

An Indian Governor in the Norfolk Marshland: Lord William Bentinck as Improver, 1809-27

By JOHN ROSSELLI

I

THE younger sons of the English landed aristocracy have by custom been allowed only the most modest share in the family fortune. In the nineteenth century a few lived idly on an allowance or portion from the estate; many more went into the Army; some undertook other kinds of public service. What is seldom clear is how their financial needs as younger sons directed the successive steps in their careers. The career of Lord William Bentinck (1774-1839), which culminated in his Governorship of Bengal (later Governor-Generalship of India) in 1828-35, helps to show how a younger son could be led, partly by his own leanings but above all by his needs and by the economic pressures of the time, into a lifelong activity as improver and entrepreneur.¹

Bentinck, the second son of the Duke of Portland, took his commission at eighteen and served in the revolutionary wars. He is, however, best known for his service in India, first as Governor of Madras (1803-7) and then, after a twenty-one-year interval, in the Supreme Government. In between he served as Minister to Sicily and Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean (1811-15). Both in Sicily and in Bengal Bentinck showed a stout reforming spirit: the best-known instance is his abolition of *sati*, the most important his work on the 1833 revenue settlement of the North-West Provinces and his encouragement of capitalist enterprise in India. Much of this work has previously been put down to Benthamite influence. It is probably at least as true to say that Bentinck's public service overseas and his private enterprise at home informed one another.

¹ Cf. F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 1963, pp. 65-75. The present article rests chiefly on the collection of Bentinck Papers at Nottingham University, Department of MSS; these (subsequently referred to as BP) are quoted by kind permission of the Duke of Portland. Some of these papers are catalogued, some not. Those dealing with Bentinck's finances and his activities as landowner and entrepreneur are nearly all uncatalogued: it seems unnecessary in most cases to give precise references to them. References are, however, given to catalogued documents, and on occasion to uncatalogued papers where this seems suitable. I am grateful for help with my researches in Norfolk to Miss Sophia Mottram, Mr R. W. Ketton-Cremer, Mr G. Wilson, Mr R. K. Kerkham, and Messrs E. A. Lane Ltd. I am also grateful to Professor Asa Briggs and Professor F. M. L. Thompson for having read an earlier draft of this article.

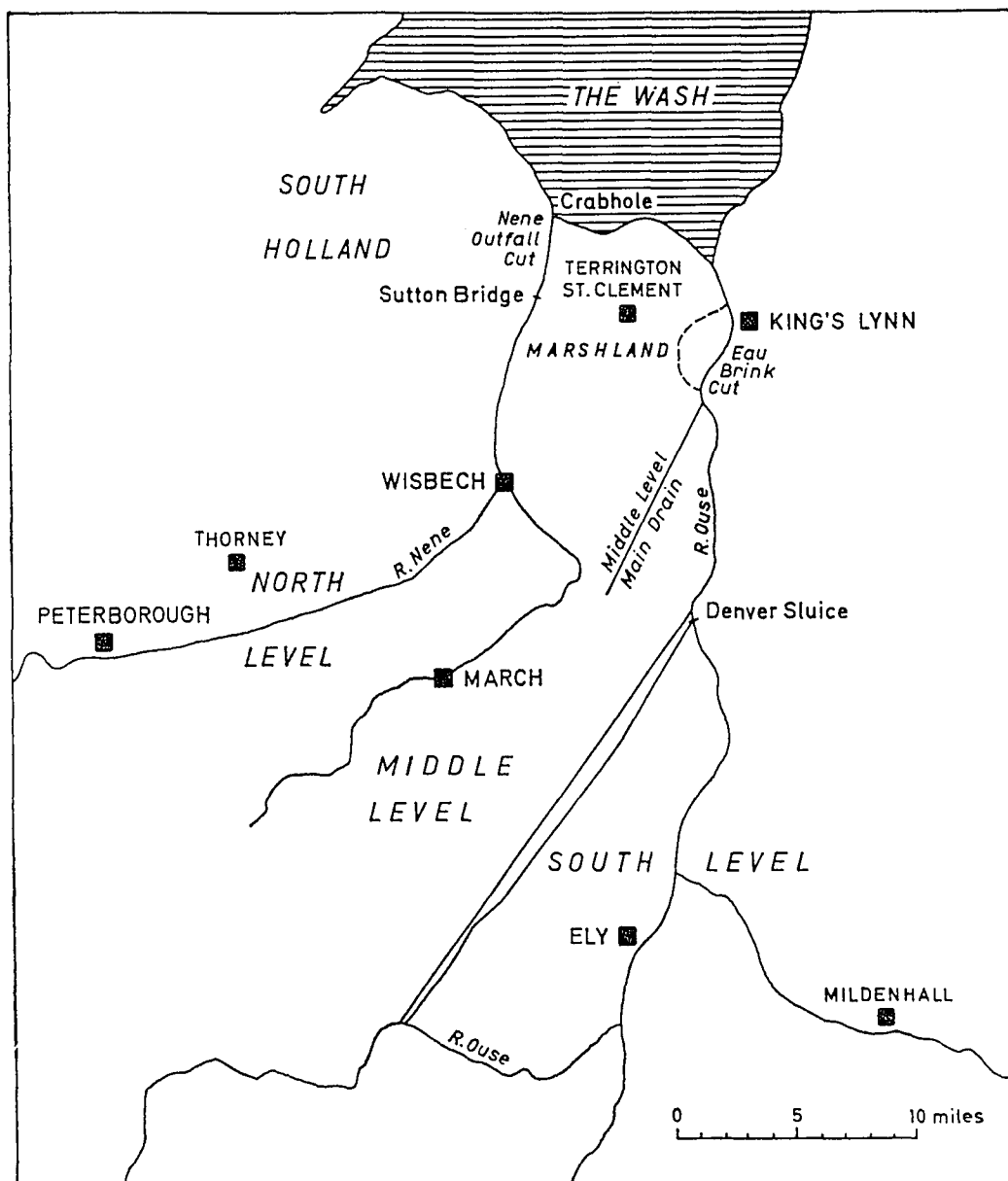


FIG. I: THE NORFOLK MARSHLAND

Because an early recall from Madras in 1807 disappointed his expectations of making a fortune, Bentinck plunged into speculative enterprise in agriculture and agriculture-based industry in the Marshland district of Norfolk. Because this venture in turn proved ill-timed it gave Bentinck one strong motive among others for going out to Bengal in 1828. Meanwhile, however, he had been drawn closely into the affairs of Marshland and the Fens, in particular into the

long effort to improve fen drainage, navigation, and communications and to reclaim land from the Wash. He had in fact become a leading local improver; his Norfolk experience was to influence his later work in India.

The key to a good deal in Bentinck's career was the tangled fortunes of his father, the third Duke of Portland, Prime Minister in 1783 and again in 1807-9. Portland, one of the greatest landowners in England, was heavily in debt for most of his life; at his death in 1809 the debts totalled £512,000. As a young man he had incautiously agreed to pay his mother £16,000 a year in exchange for entering upon her estates: this, together with his political preoccupations—above all his ruinous electoral struggles against Sir James Lowther—and some procrastination and muddle, kept the duke from ever getting over his indebtedness. It touched bottom about 1780, when the servants' pay was years in arrears and the duchess, whose husband owned Welbeck, Bulstrode, and a large part of Marylebone, and tenanted Burlington House, could not think how to pay the coalman; possibly only the death of the duke's mother in 1785 saved him from bankruptcy.¹

The duke's troubles owed nothing to gambling or extravagance: at Welbeck and Bulstrode all was "moderation and innocence—sixpenny cribbage and dancing with the children the evening amusement."² They seem none the less to have impressed his two elder sons in their formative years. The eldest, when he succeeded as fourth duke, kept aloof from politics as far as he could and devoted himself to restoring the family fortunes. The second son, Lord William, as a newly married man of twenty-nine thought it "absolutely necessary for our future comfort that I should make a sufficient fortune. . ."³

A younger son with a colonelcy in the Dragoons was not likely to do this unaided even if, like Bentinck, he shared his father's simple tastes. Bentinck in 1800 had an allowance of £600 a year from the duke; by 1811 it had turned into an annuity of £900. He had a sinecure as Clerk of the Pipe: about 1821 this was bringing in not far from £1,000 a year in fees; by 1835 it had been converted into a pension of £187 14s. 4d. a year. His father had presumably bought him his commission. What other capital he may have had, whether from his family or from his marriage to a daughter of the Earl of Gosford, is not clear. But there is no sign that it amounted to much. This may explain why Bentinck kept

¹ A. S. Turberville, *A History of Welbeck Abbey and its Owners*, 1938-9, II, pp. 154-6, 307-10, 317-19, 345-6; Duchess of Portland to Portland, 11 Sep. 1780, BP/PwF/10743. In 1808, when matters had improved, Portland's net revenue was £52,000; after deducting income tax at 10 per cent and debt interest of about £20,000 his clear income was £25,997.—BP, Bentinck's journal, 20 Feb. 1808.

