

Corporate Estate Management: Guy's Hospital Agricultural Estates, 1726–1815¹

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IN 1755 Dr Benjamin Avery, one of the more active treasurers of Guy's hospital during the eighteenth century, wrote to the charity's Herefordshire agent of the need for early notification of timber and coppice wood sales. During the course of the letter he highlighted one of the main differences, as he saw it, between the management of private and corporation estates:

I can say nothing to it till I have an opportunity of consulting some of our Gentlemen: You shou'd give us a little more time, as you know bodies of men can't answer Letters, give their orders, review, alter, and amend them with so much ease, and in so little time as particular persons can do.²

Later officials were to express similar sentiments. The fear of farms falling in hand made the clerk to the governors declare in October 1780 that:

Public Bodies & Trustees of Charities are in a very different situation from private persons and individuals and cannot with the same ease and propriety vary & cancel Agreemts and take their Farms and Estates into their own hands. . . .³

This letter underlined the problem of institutions which regarded property, above all things, as a source of income. Their corporate nature could make them appear both formal and inflexible. The relationship with their lands was often distant, and this in turn has tended to give them a reputation for being less effective as landowners, and less involved in the affairs of their estates than private landlords. It has also helped to create the impression of institutional estate owners being little more than heartless rackrenters. In

the late nineteenth century Shaw-Lefevre thought that tenants of collegiate and charity properties were treated less favourably than those of private landlords, and he went on to declare that they should consider the interests of all classes living on their land, and not merely aim to make 'the very utmost net income out of it'.⁴

There were certainly a number of dismal examples to confirm this attitude. The Charity Commissioners of the 1830s, for instance, discovered that the burgesses of Huntingdon had done so well out of their charity estates that a notification was sent to the Attorney General.⁵ In 1783 the canons of Hereford cathedral recorded that:

the fines in future for all Leases that shall be granted by the Chapter shall be paid immediately and the Money instantly divided amongst the members of the Chapter.⁶

The canons, in fact, neglected both their estates and their cathedral. While they were dividing considerable sums amongst themselves, the fabric account, which supported the institution from which they derived their profit, was almost annually falling into debt. The disastrous consequence of this neglect occurred less than three years later when, on Easter Monday 1786, the whole of the cathedral's west tower collapsed.

On the other hand, mismanagement also arose from the failure of many trustees to provide their institutions with rents which reflected the real worth of their estates. It was a common abuse to let land well below the market value. The Charity Commissioners discovered, for instance, that an almshouse at

¹ I should like to thank the governors of Guy's hospital for allowing me to use material in their archives, and also Professor A W Coats who helped me with an earlier draft of this article.

² Avery to Fortune, 18 Nov 1755, Treasurers' Letter Book (TLB) 1737–73, p 320; Guy's hospital MS.

³ J Harrison to Jenkin, 12 Oct 1780, TLB 1778–1807, p 32.

⁴ G Shaw Lefevre, *Agrarian Tenures*, 1893, pp 276–7.

⁵ D Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660–1960*, 1964, p 194.

⁶ 13 Nov 1783, *Dean and Chapter Act Book, 1768–1801*, vol 5, p 231 verso; Chapter Library of Hereford Cathedral.

Ewelme in Oxfordshire received just over 3s an acre from a fine property of 4500 acres.⁷ Even more widespread was the habit of granting very long leases, thereby depriving the institution of rising land values, or of simply reletting for fines with no increase in rent.⁸

To be good and effective landlords, a number of the officials at Guy's hospital at least recognized the need to steer a course between the two extremes of exploitation and neglect. 'We are never forward to raise our rents,' Avery wrote in 1756, 'or screw everything up as far as it will bear.'⁹ Yet, of necessity the hospital itself still had to be the main influence upon the proceedings of the governors, and loyalty to a central institution of this kind could lead to neglect of its landed property. One of the hospital's nineteenth-century governors, William Cripps, told the Mortmain Commission in 1844 that on all charity estates the claims were usually larger than the funds could meet, and thus

in many instances estates had been suffered to get into bad repair, particularly the buildings on them, from the urgent calls there have been on the charity.¹⁰

Guy's hospital held land in Herefordshire, north Essex, and south Lincolnshire. The largest estate, of around 10,000 acres, lay scattered in Herefordshire. This comprised two main parts — the northern division with farmland, some of it heavy clay, stretching to the west and south of Hereford itself, and the smaller southern division taking in some of the light lands around Ross. The Essex property was the next largest, consisting of three areas around Great Bardfield, Leigh's Priory and Beaumont in the north of the county, and the estate as a whole hovered around 8000 acres for most of its history. The smallest estate lay near Wisbech in south Lincolnshire, flanking the Wash, and during the eighteenth century contained just over

