

Absentee Landownership in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: A Neglected Factor in English Agrarian History¹

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I

ACCORDING to one authority on the history of European agriculture, "the richness of English archives" has, together with other factors, "advanced agrarian economic history in England distinctly beyond that of its neighbours."² Nowhere is this more true than in regard to the study of landownership. For several decades historians in this country have drawn freely on the large deposits of estate records available in both local and national repositories. As a result our understanding of the relationship between landownership and agriculture, especially in the modern period, is considerable.

In many respects, however, knowledge of this aspect of our history is far from complete. Manuscript material, abundant though it is, deals almost exclusively, and also rather deficiently, with the affairs of the most substantial rentiers and farmers. Deeds, rentals, and accounts survive, whereas less formal records are rarely extant. Consequently, we know a great deal about factors such as rent movement and the changing pattern of ownership; much less about the evolution of the landlord-tenant relationship, to mention but one area of uncertainty. Moreover, this imbalance in the types of record which have survived encourages distortion. Well-documented features tend to be over-emphasized; other factors, though known, tend to be insufficiently appreciated.

This article argues that for this period absentee ownership falls into the latter category. Occasionally, estate records fail to reveal its existence. More frequently the lack of certain types of record, particularly correspondence, and the existence of others, such as rentals and accounts, conceal its nature and effects. Drawing mainly on a very full collection of estate correspondence, this article analyses the lengthy absenteeism of a northern landowner, Sir Marmaduke Constable of Everingham.³ It goes on to examine absenteeism more generally within the context of contemporary developments in landed economies and society, and concludes that the neglect of this factor, though largely unavoidable, has left a gap in our understanding of this period in English agrarian history.

¹ I am grateful to Dr H. A. Lloyd who supervised much of the research upon which this article is based. I alone am responsible for its failings.

² G. Duby, 'Medieval Agriculture 900-1500', *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, I, 1969, ch. v, p. 8.

³ The Constable of Everingham MSS. are deposited in the East Riding County Record Office, Beverley, under the code DDEV. The Rev. W. V. Smith, All Saints, Lanchester, Co. Durham, has compiled typescript transcripts of many of the letters (DDEV/60) in this collection. I would like to record my gratitude to him for allowing me extensive use of these transcripts, references to which are hereafter cited as S.T.

II

In October 1730, in a letter from Rotterdam to his chief steward at Everingham Hall in the East Riding of Yorkshire, Sir Marmaduke Constable wrote: "The pleasure I have had in my journeys is inexpressible, and [I] repent nothing so much as sitting at home so many years idle."¹ Having left England in the previous May, Sir Marmaduke made up for lost time by travelling widely in succeeding years, remaining on the Continent for all but one of the sixteen years until his death in Paris in June 1746.

His was one of the foremost Catholic landowning families in the north of England.² At his father's death in 1706 Sir Marmaduke had inherited large estates at Everingham, Drax, and Arras in Yorkshire, and at Rasen in Lincolnshire. Because of their Catholicism the family had been forced to endure considerable financial hardship throughout the seventeenth century, and much of Sir Marmaduke's energy prior to 1730 was devoted to restoring the family fortunes. Barred from every type of office, he was forced to stand aside from the contemporary scramble for patronage and place, spending most of his time in Yorkshire where he acquired a considerable reputation as a sportsman.

In 1726 Sir Marmaduke sustained an injury while hunting. He spent several months in Bath in 1726-7 receiving treatment, but his condition did not improve sufficiently to allow him to hunt again. Subsequently, deprived of a favourite pastime and of the bulwark of his reputation as a country gentleman, he spent much longer in London, and was beginning to look further afield for distractions. In November 1728 a correspondent's wish that "you are able to follow the foxhounds" was coupled with the hope "that you have no occasion to seek health in foreign parts."³ Ostensibly, Sir Marmaduke's trip abroad two years later was for a short period of treatment at the health resorts, but there was more to it than this. After the failure of the Jacobite rebellion, with whose leaders he was closely associated, Sir Marmaduke had become increasingly disillusioned with the lot of the English Catholic.⁴ The results of his injury served to sharpen this deeper discontent.

In overall charge of Sir Marmaduke's affairs during his absence was John Bede Potts. A Benedictine priest, he had previously been cellarer at Lambspring Abbey, and had doubled as chaplain and steward at Everingham since 1717.⁵ In 1730 Robert Usher was appointed East Riding deputy to Potts. The Lincolnshire deputy was Thomas Champney, one of the tenants; similar arrangements operated at Drax and Arras. During Sir Marmaduke's absence, £500 was forwarded to him annually

¹ S.T., vi, p. 6.

² For a descriptive analysis of the family's circumstances in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see P. Roebuck, 'Four Yorkshire Landowning Families, 1640-1760. An Economic History', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Hull University, 1970, I, ch. 3 (subsequently referred to as Roebuck thesis).

³ Roebuck thesis, I, p. 312. ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 295-300, 313.

⁵ J. S. Hansom, 'Catholic Registers of St Mary's Domestic Chapel, Everingham Park, Yorkshire', *Catholic Record Society*, vii, 1909, pp. 262-3. Lambspring Abbey was an English Benedictine establishment in Hanover.

from each of the two main estates. The money was sent to Richard Wright, his London banker, who passed credit to various European agents as directed by Sir Marmaduke.¹

At his departure Sir Marmaduke's affairs were in fairly good order. He had recently purchased three small properties to add to his estate in the East Riding, while in 1728 the enclosure of West Rasen had enabled him to increase the rental there by £178 per annum. A £2,000 mortgage remained outstanding but there was no need for early repayment. In 1730 his estate income amounted to £2,040, more than twice the amount which he planned to spend annually abroad. There were problems. In particular many of the houses and cottages on Sir Marmaduke's estates were in a bad state of disrepair. In 1727 the roof of his own bedroom at Everingham had collapsed after a rainstorm.² However, he expressed the hope that all would be put "in good order by degrees" while he was away, and instructed Potts to be "easy and content." "Its impossible for me," he said, "at the distance I shall soon be at to answer or determine every little accident that may occur in my little affairs, so [I] must leave them to your prudence and discretion."³