² William Adam to John Adam, 1 Sept. 1785, quoted in D. E. Ginter, 'The Whig Party, 1783-1793: a Study in the Rise of the Modern Party System', Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1964, p. 12.

³ Turberville, *Welbeck Abbey*, II, pp. 332-6, 345 ff; Bentinck to A. Obins, 16 March 1804.—BP/PwJb/723.

buying lottery tickets, a habit that stayed with him most of his life even though he was not a gambler (his highest, even then quite exceptional, bet on record was for £58).

Portland, however, set about advancing the career of his ablest son. In 1802 he secured Bentinck's appointment as Governor of Madras. This was due simply to Portland's personal standing and "parliamentary interest:" Bentinck at that point had done nothing more notable than to serve as liaison officer with the Austro-Russian forces in Italy in 1799-1801.¹

Portland seems to have had in mind not just money but distinction, not just Madras but Bengal: it was his "anxious wish" that Bentinck should eventually have the reversion of the Supreme Government. Bentinck, whose heart was in soldiering, owned that "my first inducement in going to India is pecuniary consideration." Though he claimed higher motives as well, he might not have gone if his "second parent," the rich old Whig M.P. William Plumer, had come through sooner with an offer of financial help to keep him in England.²

There was nothing unusual in Bentinck's regarding the Madras appointment chiefly as a means to fortune. The eighteenth-century notion that India with its high death-rate was a place to make a "competency" in and get out of as soon as possible was common well into the nineteenth; among those who advanced or assumed it without any sense of impropriety were not just the improvident like Lord Hastings or Sir James Mackintosh but such thoroughly respectable characters as Sir Thomas Munro and Sir Thomas Strange, the Chief Justice of Madras.³ At most Bentinck's family circumstances may have driven him on a little harder.

In September 1805, when he had been in Madras for two years, the young and confident Bentinck explained to his elder brother his "most inmost thoughts." His annual saving on his salary as governor, exclusive of Indian interest at 8 per cent, he reckoned at £9,000 a year; after paying a debt of £4,000 to his brothers, £2,000 for his passage, and some other heavy initial expenses, he had already saved some £11,000 (later amended to £10,000). What would happen next depended on two things: Lady William's health and his chances of getting the Supreme Government. If, as then seemed likely, he

¹ C. H. Philips, *The East India Company, 1784-1834*, Manchester, 1940, p. 121; BP, E. Monckton to Bentinck, 7 July 1802.

² Bentinck to Minto (private and confidential), 1 Oct. 1806, BP/PwJb/726; to Plumer, 7 Jan. 1803, in R. W. Goulding, ed., *Letters written to Charles Lamb's 'princely woman'* . . . , 1909, pp. 76-8. The reversion of Bengal, linked with the Madras appointment, had already been offered to Charles Yorke and suggested for Sir George Barlow.—Philips, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

³ Philips, *op. cit.*, p. 228; R. J. Mackintosh, *Memoirs of the life of . . . Sir James Mackintosh*, 1835, I, p. 188; G. R. Gleig, *Life of Major-General Sir Thomas Munro*, 1830, I, pp. 227-9; BP, Sir T. Strange to Bentinck, 28 Feb. 1812. As late as 1839 "the less thoughtful" Balliol undergraduates thought anyone going to India would "come back a nabob."—F. C. Danvers, M. Monier-Williams, and others, *Memorials of Old Haileybury College*, 1894, p. 36.

did not get Bengal, "it is my resolution to remain [at Madras] if I am permitted four years from the 1st January 1806 . . . which will give me a fortune of between £50,000 and £60,000." The only grounds for limiting himself to four more years were his wife's health and the age of both their parents; he himself "never was better in my life. I like the situation and am exceedingly interested in it. . . I am quite at my ease and I believe the country is doing well under my government." Or, as he put it a little later: "My weight has increased considerably. I hope my property will increase also."

If, on the other hand, Bentinck were shortly to succeed the aged Cornwallis in the Supreme Government, "the greatness of the situation and the vast benefits which would accrue to myself and to my family" would induce him to stay on rather longer: "I should not wish to stay less than three years in Bengal and supposing Lord Cornwallis to leave India in three years, my stay would be six years or till 1812. . . The saving in Bengal is I believe £20,000 per annum—I am not sure of this—but say £16,000. My fortune at the expiration of that term would be £100,000 which would make us very much at our ease and would prevent any great descent from the style and comfort in which we have both lived, and which becomes of importance when occupation ceases, and where an economy approaching parsimony does not exist."¹

These speculations came to a rude end. Not only did Bentinck not get Bengal: the 1806 Vellore mutiny led to his recall before he could serve out the term he had looked for in Madras. In June 1807, three months before sailing home, Bentinck reckoned that his net savings amounted (give or take £1,000) to no more than £20,000, or half the minimum he had hoped for.²

II

Much of Bentinck's energy on his return home went into justifying himself against what he considered the unfair terms of his recall. Partly for this reason he went to Portugal with the 1808 expeditionary force and served with distinction as far as Corunna. After the evacuation he set about repairing his fortunes.

As he was to say more than once in after years, he was interested not in honours or in a peerage but in an "independence:" this he tried to achieve in one way or another. The true reward of public service, he said in 1813 when he was battling through his difficult Sicilian mission, was "the public respect which you will enjoy if you deserve it . . . this depends wholly . . . upon my own conduct. But the Government can give me what the public cannot, which is income and comfort. Respect is very good food for the mind, but not for the

¹ Bentinck to Titchfield, 6 Sep. 1805, 11 Jan. 1806, BP/PwH/249, PwJb/723. Lord Minto, who did get the governorship of Bengal, found that he could "depend on laying by £1,500 a month or rather more. It will be more as I get a larger sum to bear interest."—to Lady Minto, 20 Nov. 1807, National Library of Scotland, Minto Papers, vol. M36.

² To W. Petrie, 2 June 1807, BP/PwJb/343-584.

body." In 1827 he advised Canning's widow to take an income rather than a title—"I do not set the value of a rush upon the peerage."¹ He himself was to refuse a title in 1835. Meanwhile, in 1809, Bentinck set about gaining an "independence" by investing heavily in agricultural enterprise in the Marshland district of Norfolk.

