensive than the untried system; and third, that it could be accommodated to the needs of an extensive program of agricultural improvements. The contemplated improvements on the estate in farm buildings and draining were to be administered from the central office, and consequently "there is less necessity for a critical knowledge on these subjects on the part of the Bailiffs." In fact, as the Duke's Commissioner concluded, "the real complexion of the Estate must be derived from the Noble Possessor," from the Duke and the central office at Alnwick. "In this point of view, the arrangements of Head Quarters are to be regarded as the proper source of improvement and when these are clearly determined, the perfect local knowledge possessed by each bailiff of his own district, cannot be otherwise than highly useful."

The central office during the regime of the fourth Duke of
Northumberland was in most respects a businesslike affair. It had behind it a tradition of business, going back at least to the beginning of the century. In 1806, the second Duke in drawing up a book of general instructions for his agents had desired them to know “that the Estate is mine, and that in the management of it, it is my peculiar province to Direct.” His successors ruled with the same sort of firmness, none more so than the fourth Duke. On coming into the estate he reproached one of his Commissioners for failing to put questions on which decisions were requested with sufficient clarity and adequate information. This was soon remedied by what was known as the Weekly Business Minutes which were written accounts of each subject of business as it came up, providing on each page a margin for the Duke's comments and decision. The system saved the writing of innumerable letters, provided a detailed record of the estate business, and kept the Duke fully informed.

Supreme among the ducal agents was the Duke's Commissioner. During the regime of the third Duke there had sometimes been as many as three Commissioners, one of whom had been known as the Chief Commissioner; usually they acted in concert, although each was responsible for some part of the estate. Under the fourth Duke there was but one Commissioner, Hugh Taylor, who had for a long time been the colliery agent; in 1865, on the fourth Duke's death, he was warmly recommended to the next Duke as being “with his large local and practical experience in mineral and other property” the best man for the position. Before the fourth Duke's time one of the Commissioners seems to have served as auditor of accounts; but this practice ceased under the fourth Duke when

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20 Ibid., General Instructions to Commissioners and Auditors, 1806.
21 Ibid., J. Blackden to Duke of Northumberland, May 15, 1847.
22 The Business Minutes were sometimes supplemented by Legal Minutes, i.e., memoranda drawn up by the Duke's lawyers.
23 Alnwick Castle MSS, passim; see also R. Welford, Men of Mark Twint Tyne and Tweed (London, 1895), 3 vols. III, 494–97.
24 Alnwick Castle MSS, Report of Alfred Bell, March 2, 1865.
a London accountant, G. C. Begbie, was employed, who saw to it that “the Duke of Northumberland knows periodically to a penny, and without the slightest complication, how he stands.” In addition to Begbie and Taylor among the Duke’s leading agents, there was the London solicitor, Alfred Bell, who was in charge of the Duke’s legal business, acting as his local solicitor in Middlesex, superintending his local solicitors in the North Country, attending to his parliamentary business, and generally offering advice on a great many subjects. It was Bell who had recommended Hugh Taylor to the fifth Duke.

Apart from the Commissioner the principal agents in the Alnwick Castle office comprised the colliery agent, the surveyor (that is, draftsman and architect), the clerk of works, the draining surveyor, and the wood bailiff. The colliery agent was responsible for letting the mines, for assessing their value and condition, and for negotiating wayleave as well as colliery rents. The surveyors and the clerk of works were among other things responsible for supervising the large improvements in building and draining which the fourth Duke initiated. For all important purposes the estate office kept a firm hand on estate affairs, and exercised a close supervision over the bailiffs. The latter were seldom free to spend money. They made written or verbal reports as to the requirements in their respective districts which were reviewed in the estate office by the clerk of works. Plans and estimates were then drawn up and submitted by the Commissioner to the Duke “either on the occurrence of any Special Case, or more generally set forth in an Annual Schedule of proposed buildings and improvements.” Once undertaken, works were paid for in the central office on the certificate of the clerk of works. Monthly estimates of such expenditure were prepared in ad-

\[25\] Ibid.