However, things began to get out of hand soon after Sir Marmaduke's departure, not least because he failed to give any reliable information as to the length of his trip. At no stage did he have definite long-term plans, and his statements in this respect were either confusing or contradicted by his actions. Thus, in December 1730, having ordered the replacement of dead tree shoots, Sir Marmaduke went on to say that nothing was to be "done anew till my arrival." He ended with the statement that a return to England was "far from my thoughts at present." In November 1733 he spoke of "steering my course homewards" after seeing a little more of Italy. In March 1735 he said that he would soon be in London; in the following August: "I now think of my return to my native country." In January 1737 he wrote to say that he was approaching home, and in June 1739 expected to be in London by the following spring. Finally, in March 1742 he planned to travel home in the summer, but not to remain. In fact Sir Marmaduke stayed abroad until 1744, Potts having died in June 1743.⁴ This indecision bred confusion. In his letters Sir Marmaduke either recommended that certain matters be left until his return, or delegated responsibility for all his affairs, large and small, to Potts, asking the latter not to trouble him with queries. He tended to adopt the second course most frequently, though all his letters contained inquiries and opinions. Potts, on the other hand, looked to Sir Marmaduke for decisions and, grasping at any suggestion of his early return,

¹ S.T., VI, pp. 6, 8; DDEV/58/118. As bankers the Wrights were "intimately connected with the Papist gentry": C. Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship 1603-1763*, 1967, p. 330.

² Roebuck thesis, I, pp. 305, 313-5.

³ S.T., III, p. 205; DDEV/56/30b. Just before he left the country Sir Marmaduke sent a list of instructions to Potts. These dealt with improvements to the Hall, new enclosure at Everingham, the planting of fruit trees, horse breeding, the collection of rent arrears, the letting of tithe "to the best advantage," and liaison between Potts and the Lincolnshire steward during Sir Marmaduke's absence; repairs and improvements to houses and cottages on the estates were not mentioned: DDEV/56/30a. Later, writing from abroad, Sir Marmaduke sought to calm Potts by reminding him that "you know full well when I was at home my little domicile was not conducted with the greatest prudence": S.T., VI, p. 31.

⁴ S.T., VI, pp. 2, 8, 45, 51, 60, 67, 78, 124.

frequently failed to act upon them.¹ Eventually even he became distrustful. In 1743: "Sir Marmaduke promised to be home this summer, but having broke so many former promises I dare not engage for the performance of this [one]."²

Moreover, Sir Marmaduke was at times an infrequent correspondent. Although he wrote forty-six letters to Potts between 1730 and 1743, he wrote none between November 1733 and December 1734, nor between August 1735 and December 1736. These long silences encouraged the growth of rumours which made Potts frantic with worry. In February 1735 Potts was "glad to see your hand again, it being reported that you was cast away at sea." In March 1737 the rumour was that "you are either dead or would never return." Rumours often arose in succeeding years and soon there were "many and different opinions."³ Potts himself travelled to Flanders in July 1733 to attend a chapter meeting of his Congregation. He remained there until October but did not meet Sir Marmaduke who was in Italy at the time. In 1736-7 Potts missed three similar meetings on the grounds that his responsibilities as steward did not allow him to leave Everingham.⁴ The death of Usher in 1739 prevented Potts from immediately complying with a request from Sir Marmaduke that he visit him in Cambrai. But two years later, in July 1741, a journey to a general meeting of his Congregation at Cambrai enabled Potts to satisfy both his religious superiors and "my Bart." This was the only occasion on which the two men met between 1730 and Potts's death and, not surprisingly, the latter became "tired of my charge of moneys." "I have seldom a pleasant thought; my brains are busied with the concerns of your world." Finally, Potts became incredulous: "will you never return home;" why do you "prefer foreign company before your own interest?"⁵ Thus Potts had to work in very trying circumstances which were largely due to Sir Marmaduke's casual and carefree behaviour.

However, Potts's temperament greatly exacerbated the difficulties with which he was faced. He felt inadequate—"incapable of undertaking the management of your affairs." His anxiety was permanent and it distorted his judgment: in 1737, writing of a dispute concerning rent arrears, Potts maintained that he would rather pay the sum himself than have "so much concern about it." His spirituality was of questionable help for it was of an almost masochistic type which expected, if it did not welcome, difficulties. "There is no place without them and the very best are not free

¹ The situation was occasionally farcical. In March 1732 Sir Marmaduke wrote to Potts: "I leave to your discretion all my affairs in Yorkshire, as well as in Lincolnshire." In September Potts wrote: "there is a great want of a wagon, it being so old and decayed that we dare not send it a mile from home, and unless you give leave to fell a tree, we must be without one." S.T., v, p. 64; VI, p. 30.

² S.T., iv, p. 131.

³ S.T., iv, p. 73; v, pp. 110, 159, 176, 192. In 1738 Potts wrote to a fellow religious: "Some are of [the] opinion that he will never return, but why I cannot imagine. Others that he is dead, and we keep it private for our own ends, but this is false (for anything I know of his death), nor is it possible that it could be concealed since there are heirs or relations to them both at home and abroad. Others again [say] that he is lifted into the ecclesiastical service, and takes the degree of pr—. Inform the others quite reverse to that, give it out that he is married. But my thoughts are contrary to all these reports, for I hope he is alive and will return or that he is a recluse, or engaged in a conjugal hole; but that be as it will... I am uneasy..."

⁴ S.T., iv, pp. 29, 36, 41-3, 60, 62-4; v, pp. 75, 87, 89, 137, 164; VI, p. 71.

⁵ S.T., iv, pp. 65, 85, 109, 111-12; v, pp. 52, 217, 243, 253, 256; VI, pp. 74, 110.

from them in one respect or another."¹ He was painfully shy. It was not "my custom to go about with how do you and the like." When Sir Marmaduke urged him to get out and about Potts replied: "It leads to many sins which a solitary chair is not subject to." Moreover, in the limited contact with others which he allowed himself Potts was neither personable nor liberal. He reported a servant for being out till one a.m. at Christmas time, and moved the fellow's bedroom from the ground floor so as to be aware of his movements. When Potts suspected that bricklayers were raiding the orchard he deprived them of their accommodation in the Hall garret.² His relationship with both servants and tenants deteriorated to the point where real difficulties arose. One suspects that Potts's manner and attitudes were largely responsible for this.

Furthermore, Potts simply avoided many tasks which he considered beyond him. In 1732-3 Sir Marmaduke twice asked him to "contrive me a farm or two in the remotest parts of the Lordship" of Everingham. Potts said that this was too difficult and later supported this by recalling that Sir Marmaduke had previously attempted it without success. On the other hand, he was extremely scrupulous about insignificant matters. When a fellow religious stayed for a while at Everingham Potts hastened his departure, apologizing to Sir Marmaduke for the expense. On most occasions Sir Marmaduke either ignored Potts or soothed him: "never any more make use of the word *sorrow* . . . it is too expressive for such trifles." However, in 1741 Sir Marmaduke offered an apology: "I am sorry you meet with so much trouble on my account. It was never designed upon when I left home."³ But if Sir Marmaduke at last felt a real concern for the problems posed by his absence, it did not persuade him to return.