He was not alone. In the years of peak agricultural prices from 1809 to 1812, Marshland—the rich silt area between Wisbech and King's Lynn—saw a markedly speculative land boom that drew a number of eminent men from London. According to a Radical contemporary, the district "has of late experienced an unexpected and most striking change in the sudden resort thither and settlement of a number of characters in high life . . . peers, courtiers, statesmen, nabobs, royal physicians, naval and military commanders, etc. This . . . has filled all Marshland with astonishment, so as to make its homely and unlettered inhabitants ready to lift up their voices and cry out with the ancient Lycaonians, 'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!'. . . The enormous price given by these newcomers for the estates they have purchased has greatly astonished the whole country, being about double the current valuation, or what lands usually fetched here before. . ."²

One of those chiefly concerned with helping along the boom was Vice-Admiral William Bentinck, son and heir to the Count Bentinck (a member of the family's Dutch branch) who, as lord of the manor of Terrington St Clement, had in 1773–4 enclosed several hundred acres from the sea. The admiral continued his father's work and, according to Young, "far exceeded it," though at a rate of return not really economic for what amounted to enclosure from the waste.³ By 1809–10, a few years after Young's enthusiastic report on the fertility of Marshland, the admiral was buying himself and was acting as a promoter urging on such potential investors as Huskisson, Canning, Charles Arbuthnot (then Secretary to the Treasury), and the Hon. Berkeley Paget. Of these, Arbuthnot and Paget in the end took up some 200 and 400 acres apiece. Canning wholly, and Huskisson partly, backed out of agreements under which they would have bought estates of 200-odd acres each; their reasons for withdrawing—defective titles, and the presence as seller of an undischarged bankrupt—are themselves evidence of speculative fever. Most of this land seems to have sold at just over £50 an acre; for specially rich land at Long Sutton Canning had been prepared to pay nearly 80 gns an acre exclusive of buildings

¹ To Charles Greville, 7 April 1813, BP/PwJd/6250; to Mrs Canning, 26 Dec. 1827, Canning Papers, Sheepscar Library, Leeds, bundle 147 (quoted by kind permission of the Earl of Harewood).

² W. Richards, *The History of Lynn . . .*, King's Lynn, 1812, II, pp. 1084–5.

³ F. Blomefield and C. Parkin, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of . . . Norfolk*, new ed., 1805–10, IX, p. 91; W. White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Norfolk . . .*, Sheffield, 1836, pp. 469, 473–5; A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Norfolk*, 1804, pp. 435–43.

and timber: "It is very dear after all," he told Huskisson, "... but I think we cannot do much amiss with it."¹

One of the first "characters in high life" to be brought in as a purchaser was the admiral's distant cousin Lord William Bentinck. In 1809 he bought North Lynn, an estate of some 914 acres, then on the west bank of the Ouse facing King's Lynn. For this Bentinck seems to have paid about or just below £50 an acre: the total purchase price came to at least £36,500, possibly something nearer £40,000. Eight years later, in circumstances which are still obscure, he was to buy Orange Farm—some 185 acres with a cottage residence and a windmill "after the German fashion" at Terrington St Clement, four miles west of North Lynn. A "very moderate price" for Orange Farm was reckoned in 1824 at £11,000; a little earlier, when prices were still depressed, Bentinck had been prepared to take £10,000. Altogether he sank not far from £50,000 into land purchase alone.

Much of this land came from people who, like Bentinck himself, had only a recent or an entrepreneurial stake in Marshland. The nucleus of North Lynn—for which he paid £17,000—came from the heir of Governor Thomas Pownall of Massachusetts, the Fellow of the Royal Society and member of a Cheshire landed family, who had acquired it in the mid-eighteenth century: the seller, Pownall's nephew Sir George, had himself served overseas as a colonial official. Additional parcels came from Sir Martin Folkes, M.P., of Hillington Hall (£9,000)—a member of a long-established local gentry family, a Mrs Elizabeth Sansom or Sampson (about £2,000), and perhaps others yet. The seller of Orange Farm was Baron Fagel, a Dutchman who had played host to the Prince of Orange after his flight to England in 1795: hence the name of the farm. Whatever Fagel's interests as a landowner, his brother, also a Marshland proprietor, was a declared speculator, and, by 1812, an unsuccessful one.²

Bentinck's own ventures were clearly entrepreneurial. He seems to have had no thought of settling down in Marshland. His visits, though frequent, lasted as a rule no more than two or three days—just long enough to do business with stewards and neighbours. In 1817 he and his wife spent six weeks at the newly bought Orange Farm, apparently to oversee the first harvest; they never stayed

¹ Arbuthnot to Bentinck, 30 Aug. 1810, BP; Admiral Bentinck to Arbuthnot, 7 Dec. 1810, B.M. Add. MSS. 38, 738, fol. 46; Canning-Huskisson correspondence, 1811, *ibid.*, fols. 75, 107, 109, 192; Huskisson to Canning, 4, 17 Sep. 1811, Canning Papers, Sheepscar Library, Leeds, bundle 67. As early as 1802 Young alleged that some land in Marshland belonging to Thomas Bagge of Lynn "would now sell at £70 an acre".—Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 39. Cf. 1805 Fenland prices of £53–£60 an acre, quoted in A. H. John, 'Farming in Wartime: 1793–1815', in E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay, eds., *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution*, 1967, p. 45.

² The cutting of the Lynn Outfall Cut or Marshland Cut in 1852 transferred most of North Lynn to the east bank of the Ouse. White, *op. cit.*, 1836 ed., pp. 472–5, gives North Lynn 914 acres, Orange Farm 185. Documents of 1824 give Orange Farm 190 acres; the larger figure may include some rented land. For Pownall, see *Burke's Landed Gentry*, 1846 edn.

anything like so long again. Marshland, in fact, was "adventurer's land" even though it was outside the old fenlands that bore that name. "Frontage" on the Wash in particular was recognized as highly speculative—too much so, Arbuthnot thought in 1810, to risk trust capital upon; and North Lynn had plenty of frontage. This made for the chance of lucrative conquests from "the enemy", as Bentinck, in correspondence with his military colleague Sir Home Popham, called the sea; it made for heavy expenditure on banks and drains and for damaging floods, and perhaps also for the disappointing returns common among nineteenth-century landlords who enclosed salt marsh too fast.¹

Bentinck frankly wished to make money. But he was not a pure speculator on capital gains. When he thought of reselling some land it was—as will be seen—a desperate measure. The quick returns he optimistically looked for were returns of income. By the 1810's he was a dedicated improver. To his favourite niece (later Duchess of Manchester), who had acquired a farm, he wrote that it would make her "useful in your generation. I trust you will get a good steward, who will be a good agriculturist and who by his authority and good sense will be able to make the tenants follow your example."² In 1824, even after years of adverse fortunes, he could write that the heavy silt of North Lynn was "capable of being greatly improved by draining, but not without considerable expense. . . Both for pleasure and profit I cannot refrain from making these improvements; but as they cannot but be progressive slowly, it is probable that not I, but my successor, will reap the harvest. . ."

In fact his belief in improvement could get in the way of his desire to make money. So at least thought his friend Lord Exmouth, the retired admiral who farmed in Devon. "Your mind is too liberal to farm profitably," he told Bentinck in 1818. "You must improve and invent, which are the expensive articles in farming."

The truth was perhaps rather that Bentinck set about improving at the wrong time. He had bought near the top of the market during the wartime boom, and had borrowed heavily to do so. He then set about improving his estates and launching other enterprises—in particular an oil mill—during the years of falling prices and agricultural distress. This, together with repayments of existing debt, called for repeated injections of capital that were increasingly hard to come by, so that by the early 1820's Bentinck—like many others—was in serious trouble; he kept going largely thanks to his family connections.

Both as a convinced improver and as a rare Marshland representative of the great landed aristocracy Bentinck, however, had meanwhile come to take the lead in several co-operative ventures, notably the making of the Eau Brink Cut

¹ J. A. Steers, *The Coastline of England and Wales*, Cambridge, 1946, p. 436.

² Bentinck to Millicent Sparrow, 6 Jan. 1822, Huntingdonshire County Record Office, Dd M 10 A/8.

above Lynn and the building of Sutton Bridge across the river Nene. After some initial opposition he had won the trust of the merchants who ran most of the economic and political life of King's Lynn; with it he had in effect been given control of one of the borough's two parliamentary seats. Bentinck's influence, ultimately based on his possession of North Lynn, enabled him on his departure for India in 1828 to hand on the parliamentary seat to his nephew Lord George Bentinck: so it was that Lord George, at his death twenty years later, was still member for Lynn, and that Lynn today perpetuates his name in its Bentinck Dock.