5000 acres. It is to the credit of the governors of Guy's that the effect of the charity upon this property was not usually harmful. At the turn of the century they even received some praise from the reporters to the Board of Agriculture for their farm buildings in Herefordshire and a short-lived scheme there for encouraging the growing of turnips.¹¹ Yet the governors could not really be called improving landlords, although in a number of ways the presence of the hospital actually encouraged them to manage their estates with efficiency, and, in general, with consideration. The differences between the management of private and corporate property could be exaggerated, yet they did exist. They were recognized by a number of treasurers, and the most obvious influence was provided by the hospital itself, situated in Southwark, and so generously endowed by its founder, Thomas Guy.

I

Guy died a bachelor in December 1724¹² after a life of active philanthropy. He had first built his fortune in the book trade, and then, during the Marlborough wars, became a dealer in sailors' pay tickets. Government securities also attracted his attention 'by which, and his Trade, he acquir'd a very great Estate'.¹³ It was, however, the South Sea bubble which created a most impressive fortune for this already wealthy man. On his death he left £300,000, mainly in personalty, and over £200,000 of this went towards endowing the hospital which still bears his name. The charity opened its doors to the first patients early in 1726, just over a year after the founder's death. Its establishment brought little controversy. There was some dispute about the original purpose of the hospital, but re-publication of Guy's will in the early 1730s soon settled this matter. The

⁷ Owen, *op cit*, p 195.

⁸ *Ibid*, p 185.

⁹ Avery to Yeldham, 13 Nov 1756, TLB 1737-73, p 345.

¹⁰ House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Mortmain*, 1844, p 108.

¹¹ J Clark, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Hereford*, 1794, pp 58-59n; J Duncumb, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Hereford*, 1805, p 30.

¹² New style of dating is used throughout.

¹³ W Maitland, *The History of London*, 1739, p 667.

actual terms of his will were never disputed: there were not only generous bequests for his relatives, but careful instructions about the government of the hospital.

To some extent Guy was influenced by the example of St Thomas's, of which he had been a governor for a number of years. Indeed, in its earliest years Guy's hospital not only shared its treasurer and governors with the sister charity, but on the medical side the training of Guy's students was also closely linked to that of its neighbour until 1837. Yet although undoubtedly influenced by St Thomas's, Guy never followed its example slavishly. He certainly avoided some of its abuses by restricting the number of governors to between fifty and sixty, thus preventing the possibility of a sudden increase in their ranks for support of a particular appointment.

The governors of Guy's also received but few emoluments,¹⁴ while their powers were restricted. The governors were required to appoint the hospital's senior officials, both administrative and medical, and also to present clergymen to any livings the charity might hold. Later by-laws increased their powers to some extent when, from 1728, the general court's consent was required for the purchase, sale, or exchange of any substantial pieces of property. The governors also had to elect by ballot the twenty-one members who comprised the court of committees, seven of whom were chosen each year. It was with this smaller administrative body where the real power of the hospital lay. It dealt with 'the more constant and ordinary Management' of the hospital,¹⁵ and as its meetings were fairly frequent much of the daily work was conducted by the treasurer. He was the presiding officer of the committee; and although the hospital had a president as its nominal head, it was the treasurer who was the charity's most important official. In some

hands this position, in fact, became very powerful.

The best known treasurer was Benjamin Harrison, junior, who held the position for just over forty years from 1797, and who stretched the powers of the office to its limits. In the early nineteenth century the Charity Commissioners declared that he enjoyed 'absolute and uncontrolled authority . . . in every department of the charity.'¹⁶ Although rightly indicating how dominant the office could become in the hands of an autocrat, this was still an exaggeration in not emphasizing sufficiently the importance of the governing body and the influential court of committees. They lay behind the strongest, or most indifferent, treasurer. In 1742, when the hospital was negotiating to renew the lease of some tithes in Essex, the Revd Bailey expressed surprise about the influence of the governors:

I did not conceive that the Gentlemen of the Hospital took the Business of Renewing their Leases out of the hands of the Treasurer or that their Decrees were so absolute.¹⁷

To a large extent each organ of administration at the hospital acted as some kind of check upon the other. It was a system of balances and restraints established by the original will to prevent the abuse of office. And not only was the government of the hospital thus arranged but clear instructions were also given for its endowment.