Circumstances were made even more difficult by illness and death. Following a bad fall in 1737, Robert Usher was unable to perform his duties satisfactorily, and went to Buxton and Bath for treatment at Sir Marmaduke's expense. Despite this, Usher's condition deteriorated and he died in October 1739. A replacement was appointed in the following January but was dismissed in April because neither Potts nor Sir Marmaduke wished to employ a married man, especially one whose wife was a non-Catholic. A second replacement, James Marrow, also died before Sir Marmaduke's return.⁴ Potts spoke of being ill in January 1739 and he had a bad fall from a coach when returning from Cambrai in the autumn of 1741. He was unable to wear shoes for months afterwards and by July 1742 had ventured only two miles from Everingham since his return. Potts's injuries prevented him from holding ser-

¹ S.T., iv, p. 106; v, pp. 11, 181.

² S.T., iv, p. 60; v, pp. 168, 191, 267; vi, p. 74. Potts had become profoundly depressed by the behaviour of servants even before Sir Marmaduke left England. In 1726 "the boy, Will, was forced to go off all in a sudden, a naughty hussey at Shipton laying the cause of her big belly to his charge. I told Thomas to take his livery and hat from him, which he did to the boy's great discontent." Later he discovered that the housekeeper had drunk almost all the family's stock of beer. When Potts accused her of this she "before a stranger did demand to be dismissed . . . being so very tufty, and has her spark to lie with her in her bed, though there be the two other maids in another bed in the same room. O shameful deed, or rather void of shame." DDEV/60/84g.

³ S.T., v, pp. 42, 71, 80; vi, pp. 36, 42, 74, 110. On two occasions in 1731 Potts threatened to run away. S.T., v, pp. 22, 31.

⁴ S.T., v, pp. 163-4, 168, 171, 201, 206, 212; vi, pp. 71, 91; DDEV/56/157-64; 60/13.

vices from the beginning of 1743; his condition deteriorated in May, and he died in June.¹ Fr Rogers, chaplain to the West Yorkshire Gascoigne family, was present at Potts's death and, after Marrow's death, collaborated with Sir Marmaduke's nephew and his banker in an effort to keep estate affairs in order.² Sir Marmaduke had not been unduly perturbed by the decline in efficiency which had resulted from the accidents, but the third death in 1744 seems to have hastened his return to England.

III

The correspondence between landlord and chaplain-steward provides ample evidence of Sir Marmaduke's policies and of the conditions which prevailed on his estates during his absence. He was certainly a strict landlord. After allowing his tenants to hold half a year's rent in hand he was not prepared to tolerate arrears, considering that "I allow them time sufficient." When Potts reported that widow Anna Bell was having difficulty in paying her rent Sir Marmaduke ordered him to "quit her of her cottage, and all others who do not pay."³ In 1732 he asked Potts to warn the Lincolnshire tenants that ejection would follow interference with his timber. When tenants trespassed and refused to obey the court Sir Marmaduke ordered them to "be punished as far as possible it can be carried;" and when a tenant destroyed a wall in his tenement in order to introduce a second door he was "proceeded against with the utmost severity." After digging turf from demesne land another tenant was not spared "one half inch" but was fined at the rate of 6d. for each square yard of turf dug; "let him burn out of hand the turf he has pared and spread the ashes on the same ground."⁴

The fact that properties were occasionally "called in the markets" indicates Sir Marmaduke's eagerness to avoid having land "in hand," but this did not prevent him from carefully scrutinizing prospective tenants. Thus, a young man "having a very indifferent character, and being of an idle temper was not admitted to be your tenant, most of his neighbours apprehending that he would soon make an end of all, and his wife be thrown upon the town." Ironically Sir Marmaduke forbade Champney to let property to absentee tenants, properties "inhabited by servants" having been ruined "during my father's time." Once admitted the good tenant could expect certain signs of favour; when a property became vacant Potts recognized that it was Sir Marmaduke's "will that your tenants be served first."⁵ However, despite this and the severity outlined above, the behaviour of tenants was a constant source of trouble. They stole, poached, organized hare-coursing on the estate, and one of them "drew the staple out of the park gate to let your bull into his closes to serve his cows." When the penalties for failing to perform drainage duties

¹ S.T., III, pp. 193, 205; IV, pp. 119, 130, 131, 133, 134; V, pp. 187, 356. Sir Marmaduke had lost a "true friend."

² S.T., III, p. 206; DDEV/60/12. In April 1744 Fr Rogers informed Sir Marmaduke that his affairs were "in such confusion" that "everyone is afraid to act without commission. I shall expect to hear from you with the utmost impatience. In the meantime I shall acquaint Sir Carnaby with . . . your affairs at Everingham."

³ S.T., V, p. 69; VI, pp. 8, 40. Anna Bell was "excluded from the charity" which Sir Marmaduke was "pleased to give because no Catholic."

⁴ S.T., V, p. 27; VI, pp. 16, 25, 27, 31, 105. ⁵ S.T., V, pp. 18, 159, 172; VI, p. 74.

were omitted from the court rolls tenants ignored local custom until insertion of the penalties placed them "under a necessity to keep" their ditches "well dressed." Thus, although the tenants rarely went to extremes in their behaviour there was a steady incidence of recalcitrance.¹

This may not have been unusual, but certain events do seem to have been the direct result either of Sir Marmaduke's absence or of other circumstances prevailing during this period. Potts was seemingly reporting something out of the ordinary when he told of a failure to perform customary services. "Your cottagers have been extreme obstinate; none of them would come to your assistance except poor Samuel Cook." Again, "your whelps in Town are very poor; none keeps them well but Thomas Deane."² The distance between Potts and Sir Marmaduke was perhaps exploited when a tenant claimed to have the latter's permission to do something, for example to plough ley, to which the former took exception.³ Moreover, rent arrears grew steadily until Sir Marmaduke maintained that he had never known them so high. Potts pointed to unfavourable harvests and price fluctuations as reasons for this, excusing his own incapacity to enforce payment as much as that of certain tenants to pay. His predicament was that "if we did proceed according to your directions we should be obliged to turn off your chief tenants." Henceforward Potts threatened distraint but merely reported individuals, while Sir Marmaduke recommended "prudential severity." Potts began completely to lose control of the situation after Usher's death. "Neither fair nor foul words can prevail with some" who failed to pay their rents. When a boundary dispute broke out in Everingham in 1741 he maintained that the tenants were "resolved to ruin one another." In his frustration Potts was occasionally savage: "I shall discharge widow Emerson of her cottage the next Ladyday because she is about marrying an old shoemaker from Cranswick, for we do not want old cottagers but such as are able to work whenever called upon." Sir Marmaduke eventually reverted to ordering distraint "without mercy" and immediate eviction but with as little effect as before.⁴ He did not return.