Almost as soon as he had bought North Lynn Lord William set going various costly improvements. In 1810-11 he started spending at least £3,000—possibly much more—on a new sea-bank at North Lynn to enclose part of the salt marsh, and on repairs to the river bank; the plans were drawn up by John Rennie, who, together with Telford and the younger Rennie, was to work with Bentinck on the Eau Brink Cut and Sutton Bridge projects. At the same time Bentinck built a new great sluice at "heavy expense" (and then probably had to spend about £800 more on "casting back the banks" in consequence); he bought a threshing mill; he set about building cottages and stables as well as—with the aim of exploiting the increasing seaborne trade—a jetty on the west bank of the Ouse at North Lynn.

In 1811 Bentinck went to Sicily as Minister and Commander-in-Chief; we hear little of further improvement until the post-war period. In 1816 he was in correspondence with Portland's bailiff at Chillingham, Northumberland, about having cast-iron stack stands made at Newcastle. His biggest venture was the oil mill he set up at North Lynn in 1818 for the commercial manufacture of cattle cake and oil—a long-standing local industry, based from the fourteenth century on rapeseed, which in the eighteenth century had shifted to the milling of eastern European linseed in wind-driven "stamper" mills.

Bentinck's transactions over the oil mill suggest the uncertainty that attended the carrying into effect of new techniques even when these were available. At first he wished to be able to use the mill for other purposes as well—either threshing or corn grinding; at one point in 1817 he thought of getting a steam engine capable of grinding "a considerable quantity of corn in a short time" (i.e. about 150 to 200 quarters a week) "for the purpose of taking a favourable state of the market." Yet he also considered an old-fashioned wind-driven mill. Meanwhile he was taking estimates and advice from several engineers, among them William Tierney Clark, then at Hammersmith, and Thomas Waters of Gateshead. Clark, who finally undertook the work, came up with several proposals; the most expensive would have involved a 20 h.p. engine and a total cost of about £4,850—which, Clark reckoned, if worked eighteen hours a day all the year round would bring in a net profit of nearly 20 per cent. This was

modest compared with the notions of an East Yorkshire tenant farmer who upheld Newcastle "mechanics" against "your London engineer" and estimated that—for a domestic rather than commercial mill, suited to a farm with 440 acres of tillage—a capital outlay of £700 to £800 would bring in a profit of £500 a year regardless of market fluctuations.¹

Bentinck in the end settled for a second-hand Gospel engine which Clark supplied at a cost, including reinstatement, of about £400. Clark, however, leading engineer though he was, contented himself with specifying the stamper presses then widely used; it was left to another of Bentinck's advisers to denounce the stamper press as "a barbarous kind of process in this scientific age," and to uphold against it Joseph Bramah's hydraulic press (1795), which was more productive and made for less wear and tear.² This advice, offered in September 1818, came too late. By then the mill was built; worse still, the Gospel engine had in the previous month been wrecked on its way to Lynn by sea, just before the harvest which Bentinck had intended to make a start on. On top of the loss and delay he had on his hands the seed he had ordered. To face immediate expenses Bentinck had to sell £3,500 (market value) in Consols and raise a bank loan of £3,000.

The oil mill, set up just before the worst years of agricultural distress, had a fitful career. In 1819, 1821, and 1825 Bentinck imported linseed from Memel or inquired the price (which turned out to be non-competitive) of Italian seed. Even then, the evidence for 1825 shows only five weeks' work on crushing for outsiders; when, in 1819, Bentinck made a profit on his seed purchases it still did not cover interest charges. In 1824 the mill seems to have been idle; Bentinck's political associate, the Lynn merchant J. P. Blencowe, was advising him to convert it into a flour mill. This advice was still being offered in 1835 by Bentinck's under-steward: the oil trade was so bad that "its working again as crushing is totally out of the question." A year later the mill was described as "unemployed during the last eight years"—though the pluralist incumbent of the "decayed" North Lynn parish "*sometimes* performs divine service" in part of it.³

This was almost certainly the most burdensome of Bentinck's investments. There were other losses to be faced. In 1810 and again in 1820 and 1836 severe gales and tides broke banks and flooded fields with salt water. "A large brig is lying in the middle of a wheatfield in Terrington Marsh," his steward reported in 1820: the sea had overrun some 350 acres, of which all but 80 were probably sterilized for that season. The 1836 flood overran 90 acres of grassland, 20 acres

¹ BP, Digby Leyard of Elton, E. Yorks, to Bentinck, 13 Sep. 1817.

² BP, G. Taylor to Bentinck, 1 Sep. 1818; H. W. Brace, *History of Seed Crushing in Great Britain*, 1960, pp. 37-50, quoting an 1858 report by the engineer Alexander Samuelson, gives as its earliest examples of oil mills based on hydraulic presses two (both at Hull) dating from 1822 and 1824.

³ White, *op. cit.*, 1836 edn, p. 472.

of wheat, and 5 acres of trefoil, in some places three feet deep; raising banks in consequence was reckoned to cost perhaps as much as £600.

Bentinck, however, went on pursuing scientific improvement. What evidence there is of his farming practice suggests that he at least kept up with contemporary Marshland ideas about crop rotations. The main business of North Lynn was sheep and cattle fattening and, on the arable, wheat rotated with beans or oats; Orange Farm was largely arable under a similar rotation, though some cattle attached to it were kept at North Lynn—presumably because of the lack of fresh water characteristic of the Marshland silt, which prevented cattle rearing until the coming of mains water.¹ Bentinck urged his friends elsewhere to drain and irrigate, continually noted on his travels local practices of clay burning, Swedish turnip cultivation, or the feeding of cattle on cake; he inspected new kinds of agricultural implements; he had forms printed for his farms to show in detail—rather as on an Army return—the weekly state of labour, tasks performed, numbers of cattle, cereal crops disposed of or bought, and receipts and expenditure. All the same, much of the time his agents and stewards were in practice left to get on with the job. When he was in England Bentinck visited Marshland as a rule once or twice a month, but his long absences on the Continent meant that he could not supervise the farms in detail.

To begin with part at least of North Lynn had been let. By 1825 all of it seems to have been under direct management, and so does most of Orange Farm: this suggests that in the bad years Bentinck and the tenants may have been unable to agree on lowered rents. In 1809–10 Bentinck used as agent a neighbouring gentleman farmer (N. L. Fenwick, who for a time tenanted Brunnage Farm, now Pierrepont Farm, Terrington Marsh), followed in 1811 by a clergyman (the Rev. J. Heckford, vicar of Bircham). He also had a steward for North Lynn, where J. H. Savigny, apparently a professional farmer between tenancies, gave way in 1810 to one Sanderson. By 1818 Bentinck had brought in a professional Scottish steward, Robert Anderson: in this he acted like other enlightened landowners of his day, but comments by his neighbours suggest that a Scots steward was still something of an exotic novelty in Marshland. Bentinck thought highly of his Scotsman, but when he became Governor of Bengal, Anderson went off to work for the Bagges of Stradsett—Lynn merchants turned landed gentry. The farms remained under the management of John Sculthorpe, a gentleman who had had a son at Rugby but who in consequence of “recent misfortunes” had had his own estate sold at auction at Wisbech in 1826; a retired officer of Bentinck’s regiment, G. Sicker, worked under him at North Lynn. Sculthorpe seems to have been an unfortunate choice. Sicker later described him as a “castle builder;” in 1836 Sculthorpe

¹ Information from Mr R. K. Kerkham, Banklands, Clenchwarton.

was still heavily in debt and was asking Bentinck for loans. Perhaps because of his mismanagement, the farms were let by 1835.