Although the founder himself left mainly personalty, he instructed that his charity was to derive a regular income from landed estates; and one of the chief tasks of the court of committees was to buy, sell, exchange, and administer such property. It was certainly not unusual for an endowed institution to rely on income from land, and Guy again had the familiar example of St Thomas's to follow. After the South Sea shock it may also have seemed the safest thing to do at the time. It was not uncommon in the 1720s, after 'the

¹⁴ The only privilege they enjoyed was the right of each in turn to recommend a lunatic for admission to the hospital.

¹⁵ 11 Geo I c 12, Act of Incorporation [including the will of Thomas Guy] reprinted 1944, p 10.

¹⁶ 32nd Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry concerning the Charities in England, Part VI, 1840, p 712.

¹⁷ Bailey to J Harrison, 7 April 1779; Essex RO: D/DGh E3.

shipwreck of the year twenty',¹⁸ for many large owners to put their surplus capital into land or mortgages rather than stocks.¹⁹ In fact, Guy tied his hospital so closely to land that if any property were sold more had to be bought with the proceeds of the sale. The governors were also not allowed to hold stock as a permanent investment, and consequently during the following century they were not permitted to accept shares in lieu of payment for any land, for instance that bought by railway companies.

In 1725 an Act of Parliament incorporating the charity confirmed the terms of the will, and imposed further restrictions on the governors' powers for purchasing land. It forbade the buying of estates yielding as a whole more than £12,000 net. The reasons for this are obscure, but the so-called Mortmain Act of 1736 provides some explanation. To some extent this was the climax of a movement directed against the accumulation of property by institutions such as charities. The limit imposed on Guy's hospital may have been an indication of this growing opposition, and some witnesses in the later Mortmain enquiry thought that the allusions in the contemporary debates to a man who 'happens to fall into that delirious ambition of erecting a palace for beggars' specifically referred to Guy.²⁰

II

Whatever the reasons for such restrictions, the management of the hospital and its estates was now closely tied to a will and an Act of Parliament. Later parliamentary measures were also to affect the governors' policies; although most of this legislation, in the form of various charitable trusts Acts, was passed during the following century. The founder's

intentions, and Acts of Parliament, influenced the policies of Guy's hospital in a way few private properties could have experienced. The latter, of course, were often considerably affected by legislation and wills, but few could have had such direct and explicit initial guidance. The various Acts emphasized the hospital's position as a public body; and this difference was recognized by Thomas Turner, a nineteenth-century treasurer, when he wrote that with private owners the difference between nominal and net rents was immaterial, purely a matter of account, the whole details only being known to themselves:

But in the case of a public property it is very different. And the large proportions of outgoings to receipts, however capable of explanation, is apt to provoke animadversion from careless inspectors of the accounts and give unnecessary trouble to the managers.²¹

Such contrasts, however, can be exaggerated. In the management of Guy's property the similarities with private landowners were more striking than the differences. There were many rules of administration which were common to most large estates. Like many private landlords, the hospital had a central office where the accounts and records were kept. The degree of control such an office exercised on the estates, as well as its general efficiency, often depended on the energies and inclinations of the landowner himself. Where Guy's hospital was concerned, the organization was fairly tight. The agents were answerable to the treasurer who, in turn, was responsible to the governors either in the small court of committees or the general court of the hospital. It has been seen that these circumstances could still give him considerable power, but the carefully organized centralized system also prevented abuse of this office. Although it could not exert such a tight control over the agents scattered throughout various parts of the realm, especially those in distant Herefordshire, it did at least encourage the central officials to keep a watchful eye upon their activities. Careful checks were

¹⁸ E Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 1959 (World's Classics edition), p 12.

¹⁹ G E Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 1963, p 72.

²⁰ Mortmain Report, op cit, p 16. Gareth Jones, *History of the Law of Charity, 1532-1827*, 1969, p 109n.

²¹ Turner to Higgins, 21 Nov 1870, TLB 1870-72, p 216.

made in the central counting house on rents received from these stewards, as well as on the work they supervised on the various farms. From 1760, when the hospital had finished purchasing its main properties, an annual abstract of accounts was compiled, giving at a glance a complete statement of everything connected with the estates — their purchase values, rents, casual profits, and expenses — as well as an analysis of the charity's own expenditure in any particular year. Indeed, although this type of organization was similar to that used by many private landlords, it was the way in which it was used and controlled by committees that probably afforded the greatest difference between the management of the hospital's property and that of private estates.

The charity's accounting system also shared many features in common with the methods used by private owners. Although techniques varied in detail from one estate to another, an over-all pattern could be seen. The master and steward system, which had remained virtually unchanged from the Tudor period to the end of the eighteenth century, had become the standard form of accounting. As Pollard says: 'It had become routinized to the extent of being included in textbooks on land stewardship and, no doubt, taught in the appropriate schools.'²² The system not only provided a convenient view of the estate as a whole, but could also clearly show annual rent movements, accumulation of arrears, and the amount spent on salaries, repairs, buildings, and general upkeep of farms.