Nowhere are the difficulties which arose during, and because of, Sir Marmaduke's absence more evident than in regard to building and repair work. Examples of the ruinous condition of much of his property abound. In May 1731 a Lincolnshire tenant alleged that his house was unsafe. In November, "Thomas Young will either have his repaired with barn and stall this year, or will go off next year." Two months later there were "sad outcries at Rasen concerning their houses." Three of them

¹ S.T., v, pp. 27, 42, 49, 69, 76b, 100; vi, pp. 27, 39. In May 1741 Potts reported an extreme case. The tenant in question would not "make the part of his fence against Blackburn Garth . . . though you have been at the charges of making a fence against his garths, yet he will not make up that small part, that his goods may have the liberty to trespass in the Intack. He has two swine daily in it, lets all his house go to ruin, little thatch on his barn and the outshot fallen. Neither he nor Robert Deane have paid anything of their Ladyday rents 1740. . . . There can be no prospect of getting clear with him but by distraining of all his goods and crops at Michaelmas next, if he does not in the interim come equal with his fellows. He is a tricky fellow." S.T., v, p. 249.

² S.T., v, pp. 1, 8. ³ S.T., v, p. 31.

⁴ S.T., v, pp. 31, 64, 69, 107, 127, 168, 212, 259; vi, pp. 9, 126, 137. Speaking of arrears in February 1741, Potts told Sir Marmaduke: "If you will not come home nor appoint a steward who can and will hold them to their duty, you are like to come up a great loser." S.T., v, p. 243.

were "very ruinous," Champney's having "two props and must have a third."¹ By November 1732 Daniel Decow's house at Drax had three props "and must yet have another." It fell during the following summer and "nothing but providence preserved the inhabitants' lives." In 1736 a shop in Everingham collapsed, and in 1737 the walls of another house would withstand no more than "the first or second push." In 1739 one tenant's house was so "very ruinous that he is afraid to lie in it."²

In 1730 Sir Marmaduke's "absolute orders" in this respect were "to put all in good order by degrees." Some repairs were carried out and a very few new buildings erected, but no attempt was made to deal with the situation "by degrees." Indeed, Potts acted as if no such order had been given, and often desired, for example, that "you give orders to cast up clay." He repeated such requests despite Sir Marmaduke's frequent delegation of full authority: "Champney has built nothing because no order to make brick, and you yearly expected home." Eventually complaints became so numerous that "no-one can be favoured in this without giving offence to the others, so everyone must rest quiet till your return."³ Sir Marmaduke's grumbles about the size of disbursements encouraged Potts to evade the issue, but the landlord was startled when he discovered the extent to which the steward had neglected matters. In 1736-7 Potts survived queries about the number of "houses you have repaired or built again," but in 1739 Sir Marmaduke was surprised "to hear after so long absence that I have any farmhouses upon my estate in bad repair." He ordered a major effort to be made during the summer but in reply Potts was "of the opinion that the repairing and rebuilding some tenements is an encouragement to others to let their places run to ruin in hopes of a like favour." Thus, Potts painstakingly avoided his responsibilities in this sphere. When Sir Marmaduke realized the extent of his steward's neglect he saw the very real connection between the size of arrears, which previously had puzzled him, and ruinous property. In 1741 tenants were, he ordered, "not to be in arrears more than I allowed; also keep in good repair their houses." When Fr Rogers wrote to Sir Marmaduke after Potts's death some houses were being repaired, but only because previous neglect had left tenants in extreme difficulties.⁴

At his departure in 1730 Sir Marmaduke hoped "to avoid all dispute and law in my absence," but trouble arose both at Drax and West Rasen. The Constables had long exercised a monopoly of the fishing rights in that part of the River Ouse which bordered their property in the West Riding. In 1732 this monopoly was challenged and encroachments made. In Lincolnshire Alexander Knight, who held property adjacent to that owned by the Constables, gave vent to his grievances, the nature of which remains unknown, by cutting the river banks and flooding Sir Marmaduke's land. Once the disputes had arisen Sir Marmaduke was determined to defend his interests "with all the vigour" that could be "set in motion."⁵ Potts adhered to

¹ S.T., v, pp. 18, 46, 49, 60. In 1736 Champney forwarded more than his half yearly quota to Wright because of "the meanness of his house, lest it should be broke into." S.T., v, p. 138.

² S.T., v, pp. 69, 76b, 85, 149, 164, 195. ³ DDEV/56/30b; S.T., v, pp. 31, 35, 46, 64, 89, 97, 118.

⁴ DDEV/56/30b; 60/13; S.T., v, pp. 156, 237; vi, pp. 42, 69, 82, 105.

⁵ S.T., v, pp. 55, 107; vi, pp. 2, 51. Sir Marmaduke thought that "it would be much better to avoid all law

a different interpretation of the word "avoid" and attempted to persuade Sir Marmaduke to return while taking very little positive action himself.¹ The West Rasen dispute was settled by the Commission of Sewers; but that at Drax, after being settled out of court, was reopened as a result, according to Potts, of rumours that Sir Marmaduke was dead. The latter came fully to appreciate Potts's fear of involvement and, after having determined to order a prosecution, decided in 1743 to postpone dealing with the situation until his return to England. In this respect also Potts's lack of fibre and Sir Marmaduke's resolution to remain abroad for as long as possible damaged the position and interests of both family and tenants.²

There is no doubt, therefore, that Sir Marmaduke's absence resulted in a marked deterioration in some aspects of his estate affairs. His employees were almost totally reliant on him, although they largely ignored him when he provided the initiative and imagination which they themselves lacked. Not only were his detailed instructions neglected, but also there was a steady decline in the efficiency with which the routine administration of the estate was conducted. The responsibility for dealing with situations which arose unexpectedly was, if possible, evaded. In particular both the condition of his property and relationships with the tenants greatly worsened. With Potts's death confusion became near chaos.