The farms lost money in the distressed years around 1820. "Sad and gloomy beyond any period in my memory is our agricultural prospect," Bentinck wrote in 1821.¹ In 1835 they had had further losses, presumably because of low prices, and were still a "dead weight." In between they saw an interval of prosperity, partly no doubt because of the general upturn in agricultural incomes from 1824, perhaps also thanks to Anderson's professional management. In 1825-6 and 1826-7, anyhow—the only years for which we have full accounts—they made a profit of sorts. North Lynn showed a profit of £2,990 in 1825-6 (against total expenditure of £8,969) and £1,697 in 1826-7 (against expenditure of £7,143); Orange Farm, a profit of £407 in 1825-6 (against £1,156 expenditure) and £355 in 1826-7 (against £1,019). Even then Bentinck would have done no better than break even if he had charged against himself the rent he thought the farms could fetch.² Capital expenditure at North Lynn was significantly high: in 1825-6 £841 went on tile drainage and, in the two years 1825-7, £290 on banks; in those good years fixed capital expenditure was running at about 13 per cent of receipts. (Banks seem to have been an inescapable recurrent item; drainage had been put off during at least some of the bad years). Orange Farm, on the other hand, could carry on with little capital investment: according to Sicker, it "ought to have paid its way" in the early 1830's; presumably it would have but for Sculthorpe's mismanagement.

III

Right from the start, in 1809-10, Bentinck had borrowed £36,500 to buy North Lynn and pay for capital works—£14,500 on mortgage from the sellers and £22,000 on loan from bankers and relatives. To this was added, by the end of 1812, a further £2,500 loan from the Lynn country bank Gurney, Birkbeck, & Co. In the heady atmosphere of 1809-10 Bentinck, it seems clear, had counted on returns so quick as to enable him to pay off within a few years most of the non-mortgage debt. By 1812-13 he had run into unexpectedly heavy capital charges, above all for banks and drainage. This came on top of running interest charges of at least £2,000 a year: in 1813 his total indebtedness to Drummonds, his chief bankers, was (including overdrafts) £40,000. At this point Bentinck—then in Sicily—panicked: "I am quite frightened by the amount of my debt—and I must diminish it greatly at whatever sacrifice." Because of "the extraordinary demands from Norfolk at a moment when I

¹ To Millicent Sparrow, 5 Feb. 1821, Huntingdonshire County Record Office Dd M 10 A/8.

² Bentinck in 1824 had estimated the rent of North Lynn at £2,500, of Orange Farm at £400. In the two years 1825-7 he received £63 12s. od. in rents at Orange Farm and himself paid £40 rent to a neighbouring landlord (these amounts were included in the accounts); and he was himself paying £1,500 a year rent on North Lynn (see p. 58, n. 2).

expected that my debt would be rather diminished than increasing" he decided to sell his Bruton Street house and £10,000 worth of North Lynn land: this would clear the bulk of the loans (not the mortgages) incurred in 1809-10.¹

What happened next is unclear. There is no sign that any of North Lynn was sold; possibly the break in the land boom forestalled any chance of carrying out Bentinck's instructions (which had assumed its continuance: he had expected to get £80 an acre and even, for some fields near a road, £100). Bentinck did not even vacate the Bruton Street house until 1817, though he may have sold the lease sooner. Instead what he did was to buy: in 1817 he bought Orange Farm for a sum that cannot have been much under £10,000.

In Sicily Bentinck had been able to live wholly within his official salary. This may have influenced him to take on the mission after he had twice refused offers of a Government job or a Peninsula command; "the temporary embarrassment of his Norfolk estate" certainly induced him to try to hang on to the mission in 1814.² After Napoleon's fall Bentinck resigned his Parliamentary seat and, with two short summer breaks, spent the years 1814-16 in Italy: it is tolerably clear that—as he was to do at intervals later on—he was recouping himself. The purchase of Orange Farm in 1817 and the setting up of the oil mill in the following year seem to have amounted to that classic speculator's move, throwing good money after bad: Bentinck entered the years of deepest agricultural distress with his commitments increased.

He touched bottom, not surprisingly, in 1819-22: more than once he borrowed hurriedly from one country bank or relative to pay off another; Gurney, Birkbeck, & Co. were sending him increasingly stiff (though Quakerly) demands for repayment of loans and "liquidation of thy accounts current." This, as well as Bentinck's desire to clear himself from the slur of his recall from Madras, may help to explain the urgency with which he tried to secure the governorship of Bengal in 1822—an attempt thwarted by Canning and Liverpool, to whom Bentinck's record just then seemed awkwardly radical.

These accounts, incomplete as they are, make several things clear about Bentinck's affairs. One is their bad set around 1820-1 and the beginnings of recovery in the later twenties. In 1824, a better year for agriculture, he paid off six years' arrears of interest due to Lady Olivia Sparrow. In 1827 he repaid not only the amounts shown here but at least £2,725 owed to tradesmen; by then he was beginning to draw his salary as Governor of Bengal. The governorship, though perhaps not so desperately needed as in 1822, clearly helped to lighten

¹ Bentinck to Heckford, 20 Jan. 1813, to John Heaton, 20 Jan., 21 May, 16 July 1813, BP/PwJd/6250.

² J. Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck and the British Occupation of Sicily, 1811-14*, Cambridge, 1956, p. 113; C. A. A'Court to Lady William Bentinck, 5 May 1814, in G. Gallavresi, 'La Rivoluzione lombarda del 1814 e la politica inglese', *Archivio Storico lombardo*, ser. 4, XI, 1909, pp. 130-2.

TABLE I
LOANS, MORTGAGES, AND REPAYMENTS
(* = banks) († = mortgages) (‡ = relatives)

<i>Creditor</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Date incurred</i>	<i>Approx. total debt¹</i>	<i>Date of repayment</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Drummonds*	6,000	1809-10		1817	2,000
Sir George Pownall†	8,500	"		1819	8,500
Sir Martin Folkes†	5,000	"			
Mrs Eliz. Sansom†	1,000	"		1817	1,000
Duke of Portland‡	3,000	"			
Lord George Cavendish‡	9,000	"			
Lady Mary Bentinck‡	3,000	"		1836	2,400
Lord Fred. Bentinck‡	1,000	"	36,500		
Collyers*	1,000	1811	37,500		
Gurney, Birkbeck*	2,500	before 1813	40,000	1822	1,000
" "				1826	1,000
" "	500	? 1817			
Major R. Smyth	2,000	1817	39,500	1824	700
Bagge & Bacon*	3,000	1818		1820	1,000
" "				1824	1,000
Lady Olivia Sparrow‡	4,000	1818	46,500	1827	3,000
A. R. Balfour's Exrs.	30,000	1819	68,000		
Snow & Co.*	1,000	1820	68,000		
A. Obins‡	4,000	1821			
Lord Gosford‡	1,000	"		1821	1,000
Sir Andrew Hamond	3,000	"			
Charles Heaton‡	1,000	"			
George Strachey	2,000	"	78,000	1836	1,000
Collyers*	1,000	1822	78,000		
Snow & Co.*	500	before 1823	78,500	1826	1,200
Lady Olivia Sparrow‡	5,000	182?			
Everard & Co.*	530	"		1827	530
Lord Gosford‡	500	"		1825	500
Sir Edward Banks	800	"		1827	800
Drummonds*	4,000	"	89,330	1836	10,000
Duke of Portland‡	1,000	1824	88,630		
		1825	88,130		
		1826	85,930		
		1827	81,600		
		1836	under 68,300		

¹ Figures for total debt are approximate because (a) the evidence is incomplete, (b) overdrafts are not included (unless the £30,000 borrowed from A. R. Balfour's executors includes a consolidated overdraft), (c) it is not always possible to match debts with repayments. In particular there must have been a number of repayments in 1828-35 (when Bentinck was remitting large sums home from India) for which there is no surviving evidence.