\[26\] Bell seems to have specialized in North Country business, for he was also Lord Eldon’s solicitor.

\[27\] There was a staff of estate office clerks to assist these agents.

\[28\] Alnwick Castle MSS, Business Minutes, Feb. 28, 1865.
All in all, the Duke of Northumberland's administrative arrangements were probably as businesslike as any to be found among the great estates. The Duke had the advantage, of course, of being the owner of an estate largely concentrated in the county of Northumberland; huge as it was, it was not dispersed over the British Isles or located in various parts of England. At the same time, it would seem that the main strength of the Northumberland estate lay in the quality of its central management, in the administrative aptitude of the Duke and his leading agents. Even an estate much more dispersed than that of the Duke of Northumberland operated with reasonable efficiency if its central direction was energetic.

Such an estate was that of the Dukes of Bedford, about 80,000 acres in size, which comprised three main country estates and a London estate. The chief country estate, on which the main ducal house sat, was Woburn; it consisted of 33,488 acres, most of which lay in Bedfordshire. The second was the Thorney estate in the Fens, much of which had been reclaimed and improved by the Dukes of Bedford; it was 23,652 acres in size. The third was in the West Country, and included the town of Tavistock as well as a great copper and arsenic mine, Devon Great Consols, which was worked from 1844 onwards; this estate was 20,377 acres in size. Finally there was the immensely valuable London estate, comprising 119 acres in the heart of London, most of it let to builders on 99 year leases. In the seventeenth century the Crown had granted to the Russells the right of holding markets on their estate; and by the nineteenth century Covent Garden Market was the chief produce market in the kingdom, and a substantial income was obtained from levying tolls on produce sold there.

There was also a detached estate in Dorset of 2,176 acres. The acreages for the Bedford estates belong to the year 1857.

This information was derived from the Bedford MSS; see also Duke of Bedford, *A Great Estate* (London, 1897).
The local agencies on the Duke of Bedford's estate were almost invariably held by men of some professional standing, not (as on the Duke of Northumberland's estate) by tenant farmers. Their salaries would indicate that they were among the best land agents to be had. As the Duke of Northumberland's Commissioner had implied, such men could be managed with a looser rein than that used on the Northumberland bailiffs; and during the regime of the sixth Duke of Bedford (which ended in 1839) the local agents were in fact pretty independent. During the regime of the seventh Duke (1839-61), however, when an energetic owner and an equally energetic supervisory agent were in power, the reins were drawn tighter. The greater centralization under the seventh Duke consisted mainly of more detailed reporting by the local agents, and of closer and more frequent scrutiny of their activities and accounts from the center.

The central estate office of the Dukes of Bedford was in London—appropriately so, given the importance of that estate. It was presided over by the Duke's auditor (as he was called), who rather resembled the Duke of Northumberland's Commissioner, except that he audited the Bedford estate accounts and was likely to be a lawyer. Under the seventh Duke he was a solicitor, Christopher Haedy by name. Haedy was in charge of all estate business. The local agents reported directly to him, and he in turn wrote innumerable letters to a Duke who was equally assiduous at letterwriting and hungry for information. The Duke of Bedford was not so close to the center of estate business as was the Duke of Northumberland; he was at Woburn more than in Bloomsbury; nevertheless he was in large part responsible for giving the estate its businesslike aspect. Much more will be said of him in the following chapter.

Another great estate, the Fitzwilliam estate, also dispersed

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31 Except for the agent on the London estate who was a solicitor.
32 See Appendix II.
33 The administrative arrangements on the Bedford estate are described in greater detail in the next two chapters.
like that of the Dukes of Bedford, was less tightly knit. It lay in three main blocks: in Ireland, in Yorkshire, in the east Midlands. The Irish estate was the largest, some 80,000 acres in extent, situated in county Wicklow. The Yorkshire estate was geographically two estates: the Malton estate in the North Riding, and the Wentworth Woodhouse estate in the West Riding. The Malton estate had no family residence, and was small and mainly agricultural, although among its enterprises it included the operation of a canal. The Wentworth Woodhouse estate, about 19,000 acres in size, was highly varied in its enterprise. In part a farming estate it sat upon the great Barnsley seam of coal, and the Fitzwilliam family mined coal and iron ore and at times manufactured iron. The east Midland estate, about 24,000 acres in size, with its center at Milton near Peterborough, was largely agricultural—although the Fitzwilliams owned a large part of the ground rents in the town.\textsuperscript{34}