IV

Yet, although Sir Marmaduke's estate was neglected, his general financial and economic circumstances were not in decline during this period. The income from a tithe sub-lease steadily decreased but this amount was small in relation to his gross annual income.³ Rent arrears grew with his absence but never reached the proportions which they had assumed during his father's lifetime. Before 1725 they had been virtually non-existent and his concern stemmed as much from their appearance as from their size.⁴ Neither of these two factors resulted in significant reductions in the size of his annual income.

At least £1,000 was forwarded annually to Sir Marmaduke. Besides paying for and disputes . . . a suit once commenced nobody can tell when it may end. . . I never had any suit in my whole life, and should be glad not to begin now, but . . . my tenants must be defended in my rights and . . . no part of my estate exposed to waste . . . let your manner of discourse and that of Champney's be all tending to peace and quietness, though at the same time in yourself resolve and pursue any fact that has been or shall be with all the vigour that lawyer Johnson's skill can set in motion. There is an old but true saying: give rogues and villains rope enough and they will hang themselves . . . whatever charge I am at I shall think it well disposed of." However, lawyers "are always for fire and sword and" one has "difficulty to keep within bound all that you can say to them."

¹ In 1732 he was "inclined, because not able to manage so weighty an affair, to let" the Drax dispute "rest to your return." By 1740 his tone had changed: "cannot so many injustices put upon you move you to espouse your right personally, which would strike terror into your now insulting adversary." S.T., v, pp. 62, 217.

² S.T., v, pp. 114, 118, 123, 127, 159; VI, pp. 97, 136.

³ DDEV/56/91-166; S.T., v, pp. 11, 18, 27, 75, 96, 124, 209; VI, pp. 27, 60. They were eventually let "for what you can get . . . do anything rather than keep them in hand."

⁴ Because he allowed tenants to keep one half year's rent in hand and was generous in regard to tax allowances, Sir Marmaduke found it difficult to tolerate their rent arrears. "War for them is a harvest, the landlord paying all taxes; at least I do. Therefore they should be better qualified to pay their rents." DDEV/56/91-106; S.T., VI, p. 91.

his travels, this money was devoted to the purchase of books, paintings, and sculptures. These were sent to England and formed a considerable and valuable part of Sir Marmaduke's personal estate.¹ Despite the half-yearly quotas which they sent to Wright, Potts and Champney were sometimes embarrassed by the size of the sums of money which remained in their hands at a time when estate expenditure, as distinct from the need for it, was at a minimum, and when both their accounts were in surplus. Much of this capital was loaned. By August 1744 Sir Marmaduke had lent £5,000 to his nephew, Sir Carnaby Haggerston. He lent others a further £600 but had difficulty in satisfactorily placing his money in the provinces, and determined to avoid unsecured loans after a Benedictine friend of Potts had been slow to repay a loan of £200.² In 1737 Sir Marmaduke directed Wright to invest "in some of the public funds." No accounts of the resulting transactions have survived but scattered evidence indicates that at least £3,000 was invested in East India bonds, while there is the suggestion that much more was invested in this way.³ Despite these resources, Sir Marmaduke made no attempt, nor was he pressed, to discharge his own mortgage debt of £2,000 after reassigning it in 1732.⁴

Throughout his absence Sir Marmaduke was anxious to continue the policy which he had inaugurated shortly before his departure, namely of expanding his estate by purchasing conveniently situated property whenever possible. He made inquiries concerning the availability of land in Acklam and, on various occasions, discussed with Potts the advisability of buying property in Sancton, Hartswell, Weighton, and Shipton. At one point Sir Marmaduke asked whether Robert Watson could be induced to sell the farm at Whalsey which he had purchased from the former in 1716. But all this was to no avail and no further purchases were made.⁵ However, within a decade of Sir Marmaduke's death his carefully accumulated personal estate was used to purchase an estate at Seaton Ross for £12,000.⁶ This was considerably more valuable than any other single property which the family owned, or had owned, and represented the opportunity for which Sir Marmaduke had looked for so long, as well as the major result of his achievements.

By 1740 Sir Marmaduke was exhibiting an old man's anxiety to bring his affairs into order, but only necessity brought him back to England. As early as February 1741, writing from Cambrai, he complained of "pure idleness . . . not knowing where to go to see what I have not before. Travelling is almost done when we find no variety."⁷ But even when the desire to travel had waned, Sir Marmaduke preferred to live on the Continent. Nor was there a revival of his previous interest in his estate affairs after his return; he did what was necessary and no more. As he had never married, this included settling the whole of his estate after his death on the

¹ Roebuck thesis, II, table 52; S.T., III, pp. 158, 205; V, p. 267; VI, p. 126. In 1741 Sir Marmaduke spoke of fifty-two paintings as not including his "best." He mentioned Italian books and sculptures, and Flemish, Spanish, and Italian paintings.

² DDEV/56/91-166; S.T., III, pp. 167, 200, 212; IV, p. 16; V, pp. 22, 110, 114, 131, 138; VI, pp. 16, 21, 25, 42, 45, 48, 69, 117.

³ DDEV 56/4846; 58/118; S.T., III, pp. 126, 142; VI, p. 69. ⁴ DDEV/31/183-4.

⁵ S.T., V, pp. 141, 151, 219, 233; VI, pp. 39, 48, 78, 97.

⁶ DDEV/21/60, 62, 71, 72; 58/177; 60/16, 18; Roebuck thesis, II, table 43. ⁷ S.T., III, p. 147.

second son of Sir Carnaby Haggerston and his male heirs forever.¹ This he did in 1744. In the following March he asked one of his servants "this summer" to "represent more lively to me the situation of my affairs . . . in Yorkshire," and added: "this will be the last that I shall trouble myself with them." Having no desire to live at Everingham, he probably returned to rooms at Farnham which the Haggerstons had previously reserved for him, where he spoke of passing "the rest of my days quietly."² This was not to be. In that year of the second Jacobite rebellion Sir Marmaduke was a marked man and sometime during the autumn or winter he was imprisoned in York Castle.³ He escaped and fled to the Continent, dying in Paris on 15 June 1746.⁴ It was left to Sir Marmaduke's successors to redeem the situation of his estates.

V

How significant is this episode? How prevalent was absenteeism among the more substantial landowners at this time, and what were its effects? It has to be admitted, firstly, that in totally absenting himself for so long, not only from his estates but also from the country, Sir Marmaduke was quite untypical, though by no means unique. Nevertheless, absentee landlordism was far from uncommon during this period, and had been increasing steadily from the last decade of the seventeenth century.