Sources: Bentinck Papers; Bagge & Bacon account books; abstract of title to North Lynn advowson, Bradfer-Lawrence Papers, Norwich and Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

his financial burden. While in India he remitted money home—at least in 1829–31—at the rate of about £10,000 a year; both before and after his return in 1835 he paid off part—most likely all—of the accumulated debt.¹

Among Bentinck's creditors by far the most important were his friends and relations—chief among them his brother the duke. Banks, with one exception—Drummonds—provided only modest amounts of capital; and Drummonds had a kind of security in the custom of Portland and other members of the Bentinck family. The rest, as one would expect, proved short-winded in the bad years. Collyers in 1821 refused to discount Bentinck's bills at longer than two months. Among the country banks, Bagge and Bacon were apparently able to stomach in 1819 an overdraft that fluctuated between £6,000 and £8,600; more typically, Gurney, Birkbeck, & Co., though the Gurney banks had advanced £1¼ million to East Anglian customers in the years up to 1816, insisted in April 1821 that they could not leave so much as £3,000 locked up in a loan, and that it went against all their habits to make more than short-term occasional advances.²

Of the other creditors the mortgagees were all Marshland proprietors. A. R. Balfour's executors, who took over Pownall's mortgage in 1819 (at Bentinck's wish, not at Pownall's), seem to have provided bridging finance: the evidence suggests that they took over at least part of Bentinck's debt to Drummonds but later handed over, as both mortgagees and lenders, to the duke. Major Smyth was a prize money agent with whom Bentinck had only a business relationship. Several creditors were friends of Bentinck. Sir Andrew Hamond, of Hamond Lodge (now Terrington Court), Terrington St Clement, a former Comptroller of the Navy, was a Marshland neighbour and fellow admirer of Canning who worked closely with Bentinck on local improvement projects. Sir Edward Banks was the well-known contractor whose men dug the Eau Brink Cut. George Strachey was a retired Indian civil servant who had worked under Bentinck at Madras.

Among the relatives, Lord Gosford and Lady Olivia Sparrow were Lady William's brother and sister; Lady Olivia, a widow and a formidable Huntingdonshire landowner, was supposed to have an income of £14,000 a year.³ Obins,

¹ Bentinck's need to remit money home to pay off the debt saved him from losing it in the great crash of the Calcutta Houses of Agency, where many servants of the East India Company invested their savings at high interest rates. Bentinck lost only about £800 in the crash; Lord Combermere, the former Commander-in-Chief—he reported—lost £40,000.—To Portland, 27 Feb. 1833, BP/PwH/293. He had written on 5 Nov. 1829, "debt diminishes and in six months more will I trust completely disappear;" but either this was a nominal calculation or he had in mind only a particular kind of debt, for he was still repaying debt in 1836.—To F. Lamb, Royal Archives, Windsor, Beauvale Papers, box 8 (quoted by gracious permission of H.M. the Queen).

² W. H. Bidwell, *Annals of an East Anglian Bank*, Norwich, 1900, p. 110; cf. L. S. Pressnell, *Country Banking in the Industrial Revolution*, Oxford, 1956, pp. 304–5, 344–9.

³ V.C.H., *Huntingdonshire*, III, pp. 13, 16.

a clergyman, was Lady William's cousin; he had acted as Bentinck's private secretary at Madras and again in Sicily, and he was the only one of the relatives to take less than 5 per cent interest (he insisted on 4). Lord George Cavendish, the Whig politician, was Bentinck's maternal uncle; Lord Frederick and Lady Mary Bentinck were his brother and his unmarried sister. By the mid-twenties much the biggest creditor was Portland, whether in his own name or in that of his agent, Charles Heaton.

Portland was already from 1812 one of his brother's mortgagees. He became heavily involved from 1819 on. In that year Bentinck—with the wreck of the mill engine behind him and loan repayments of at least £4,000 due in the following year—began a series of complex negotiations that went on until 1825. His aim, through many shifts, was always the same: to raise capital, if necessary by selling the freehold of one or other farm or both, without losing the chance of carrying on his agricultural enterprise as a tenant on a long lease. As he told Portland in 1820, "My great want is capital . . . my own means would suffice, if I could convert them into money." "My wants" (he added a few days later) "are very urgent and without your aid I cannot without much sacrifice meet them." His income apart from farm and mill was "perfectly adequate to the same establishment I have hitherto had:" the problem was not penury but how to find disposable resources to keep going "a concern which carries with it every fair prospect of success," and which might ensure for Lady William a comfortable old age.¹

Four years later, when Portland had already put large sums into the enterprise, Bentinck pressed for still more. He advanced two main reasons. First, "the possession of the [North Lynn] estate establishes in its proprietor a great identity of interest with the town of Lynn;" since 1821 Bentinck had been able to control one of the Lynn seats without calling on his brother's money for electoral purposes—the seat was at this time occupied by Portland's son Lord Titchfield—and "it would give me pleasure to transmit it as my legacy to the family." Secondly, Bentinck's efforts to improve the estate by draining it would no doubt benefit his successor rather than himself, but "my pleasure would be greatly diminished if I felt that I was working for the benefit of a stranger." For Portland to bail Bentinck out yet again would therefore "be very useful, *politically*, and very satisfactory, *feelingly*, to me."²

Late in 1819 Bentinck sold the title to Orange Farm—part freehold, part copyhold—to Portland; he took part of the purchase price in the form of a lease for three lives, worth £5,000. By April 1820, however, Bentinck was trying to get Portland to underwrite a loan from Drummonds of £4,000, with Bentinck's long lease of Orange Farm as security. This seems not to have gone

¹ Bentinck to Portland, 19, 25 April 1820, BP/PwH/251-2.

² BP, Bentinck to Charles Heaton, 22 Oct. 1824.

through; instead, after a further flurry of negotiations, Bentinck raised the £4,000 by selling the advowson of North Lynn, nominally to his Marshland neighbour and former Madras acquaintance, Thomas Hoseason of Banklands, Clenchwarton, but in effect to Portland.¹

Even this was not enough. On top of agricultural distress and its effects there are hints that in the early 'twenties Portland wanted some of his capital back and had lost faith in Marshland as an investment. At least from December 1820 Bentinck was thinking of selling the freehold of North Lynn as well as, on his brother's behalf, that of Orange Farm. In the next few years he negotiated with potential local purchasers, to no avail. In July 1821 the aged Sir Andrew Hamond agreed to buy Orange Farm; he then took fright, was quickly released by Bentinck from his engagement, and instead lent Bentinck £3,000 on the security of the lease. In 1824 Bentinck proposed that Portland should resell Orange Farm to him as part of a complex bargain whereby Portland would also buy North Lynn and give him a lease of it for life; the difference, "after deducting all [my brother's] advances to me upon different occasions," would have produced nearly £20,000 more capital to pay for drainage and other improvements. (By this time Portland had probably taken over from A. R. Balfour's executors the chief mortgage on North Lynn and some of the accumulated debt.) In the end Portland did at North Lynn as he had done at Orange Farm: in 1825 he bought the freehold and gave Bentinck a lease for three lives; he kept an option to buy back the lease at Bentinck's death.²

During Bentinck's absence in India in 1828-35 the relationship between Portland as owner and Bentinck as leaseholder seems to have remained unchanged. Orange Farm was at length sold some time in the late 1830's or early 1840's to William Whisler, who by 1864 had given way to Richard Walker, one of a local landowning family, the Walkers of Alma Lodge, Terrington St Clement.³ The North Lynn freehold belonged to the dukes of Portland until 1932. The estates have since changed hands again; they now belong to farming companies run on modern business lines. North Lynn, already much changed

¹ Portland took a mortgage of £4,000 on Hoseason's land, thus enabling him to buy the advowson from Bentinck. Hoseason for his part was anxious to prevent the advowson from being sold to one of the local clergy, who would be sure to raise the tithes. A. R. Balfour's executors, who held the chief mortgage on North Lynn, had previously agreed to separate the advowson from the freehold so that it could be sold. The advowson was later (1831) sold at auction; its value was then estimated at £650 a year to the incumbent.—Abstract of title to advowson, bill of sale, Bradfer-Lawrence papers, Norwich and Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

² Bentinck undertook to pay Portland £1,500 a year rent for North Lynn; the Portland estate did not buy back the remnant of the lease until 1880.—Supplemental abstract of title to North Lynn, in the possession of Messrs E. A. Lane (North Lynn) Ltd. During Bentinck's absence in India in 1828-35 the £1,500 rent was paid to Lord George Bentinck, Portland's younger son, who had succeeded Bentinck as member for Lynn. That Portland by the mid-1820's had taken over as creditor from A. R. Balfour's executors is a matter of inference only.