The local agents on the Fitzwilliam estates, unlike those on the two great estates just examined, were neither tenant farmers nor semi-professional land agents. On the English estates they were solicitors; on the Irish estate the agent, following local custom, was often a man of superior status, being in this case a kinsman of Earl Fitzwilliam and probably of no professional standing of any sort. This considerable reliance on country solicitors as local agents does not seem to have been questioned or discussed on the Fitzwilliam estate so long as the fifth Earl was alive (he died in 1858). The system went back into the eighteenth century, and was accepted by the nineteenth, some of the solicitor-agents perpetuating themselves dynastically. The West Riding solicitor gave orders to the Malton solicitor; otherwise all received instructions from the Earl alone. Once a year they took their accounts to Wentworth Woodhouse or to Milton House for auditing; apart from this they were under no obligation to keep in touch regularly with the central administration of the estate.

\textsuperscript{34} The Fitzwilliam acreages belong to the 1870's; I have no figures for an earlier time.
By comparison with the ducal estates of Bedford and Northumberland, the Fitzwilliam estate cannot be said to have had much of a central administration. There was in fact no central estate office which gathered information from all parts of the estate, sifted it, and reported to the Earl. There was no Weekly Business Minutes, no annual report. For that matter, there was no one on the Fitzwilliam estate comparable to the Duke of Northumberland's Commissioner or the Duke of Bedford's auditor. Earl Fitzwilliam's chief agent served very largely in a consultative capacity and had no authority over the local agents. Even the Fitzwilliam estate accounts were wanting in centralization, there being no summary of them, apart from a sketchy record drawn up by the Earl himself, presumably annually at audit time. One must conclude that the Earls Fitzwilliam were not as businesslike as the seventh Duke of Bedford or the fourth Duke of Northumberland. It may be that the interests of the fifth Earl Fitzwilliam were more numerous than those of the Dukes of Bedford and Northumberland, and his attention to estate business therefore less singleminded. He is not to be charged with failing to look into his affairs, but it may be said that he was lacking in system. Yet whatever the defects of his estate management, it worked after a fashion.\footnote{For a sketch of the Fitzwilliam estate and of the 5th Earl Fitzwilliam, see D. Spring, "Earl Fitzwilliam and the Corn Laws," \textit{The American Historical Review}, Jan., 1954. Since writing that essay I have learned more about aristocratic landowners and have concluded that my account of Fitzwilliam's businesslike qualities in that essay is exaggerated.}

Finally, among the great estates to be noted here, there was that of the Duke of Buckingham. More dispersed than the others, it was far more ramshackle in organization. In 1837 it comprised 56,823 acres, of which 26,838 acres were in Buckinghamshire, 17,282 were in Ireland, 9,225 in Hampshire (sometimes known as the Avington estate), 1,836 in Cornwall, 1,640 in Middlesex, together with a plantation of unknown size in Jamaica.\footnote{Stowe MSS, General Rental for 1837.} Apart from some mines in Cornwall and some ground rents in Middlesex, neither of which amounted to a
great deal, the estate was exclusively agricultural. The home estate in Buckinghamshire, of which Stowe was the principal seat, lay in three districts: one in the vicinity of the market town of Buckingham, another in the vicinity of the market town of Aylesbury, and the third (Wotton) on the Oxfordshire border about eighteen miles from Oxford. The land was chiefly in pasture, the produce being largely butter sold in the London and Oxford markets.37