If the phenomenon is to be seen in its proper perspective, it must be remembered that a degree of absenteeism was inherent in the prevailing system of landownership. Most substantial landowners, not just those who had the largest estates, owned property in more than one place, outlying properties frequently being at some distance from the core of their estates. Many owners, like Sir Marmaduke, held property in more than one county; some in several.⁵ The growth of large estates, a major feature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, did involve property consolidation. However, developments were extensive as well as intensive. Therefore, even while resident at home, many owners were necessarily absent from a considerable proportion of their property. Other factors exacerbated this situation. Access to property was occasionally forbidden to owners, for example during legal disputes.⁶ Minorities, which were common at a time of high rates of mortality,

¹ DDEV/31/187-188; 53/37-41; S.T., III, pp. 111, 124, 170, 200, 205. The Constable estates were settled on William Haggerston provided he assumed the name of Constable, which he did. The Haggerston property passed to Sir Carnaby's eldest son, while a third son pursued a commercial career on the Continent. Sir Marmaduke's last will of August 1745 and his "dying request" of April 1746 merely concerned minor bequests, and did not affect the main provisions of the 1744 settlement. DDEV/54/17, 33, 40.

² S.T., III, p. 215.

³ *Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers, 1742-45*, pp. 755, 768, 775; *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, ed. H. Foley, 1877-83, I, p. 628. Soldiers were dispatched into Lincolnshire to seize Champney, who hid under some hay and endured a prodding with pitchforks "rather than betray my beloved master." There is no evidence that Sir Marmaduke was in any way involved in the '45.

⁴ DDEV/54/17; 68/43.

⁵ For example, of the three families besides the Constables which I have studied in detail, the Hothams of South Dalton, the Beaumonts of Whitley, and the Brights of Carbrook and Badsworth, all held landed property outside Yorkshire during this period. Roebuck thesis, I, *passim*.

⁶ Thus, although Richard Beaumont of Lascelles Hall, near Huddersfield, inherited the nearby Whitley Hall estate in 1704, he was forbidden access to the latter until 1718 because of a legal dispute concerning the

sometimes left properties under the frequently absentee jurisdiction of a board of trustees.¹ Above all, during this period the marriage market became national rather than local in scope as far as the more substantial landed gentry were concerned. More and more wealthier landowners tended to look beyond their immediate environment when choosing a wife because financial considerations increasingly came to outweigh other factors governing their choice.² Consequently, property inherited by marriage was often at a considerable distance from that which they already possessed. Marriage, therefore, tended to raise the incidence of unavoidable absenteeism.³

Moreover, towards the end of the seventeenth century public service began to make growing demands on the upper reaches of landed society. Between 1689 and 1715 elections to the House of Commons, which was dominated by landowners, were more numerous and hotly contested than ever before or since.⁴ Many landowners acquired town houses in London or provincial boroughs, spending less of each year on their estates. Though political activity grew progressively less fierce after 1715, this pattern of behaviour persisted. Furthermore, the realignment of foreign policy which followed the accession of William III produced a considerable expansion in both the army and the navy.⁵ Younger sons and brothers, many of whom traditionally looked to the armed forces for a career, were more easily placed. If, as often happened, they succeeded to property due to the death of an older relative, their professional duties not infrequently kept them detached from their inheritance. Henceforward, existing owners of estates also took advantage of the increase in the number of available commissions. The disposition of the latter soon became one of the major strands in an extensive and ever-widening network of patronage. Nor did landowners remain uninvolved in the contemporary growth of the civil and diplomatic services. The modern civil service owes its origin not to the nineteenth century but to the erection of the government machinery needed to fight the wars against France after 1688.⁶ Many landowners seized the opportunity which salaries gave them of diversifying their revenues, and the profits of success in the fight for place were undoubtedly a factor in the ever-growing stability of landed incomes, and, to a lesser extent, in the process whereby large estates became

payment of legacies and annuities from it. Beaumont was so impoverished by 1710 that thereafter he tried, hard but unsuccessfully, through his M.P., Sir Arthur Kaye, to obtain a post in the civil service in London. *Ibid.* I, pp. 160–80; G. Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, 1967, p. 123.

¹ This was the case with the Hotham estates between 1738 and 1755. Of three trustees appointed, one, a widow, lived in London; another was a high-ranking civil servant with the Customs Commission in Edinburgh and London; the third was a friend of the family, who lived in the East Riding, but who died in 1750. Roebuck thesis, I, pp. 89–91.

² Professor Habakkuk has argued that there was “an increasing subordination of marriage to the increase of landed wealth, at the expense of other motives for marriage.” H. J. Habakkuk, ‘Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century’, *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 4th ser., xxxii, 1950, pp. 24–5.

³ According to Professor Mingay, “if it is possible to generalize from the immense variety of family history, it may be suggested that marriage and inheritance were the most prominent factors in the rise and permanence of the families with the greatest wealth.” G. E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 1963, p. 78.

⁴ J. H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675–1725*, 1967, p. xv. ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–19.

⁶ E. Hughes, *Studies in Administration and Finance, 1558–1825*, Manchester, 1934, p. 267. For one facet of this development see R. Davis, ‘The Rise of Protection in England, 1689–1786’, *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xix, 1966.

larger. Such success, however, inevitably increased the incidence of absenteeism.

Prior to the Revolution of 1688 only a minority of wealthy landowners were heavily committed in the public service. Local government was, and continued to be, their traditional preserve. But, with the exception of a few of the highest offices, its duties were besides being local neither remunerative nor time-consuming. In Yorkshire, and no doubt in other counties too, participation in national politics was the prerogative of a few long-established and influential families.¹ Neither the armed nor the civil services provided many acceptable job opportunities. However, after 1688, as can be seen from a study of Sir Marmaduke's contemporaries among the Yorkshire baronetage, the situation changed dramatically. Between 1688 and 1750 exactly half of these families had heirs who were involved, often heavily involved, in major public services of one kind or another.² Of the other half many lacked male heirs, were ineligible for office on religious grounds, or were too impoverished even to aspire to positions of responsibility and prestige. In other words those families who, though eligible and otherwise able, provided no public servants during this period were in a small minority.³ Significantly, only one of Sir Marmaduke's Yorkshire contemporaries achieved fame as an agricultural improver.⁴

Some families, for example the Stapyltons of Myton, the Slingsbys, and the Kayes, either continued or acquired a long tradition of service in Parliament.⁵ The public activities of others, like the Franklands, the Stricklands of Boynton, and the Hothams, were extremely diverse.⁶ The last, for instance, had been among the most influential families in the county before 1688, though their duties had been confined to local government and Parliament. However, Sir Charles Hotham, who succeeded in 1691, held at least five army commissions during the next thirty-two years, spending long periods in Scotland, Spain, and Portugal; he also held important local offices and represented Scarborough or Beverley at Westminster from 1695 until his death in 1723. Besides having equally successful military and parliamentary careers (and also a house in Stratton St, Piccadilly), Sir Charles's son was a Groom of the Royal Bedchamber between 1727 and 1738, and George II's Special Plenipotentiary in Berlin in 1730-1.⁷ Thus, public success and, as a direct result, absenteeism frequently escalated from one generation to another. A number of individuals held a host of important positions. Few Yorkshire baronets, however, were quite as extended as Sir Thomas Robinson of Rokeby, who was not only a

¹ R. Carroll, 'Yorkshire Parliamentary Boroughs in the Seventeenth Century', *Northern History*, III, 1968, pp. 103-4.