³ White, *op. cit.*, 1845 edn, p. 570; 1864 edn, pp. 808, 811.

by the diversion of the Ouse, has since 1959 been partly sold off to the Dow Chemical Company for a weedkiller plant; it is flanked by petrol storage tanks. The hall has been pulled down and little remains from Bentinck's day other than a magnificent seventeenth-century barn. The frontage on the Wash that gave him so much trouble is greatly changed as well. At Orange Farm the plain Georgian cottage became increasingly decayed in the latter nineteenth century. It was given a mock-Tudor addition at the back in the 1930's; after the post-war agricultural boom the present owners built on new wings and largely rebuilt the interior in lavish style. At the same time the farm buildings that used to march up to the house were banished out of sight; a large greenhouse now houses a swimming pool. Never, it seems safe to say, has Orange Farm been so prosperous as it is now.

IV

As a Marshland farmer Bentinck may be seen as one among a number of passing figures who strove with varying success to make agriculture a business proposition. As a leading improver he left a more permanent mark. At Terrington St Clement in 1818 he set up a dispensary,¹ and he paid his under-steward's daughter £20 a year to run some kind of school. His notable work, however, had to do with three main undertakings: the Eau Brink Cut; the new road over the Nene at what is now Sutton Bridge, together with the improvement of the Nene outfall; and the improvement of Lynn harbour. When he left for India he was contemplating a fourth: no less than the reclamation of the Wash on the lines since followed by the Dutch in the Zuyder Zee.

Bentinck had bought land as an investment; but his rank was bound to make him a local notable. On his return after the wars he was in demand to take the chair at meetings and pilot legislation through Parliament. His own passion for improvement combined with the pressures of local affairs to make him take the lead, now of this "interest," now of that.

Of the two ventures that chiefly took up Bentinck's time, the making of the Eau Brink Cut to channel the silted and meandering Ouse above King's Lynn concerned most of the "interests" in the area: Lynn itself; the South and Middle Levels of the Fens upriver; and Marshland. In economic terms, it set the Lynn navigation interest at odds with the Fen landowning interest, since Lynn's trade in corn and coal was thought to depend on keeping the rivers navigable as far upstream as possible, while the Fen landowners on their readily flooded peatlands wished to see the waters drained out to sea as fast as possible. The making of the road bridge over Cross Keys Wash at Sutton—involving as it did the channelling of the lower Nene—also set the town of Wisbech at odds with its hinterland in the North Level; it affected

¹ *Ibid.*, 1836 edn, p. 474.

Marshland as well as the equivalent silt area of Lincolnshire, South Holland.¹

In the making of the Eau Brink Cut Bentinck was at all times identified with Marshland by his landholdings there: he worked closely together with his neighbours Hamond and Hoseason, both of them former naval persons (Hoseason, a Scotsman, had been naval storekeeper at Madras in the early days of Bentinck's governorship). He also had many dealings with the engineers—Thomas Telford and the two John Rennies, father and son—who were retained by the conflicting navigation and drainage interests.

After an initial clash in 1810–11 with the old close corporation of Lynn—a body swayed by a few interrelated merchant families—Bentinck in 1819 sealed an alliance between the Marshland landowners and the Lynn navigation interest. So successful was he in this that two years later he was offered one of the Lynn parliamentary seats all expenses paid (and was allowed to place his nephew in it); two years later he was made a freeman.² By the time he left for Bengal it was a matter of course that he should offer the East India writership in his gift, first to one aldermanic Lynn family (the Blencowes), then to another (the Bagges).

The Eau Brink Cut, only one among many attempts at improved drainage of the fens in a long unending succession, was first proposed in 1751, legislated upon in 1795, begun in 1817, opened in 1821; it proved inadequate almost at once and, after many wrangles, had to be widened in the late 'twenties.³ Bentinck's share in the business at first consisted in reconciling Lynn and then—with the help of his old military friend Sir Henry Bunbury of Mildenhall—the South Level to the proposed cut. In the disputes over the widening of the cut in the 1820's he and the other Marshland proprietors were increasingly drawn into identifying their interests with those of the Lynn merchants against those of the upriver landowners and especially of the Bedford Level Corporation. Much of the struggle—fought out in the courts and through the promotion of local Bills—turned on the Lynn–Marshland proposal to pull down Denver Sluice, where the Old and New Bedford Rivers join the Ouse. It ended in 1825 in a compromise, largely the work of Bentinck and of the Bedford Level agent Samuel Wells: the cut was to be widened and a decision on Denver Sluice put off (the sluice was in fact rebuilt in 1832).

The building of the new embankment and road bridge over Cross Keys Wash was more directly the work of Bentinck as entrepreneur; he also had a large share in pressing forward to a conclusion existing plans to carry the Nene

¹ I hope to deal in detail with these episodes—which raise wider questions about the working of local interest groups and statutory authorities—in an article elsewhere.

² *A Calendar of the Freeman of Lynn, 1292–1836*, Norwich, 1913, p. 290.

³ H. C. Darby, *The Draining of the Fens*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 130–4, 184 ff. The main sources (both printed and MS.) for the Eau Brink Cut are in the Bentinck Papers and the Bradfer-Lawrence Papers at Norwich.

outfall to Crabhole—a measure which, when completed in 1830, meant a greatly improved drainage for Wisbech, for the North Level of the Fens, and for South Holland.¹

Throughout his career Bentinck was a wholehearted advocate of good roads as the key to economic improvement. His illustration of what was wrong with Charles Metcalfe as an Indian civil servant was: "He sets no value upon a good road."² The proposed road over Sutton Bridge was to encourage the flow of trade by shortening the journey from Lynn to Newark by twenty-five miles. The difficulty was that a road bridge meant the channelling of the lower Nene, still more silted and meandering here than the Ouse before the making of the Eau Brink Cut. Rennie in 1814 had reported in favour of a complete outfall cut right out to sea at Crabhole, both to help landward traffic and to unclog the port of Wisbech. But the project was expensive; it also ran into repeated trouble with the Wisbech merchants whose warehouses a new cut might bypass.

In the matter of the Nene outfall the Marshland proprietors regarded themselves as outsiders. Hoseason wrote that they could justifiably intervene only to build the road bridge: "from our having no property and consequently no vote on the West side [of] the Nene we have no power to interfere in the taxes on lands &c" [needed to pay for the cut]. Bentinck, it followed, was much more of a free agent than over the Eau Brink Cut, where he was thoroughly identified with Marshland and then with Lynn. This seems to have enabled him to act as the catalyst of change.

Bentinck had to wage two "campaigns"—his term—in 1818–21 and again in 1824, before a final sharp burst of negotiation in 1825–6 persuaded all parties to go forward. These were his own initiative: the second time round, in 1824, he decided to "have this subject brought again before the public," if necessary to the point of bringing forward another local Bill (a first Bill had had to be given up in 1821), against the advice of Hoseason and of his solicitors. This struggle too was carried on through public meetings, pamphlets, and the promotion of local Bills. Bentinck also successfully launched a company in 1825 to raise £40,000 and build the bridge. This last seems to have been a calculated move to stir up the Bedford Level interest, which had just reached a compromise with the Lynn–Marshland interest over the Eau Brink Cut and which had no rooted objection to the Nene Outfall Cut. After a further flurry of wrangles and negotiations, Bentinck and the Bedford Level reached another compromise in March 1826. Under its terms agreed Bills were promoted; both bridge and outfall cut were built by 1830.