The local agencies on the estate—or more precisely, those on the Stowe and Avington estates—were held by semi-professional and resident land agents. Some of these were competent, some were not; all went almost wholly unsupervised. Occasionally, when a financial crisis was blowing up, their affairs might be hastily looked into by some solicitor or man of business hired by the Duke or his trustees. Ordinarily, however, there was lacking a proper system of auditing their accounts. It was even said of the Stowe agent in 1832 that he did not “keep separate and distinct accounts for His Grace’s Estates”; that he kept a record of daily receipts and payments, but nothing more.38 The local agent on the Avington estate, Crawford by name, was sufficiently distressed by this laxity to admonish the Duke: “It is quite true,” he wrote to him in 1826, “that Your Grace’s concerns should be minutely looked into and undergo a rigid examination by men of business that will do their duty and establish a regular system of auditing, paying, and passing your accounts half yearly.”39

This was not the only time that the first Duke of Buckingham was offered such valuable advice. Some years later, when his affairs were in a state of periodic crisis, the barrister and friend of the family, Sir Edward East, urged him to look into his estate business and keep regular accounts; such things, he assured the Duke, would give “him a pride and pleasure in looking into his own affairs, and feeling himself to be the real

37 Ibid., Mr. Newton’s Report on value of Buckinghamshire estates, 1844.
38 Ibid., Memo. by Mr. Parrott, probably in 1832.
39 Ibid., Crawfurd to 1st Duke of Buckingham, June 15, 1826.
master of these and his family and servants.” For a while, finding that the Duke was auditing his steward’s and banker’s accounts, Sir Edward rejoiced in seeing his advice taken. But this show of industry on the Duke’s part was short lived. Sir Edward’s son, also a barrister, then strongly recommended that the Duke dismiss his solicitors, the Robsons, and find himself a lawyer who would manage both his legal business and his estates, “and by whom alone the secondary agents should be directed.” But this seems to have been too much for the Duke’s chronic indolence. As he once said, in answer to the same advice, he could not at his “time of life begin new confidences with a new attorney.” It proved easier to stand down altogether and put his affairs in the hands of trustees. In the last year or so of the first Duke’s regime (he died in 1839), some effort was made by the trustees to remedy the want of central control, but this ended with the Duke’s death.

The Duke’s successor, his son, Lord Chandos of the Reform Bill, was a strange, unfortunate being who in a few years so mismanaged the estate that he bankrupted it. Designated the Farmer’s Friend, he knew more about agrarian politics than about practical farming. Unlike many of his generation of English landowners, he seems to have taken relatively little interest in the new techniques of agricultural improvement. What mainly interested him was the figure he cut in the country, and if indolence was the father’s chief failing, egomania was the son’s. He had a great gift of self-deception which led him to avoid the paths of common sense. He soon broke with his father’s trustees, surrounded himself with shady attorneys and moneylenders, and in quick time brought a great estate to the verge of ruin. There is in the Stowe MSS in the Huntington Library a personal account book which the Duke

40 Ibid., Sir Edward East to 1st Duke of Buckingham, n.d., probably 1832.
41 Ibid., J. B. East to 1st Duke of Buckingham, Aug. 15, 1835.
42 Ibid., Duke of Buckingham to Lord Chandos, May 3, 1828.
43 The Minute Books of this trust are to be found in the Middlesex Record Office.
began at the time of his accession. He may have intended it as some kind of record of his finances, but it very quickly petered out in obscure scribblings. It is an appropriate epitaph to the second Duke of Buckingham as an estate administrator.44

So unbusinesslike a landowner was not, however, typical. In fact there was rather more aptitude for business, especially on the large estates, than is usually imagined, and it was to be found among landowners as among agents. So authoritative a Victorian as John Stuart Mill had little respect for the landowners of his day. He once observed, "The truth is, that any very general improvement of land by the landlords is hardly compatible with a law or custom of primogeniture. . . . Were they ever so much inclined, those alone can prudently do it, who have seriously studied the principles of scientific agriculture: and great landlords have seldom seriously studied anything." 45 But Mill was not the most reliable observer of society, especially aristocratic and rural society.46 The next chapter will be devoted to the study of a single landowner, the seventh Duke of Bedford, who if not typical in all respects of the great landowners of the nineteenth century, still conveys much of their flavor.