² *Complete Baronetage 1611-1800*, ed. G. E. C[ockayne], 6 vols. 1900-9, which lists sixty-four families besides the Constables as members of the Yorkshire baronetage between 1688 and 1750. For the purposes of this survey the only county posts included within the description "major public services" are governorships and the shrievalty.

³ Some eight families fall into this category. The history of one of these, the Grahams of Norton Conyers, is peculiarly undramatic, their estate, for example, being about the same size in 1883 as it had been in 1662. *Ibid.*, III, pp. 262-4.

⁴ This was Sir Digby Legard of Ganton. *Ibid.*, III, pp. 147-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 61, 156-8, 430-1; III, pp. 49-50. ⁶ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 183-5; II, pp. 115-16; III, pp. 142-5.

⁷ Roebuck thesis, I, ch. 1, *passim*.

lawyer, army officer, M.P., and a Commissioner of the Excise, but also an amateur architect, a Fellow of the Royal Society, and the Governor of Barbados between 1742 and 1747.¹ Some families were involved in local or parliamentary government in counties other than Yorkshire;² a number were employed in various capacities, military and otherwise, abroad.³ The overall impression is of a distinct behavioural change on the part of a significant proportion of this social group. What was true of the baronetage must also have been to a considerable extent true of the upper strata of landed society as a whole.

Developments in the London money market also played a part in the growth of absenteeism. Landowners were heavily engaged in the speculative booms which succeeded one another from the 1690's, and preferred for obvious reasons to direct their activities from bases in the metropolis. Their enterprise is reflected in the size of their investment in the National Debt, and later in the proliferation of private banks in the West End which specifically catered for their needs.⁴ Both interest and involvement were greatly reduced by the "Bubble" affair, by which time, however, the pattern of absenteeism had become firmly established.

Social developments also drew landowners away for longer periods from their estates. Catholics, like Sir Marmaduke, had been educated abroad for generations. But from the end of the seventeenth century "the grand tour which followed university became almost *de rigueur*" for the eldest sons of wealthy landowners.⁵ Thereby they acquired an early taste for travel which they frequently later indulged. This same period saw the rise of the London season as a social phenomenon of substantial proportions, while other centres such as Newmarket and Bath began annually to attract large numbers of the landed *élite*. At the provincial level the theatre, the spa, the ball, and the race meeting joined the varied duties of local government in distracting landowners from estate affairs. There was, in fact, "a transformation of behaviour in polite society" which involved a change in character as well as tone.⁶ Rustic pursuits were neglected in favour of frequent journeys about the country and to the capital. Such behaviour soon became essential to acceptance in high society. Whenever the family was in residence the country house remained at the centre of social life, but for the first time during this period it had to face considerable competition.

¹ C[ockayne], *op. cit.*, v, pp. 68-9; *Dictionary of National Biography*.

² For example, the Savilles of Thornhill and the Smithsons in Nottinghamshire, and the Calverleys in Newcastle on Tyne. C[ockayne], *op. cit.*, i, pp. 49-51; iii, pp. 101-2; v, p. 13.

³ Besides Sir Thomas Robinson in Barbados and the fourth and fifth baronets Hotham on the Continent, Sir Marmaduke Wyvil, sixth baronet, was Postmaster-General of Ireland from 1736 to 1754, and Sir William St Quintin, third baronet, Vice-Treasurer and Receiver-General of Ireland from 1720 to 1723. Sir Thomas Gower, third baronet, died during army service in Ireland while, although he succeeded to his family's estates in 1736, Sir Tancred Robinson of Newby did not resign his commission as a Rear-Admiral until 1741. Sir Marmaduke Beckwith, who was in Virginia when he succeeded his brother in 1743, was still serving as a Clerk of the Peace there some five years later. *Ibid.*, i, pp. 103, 147-8; ii, pp. 161-2; iv, pp. 115, 158-9.

⁴ H. J. Habakkuk, 'English Landownership 1680-1740', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* x, 1939-40; D. M. Joslin, 'London Private Bankers 1720-85', *ibid.*, 2nd ser., vii, 1954-5, pp. 178-9.

⁵ Mingay, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-8. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

VI

The effects, as distinct from the fact, of absenteeism are more difficult to establish. It would appear, firstly, to have been one factor in a progressive decline in the extent of demesne farming on the larger estates. In Yorkshire during the century before 1640 direct farming had provided the "wealthier gentry" with "a valuable weapon in the Price Revolution."¹ Later with the levelling, and occasional lowering, of prices farming became much less profitable. Landowners preferred to lease as much of their property as possible. Increasingly direct farming was practised merely to meet some of the needs of domestic consumption. As these needs declined with the growth of absenteeism the scale of demesne farming was further reduced. On some estates at times only an orchard and kitchen garden remained.²

Secondly, many more owners began to employ full-time salaried stewards or agents to manage estate affairs in their absence. Previously such men were to be found only on the largest estates. Due to the increasing need for their services the post of steward achieved the status of a separate profession during the course of the eighteenth century.³

The growth of absenteeism also affected tenant farmers, though the general situation in this respect remains obscure. Indeed, the episode described above emphasizes the extent to which our view of the situation of tenants is dependent on record survival. If, as is common, estate correspondence had not survived, the nature of the plight of Sir Marmaduke's tenants would never have come to light. The early eighteenth century is recognized as having been a time of considerable difficulty for farmers; this is generally ascribed to poor harvests, price fluctuations, and an "unusual number" of "what might be called acts of God."⁴ However, it is argued that tenant-farmers were on the whole less affected by these developments than owner-occupiers because landlords were both able and willing to help them over their difficulties. That this was true in many cases is beyond doubt.⁵ But if the situation on the Constable estates is in any way indicative of that elsewhere, it would seem that there was another side to the story.