¹ Darby, *op. cit.*, pp. 194 ff.; D. Grigg, *The Agricultural Revolution in South Lincolnshire*, Cambridge, 1966, pp. 31–2, 140–1.

² Bentinck to Charles Grant, 14 April 1834, quoted in E. Thompson, *The Making of the Indian Princes*, 1943, p. 176.

Better agricultural fortunes in the mid-1820's probably helped to secure this result. The cost of the outfall cut—the final estimate by Telford and Rennie in 1826 was for £161,726—would have seemed prohibitive in the distressed years. By 1825–6 the upriver proprietors seem to have needed no more than a push—which Bentinck supplied. The impulse, though helped by the speculative fever of 1825, outlasted it. Bentinck himself had been fairly belligerent at times; in launching his bridge company in May 1825 he had announced that since “insuperable difficulties” in the way of Rennie’s complete Nene Outfall Cut (which he supported) “probably still continue. . . I for one shall take no further trouble to remove them:” he would go forward with the bridge regardless. In 1826, however, he felt it “most desirable to avoid opposition and not to put to hazard a measure which, if it should now fail, will in the general opinion be lost for our times.”

Bentinck thus for some ten years played a leading part in the improvement of the whole of the Fen country. Some of this work was, at that time, almost bound to come the way of a man of his rank who owned property in the area. But much of it came from his own inclination: he “must improve and invent.” At Lynn he was in correspondence with Rennie in 1826 over the need for a deep water dock—something that was built only in the 1840's; in 1835, after his return from India, when he was no longer M.P. for Lynn or even thinking of standing there, he proposed to the Mayor the building of a quay. A year later he retorted to the Duke of Bedford and the North Level, who were opposing the “wild and desperate plan” for carrying the Great Northern Railway across their land, that “for a price I should consider such a project, executed at the expense of others, a godsend.”

The project that most clearly transcended local interests was the reclamation of the Wash. Bentinck had long been interested in land reclamation, not only on his own property at North Lynn but on public grounds: in the manoeuvres over the proposed Sutton Bridge he had canvassed the elder Rennie’s forecast that it would make possible the reclamation of some 1,390 acres. In 1825 he began to look into plans, which several engineers had already suggested in the past, for taking not only the Nene but perhaps also other rivers to outfall points far out into the Wash. Bentinck’s 1825 memorandum to the Office of Woods and Forests dealt only with the Nene and Ouse; it suggested that a scheme of this kind might lead to the reclamation of 50,000 acres and greatly improve the drainage of 400,000 more. By the time the younger Rennie had carried out a survey on behalf of a committee with Bentinck at its head the project had grown to Zuyder Zee proportions: there was now to be a single channel in mid-Wash uniting all four main rivers (Witham, Welland, Nene, and Ouse); the area to be reclaimed was, Rennie later said, “from 150,000 to 200,000 acres . . . in other words, a new county, of most valuable land, would be

added to the kingdom." The new project "took the world by surprise;" but when Bentinck and Hoseason went to India in 1828 "there remained none of sufficient energy and influence to push it forward." The only—belated—result was the setting up of the Estuary Company under an Act of 1846; its purpose was to reclaim land from the Wash, but all it achieved was the new Marshland Cut below Lynn.¹

Bentinck was something of an all-purpose improver. He did not become rooted in Marshland; there is no sign that he wished to be. He took his Norfolk experience with him to Bengal; there he wrote off to his brother for samples of British draining tiles—"I hope to do miracoli [miracles] with them."² He also concerned himself with the drainage of Calcutta and with steam navigation on the Ganges: as he once or twice explained to fellow servants of the East India Company, he knew something of such matters through his work on the Eau Brink Cut.

V

What Bentinck had not got out of Marshland was the "competency" he had hoped for back in 1809. But for his brother Portland he might easily have gone bankrupt, like so many others, in the bad years around 1820. His reason for going out to Bengal in 1828 seems to have been at least partly that he needed, yet again, to recoup his fortunes. There was no doubt a touch of special pleading in his declaration—to a young friend whom he wished to dissuade from coming out as his aide-de-camp—that "I know not any good whatever, except riches . . . , to be had in India;"³ but perhaps only a touch.

At least three years earlier Bentinck had made a will based on the expectation that the sale of the leases of Orange Farm and North Lynn would yield his widow a clear £2,000 a year. This suggests an unencumbered capital of £40,000. It seems an optimistic estimate to have made just then. Bentinck spent seven active and rigorous years in India. He was often ill; once or twice he feared he would not last the course. In 1831 he hoped to leave in January 1834, to "take away near £40,000 and to find a clear income at home—but to live so long may be some difficulty."⁴ He did not in fact return until 1835; by then his total savings may have amounted to £70,000 or more. Much of this must have gone in settling debts, some of them dating from the 1810's. Bentinck spent his last few years as member for Glasgow and as a promoter of steam navigation to India. When he died in 1839 all his property—unstated—went to his widow. When she in turn died four years later her will was proved

¹ Sir J. Rennie (the younger), *Autobiography*, 1875, pp. 206–8; H. J. Hillen, *History of the Borough of King's Lynn*, Norwich, 1907, pp. 781–4.

² Bentinck to Portland, 11 Sep. 1830, BP/PwH/280.

³ Bentinck to Harry Verney, 8 July 1827, Claydon House MSS. (quoted by kind permission of Sir Harry Verney, Bart.).

⁴ Bentinck to Portland, 14 Aug. 1831, BP/PwH/286.

at under £40,000. It was not much to show for a total of eleven years as an Indian governor. After various legacies, Lady William left one-seventh of the residue to each of three Bentinck nephews, and four-sevenths to the widow and children of her husband's brother Lord Charles Bentinck.¹ In 1879 Lord Charles's grandson succeeded as sixth Duke of Portland. Lord William's lifelong enterprise, first spurred on by the principle of primogeniture and then saved by it from failure, thus ended by benefiting the holder of the title.

In economic terms some of Bentinck's investments, notably in the oil mill, must have run to waste. His attempts to improve his own farms possibly, and his work on fen drainage certainly, made that part of East Anglia more productive. India paid for much of it, and got in exchange the services of one of her better governors.

¹ Wills of Lord William Bentinck (proved 5 Nov. 1839) and Lady William Bentinck (proved 5 May 1843), Probate Registry, Somerset House.

NOTES AND COMMENTS *continued from page 24.*

In private life his extraordinary range of interests, his love of music and literature, his enormous sense of fun, and fabulous fund of stories made him the liveliest of friends and the centre of any gathering. It was impossible to feel dull or depressed in his company.

G. E. MINGAY

PRESENTATION OF THE "FESTSCHRIFT"

The *Festschrift* in honour of Professor H. P. R. Finberg, which was published as a Supplement to the REVIEW in September, was presented to him at a dinner held at Sadler Hall, Leeds University, on 25 September. The dinner was attended by representatives of Leeds University, present and former members of the executive committee of the B.A.H.S., contributors to the volume, and other members of the Society who live locally.

1970 WINTER CONFERENCE

The winter conference of the Society was re-

vived this year and took place in the Department of Geography, University College London, on Saturday, 28 November. The theme was 'Agriculture and the History of the Environment'; it was extremely well attended. In the morning, papers were read by M. D. Hooper and J. Sheail on 'Agricultural Change and its Impact on Wild Life' and by Hugh Prince on 'Antiquarianism in the English Landscape'. In the afternoon E. J. Collins read a paper by E. L. Jones on 'Agriculture's Reduction and Renewal of Bird Pest Problems in recent Centuries'; and George Ordish read a paper on 'The Ecological Implications of Pest Control: a Historical Survey'.

1971 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The 1971 Conference will be held at Bodington Hall, Leeds, from 5 to 7 April. It is open to all, whether members of the Society or not. Further details are enclosed with this issue of the REVIEW.