The most striking feature of the circumstances outlined earlier, namely the sharp contrast between the effect of absenteeism on Sir Marmaduke's economy and its effect on his tenants, is fundamental to our understanding of the relationship between landownership and agriculture during this period. On the whole Sir Marmaduke's financial and economic position prospered despite the breakdown in com-

¹ J. T. Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry. From the Reformation to the Civil War*, 1969, p. 57.

² Roebuck thesis, I, pp. 475-6. By the eighteenth century the more substantial landowners "were, and had long been rentiers." H. J. Habakkuk, 'England', in *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. A. Goodwin, 1953, pp. 4-5.

³ E. Hughes, 'The Eighteenth Century Estate Agent', in *Essays in British and Irish History in Honour of James Eadie Todd*, ed. H. A. Cronne, T. W. Moody and D. B. Quinn, 1949, p. 189; G. E. Mingay, 'The Eighteenth Century Land Steward', in *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution: Essays Presented to J. D. Chambers*, ed. E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay, 1967, p. 8.

⁴ C. Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship 1603-1763*, 1965, p. 243.

⁵ See G. E. Mingay, 'The Agricultural Depression 1730-50', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., VIII, 1955-6.

munication and the shirking of responsibility during his absence. Nevertheless the tenants were deeply and adversely affected. Thus both socially and economically substantial landownership had come to acquire an almost unshakeable stability and security. On the other hand, the situation of tenant-farmers remained heavily dependent on a variety of factors; not only on the soil, the weather, and the market, but also on the policy and attitudes of the landlord, and the quality of management on his estates. Though guarded by tradition and expediency, security of tenure, particularly for the poorer tenants, was far from absolute. Other aspects of life on the land, in this case the capability of the steward, his and the owner's prejudices, and the continuing quality of living quarters, were distinctly unpredictable.

Eventually, the growth of a body of professional estate stewards did much to reduce the effects of absenteeism, but this was a long-term development. Before the mid-eighteenth century stewards were neither as numerous nor as capable as the situation required. There was no recognized course of training for the post; recruitment was from a very wide field.¹ Consequently, although there are examples of highly competent stewards on other than the very largest estates before 1750, one doubts whether stewards as a body prevented the uncertainty, indecision, and neglect which resulted from absenteeism. Such correspondence as exists tends to bear this out.² Moreover, steward's accounts of this period, though they give an initial impression of careful management, bristle with makeshift devices, such as too neatly summarized totals and large categories of "miscellaneous" expenditure.³ The complaints of owners bear witness to the fact that accounts were frequently completed long after the period to which they relate.⁴ For this and other reasons stewards were almost universally distrusted.⁵ Yet the employment of a scrupulous individual was, as Potts's behaviour amply illustrates, no guarantee of good management. Honest or not, it was usually impossible for a steward to keep an eye on the whole of an estate. Responsibility for outlying properties was inevitably vested in tenants such as Champney. Like minorities and other situations, therefore, absenteeism frequently placed strain on an administrative system which was, in most cases, insufficiently developed or experienced to withstand it.

As the century progressed stewards, though still distrusted, grew both in number and expertise.⁶ Moreover, after 1750 agricultural conditions greatly improved. After a long period of stability the general level of rents rose steadily; tenants were

¹ Mingay, 'The Eighteenth Century Land Steward', *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

² See for example G. E. Mingay, 'Estate Management in Eighteenth Century Kent', *Ag. Hist. Rev.*, iv, 1956, pp. 108-9.

³ See for example Roebuck thesis, II, tables 47, 61-5. In this connection see also F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 1963, pp. 152-3.

⁴ Mingay, 'Estate Management in Eighteenth Century Kent', *loc. cit.*, p. 109.

⁵ According to Professor Thompson, "horror stories about the deceitfulness, rapacity and dishonesty of stewards were one of the staples of gossip in eighteenth-century landed circles." *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁶ For example, Lord William Bentinck, who owned, and greatly improved, land in Norfolk during the early nineteenth century, was absent from his estate for lengthy periods. However, besides retaining a keen interest in his estate affairs, he was on the whole able to employ capable stewards, among whom were a gentleman farmer and a professional Scottish steward. But at least one of Bentinck's employees was "an unfortunate choice" who was responsible for mismanagement. J. Rosselli, 'An Indian Governor in the Norfolk Marshland: Lord William Bentinck as Improver, 1809-27', *Ag. Hist. Rev.*, xix, 1971, pp. 52-3.

on the whole well able to pay the latter, which followed rather than led prices. Better prospects, in particular increased profits, heightened landowners' interest in estate affairs. While the incidence of absenteeism decreased, a growing number of landlords became actively engaged in the process of agricultural improvement.¹ Prior to mid-century, however, few of them had taken a personal interest in the farming on their estates. The behaviour of many of them may indeed have led to a deterioration in the situation of their tenants. For the effects of the organizational breakdown which resulted from absenteeism would appear to have been felt first and foremost by tenant farmers.

Given the present inadequate state of our knowledge this remains no more than a reasonable suggestion. The history of many of the larger estates, however well documented, has yet to be traced in detail. The circumstances of tenant farmers are particularly obscure.² None the less, if during this period the pattern of absenteeism was the same nationally as it was in Yorkshire, it must have adversely affected those farming communities who traditionally looked to the local squirearchy for help and guidance, especially at a time of agricultural depression. Moreover, though it may have been unequal, the landlord-tenant relationship was far from purely traditional; both parties had obligations, which for the landlord were more difficult to meet at a distance. Precisely what these obligations were, and whether they changed over the years, we do not know for we lack, among other things, an adequate study of leasing policy on the larger estates. But, for example, they did allocate responsibility for the maintenance of property. Might not the heavy rent arrears of the early eighteenth century have been due partly to the neglect by absentee landlords of their duties in this respect? This was true on the Constable estates, as Sir Marmaduke eventually realized.

How far this and other possible effects of absenteeism influenced the general course of agrarian history remains an open question, but it is nevertheless a question which needs to be both asked and answered. Generalizations suggesting that absenteeism was constant in its incidence or, more crudely, that it was peculiarly an Irish phenomenon cannot be sustained.³

¹ J. D. Chambers and G. E. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880*, 1966, pp. 73-5, 77, 106-12.

² According to Professor Wilson, "the tenant farmer and the rents he paid are two of the central features of English farming and we have no adequate study of either." Moreover, "nor do we know much about a figure of crucial importance: the estate steward." *Op. cit.*, p. 157.

³ Professor Mingay has pointed out that "not all the absentee owners neglected their Irish properties." *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 46.