Another feature familiar to both the hospital's property and large private estates was the employment of a host of receivers, agents, clerks of works, and various semi-permanent officials such as surveyors and timber valuers. Private landlords saw the agents as their representatives in the fullest sense. The hospital did so too, and knew that its name could be damaged by intemperate habits and weak, ineffective behaviour. In

1763 the clerk had to send a warning to the newly-appointed Lincolnshire agent: 'I hear you spend more time in the Ale house which gives me concern.'²³ William Fortune, the Herefordshire agent, was eventually demoted because his disposition was 'so trifling and [his] neglects so frequent'²⁴ that the interests of the hospital were being damaged. The governors were not only landowners of an estate, they were also guardians of a charity. The treasurer explained to the disgraced William Fortune that where his susceptibilities were concerned, the governors had:

consulted in this new Regulation [to demote him], as far as wou'd consist with our faithfulness in the discharge of our Trust. . . .²⁵

As guardians of a hospital the governors were moved more by loyalty than personal interest. Their trusteeship put them one stage removed from the funds they controlled, and according to Avery such detachment could even be to the advantage of those officers who did not prove entirely satisfactory. He considered it gave the corporation a generosity of spirit not so readily found amongst private landowners; and he told Fortune that the governors had actually shown him:

a tenderness which they all declared they would not have shown you had it been their own private affair.²⁶

This idea of guardianship was another factor seen as an essential difference between the hospital and private estates. Yet the notion of trusteeship was not of course unknown amongst private owners. During the following century, for instance, the seventh Duke of Bedford maintained that he held his estate for the benefit of future heirs.²⁷ Again, recognition of the duty to provide charity on their estates and donate to worthy causes saw the hospital governors and many great private landlords adopting a similar policy. The charity's most frequent subscriptions were to churches and schools,

²³ Neale to Russell, 20 April 1763, TLB 1761-78, p 54.

²⁴ Avery to Fortune, 6 July 1745, TLB 1737-73, p 178.

²⁵ Avery to Fortune, 13 July 1756, *ibid*, p 337.

²⁶ Avery to Fortune, 18 Dec 1755, *ibid*, p 328.

²⁷ D Spring, *The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century: Its Administration*, Baltimore, 1963, pp 51-2.

²² S Pollard, *The Genesis of Modern Management*, 1968, p 246.

although its most generous gestures came in the nineteenth century.

Therefore, in the general course of management, the hospital's estate policy was strikingly similar to that of any other type of landowner, private or institutional. Inevitably its property was also affected by the broad economic trends of the time. The charity shared in the general prosperity of the later eighteenth century, but only by looking more closely at its policy — the attitude to its farms, agents, maintenance, and improvement, leases, rents, and expenditure on the hospital itself — can the more distinctive character of its management be discerned.

III

The general efficiency of the governors was a point greatly in their favour, and although some of their criteria can be questioned, they certainly took much care over the purchase of their property at the beginning of the hospital's history. So deliberate were their negotiations that the Duke of Chandos, from whom the Herefordshire property was bought, despaired at times of ever completing the sale. He complained of:

how these Gentlemen have treated me, by keeping me in hand a year & an half & going down to view the Estate in so publick a manner, & afterwards raising Objections that I believe were never made before in the Purchase of any Estate.²⁸

The length of their deliberations arose in part from a determination to get as good a bargain as possible. On occasion the governors were prepared to pay twenty-five years' purchase for estates unencumbered by legal complications, the normal price, apparently, for land at the end of the 1720s and early 1730s. As Chandos himself wrote:

it is now grown so common a Price (and indeed with reason from the low Interest of Money) that to take less is little else than giving away the Difference.²⁹

However, the governors usually went for

lower prices, and were prepared for long negotiations and complex wrangles over title if they could get twenty-four years or below. For Lumley's Bardfield estate in north Essex, which had to be sold to settle heavy debts, the hospital paid twenty-three years' purchase. For Chandos's Herefordshire property they gave twenty-four years for a third of the land. The remainder was a large jointure estate which was to pass to the hospital on the death of the occupant, Lady Carnarvon. For this the charity paid only twelve years' purchase in the hope of an excellent bargain if Lady Carnarvon were to die, as the governors expected, soon after purchase.³⁰ The negotiations for the Sutton Marsh property in Lincolnshire were complicated by a Chancery dispute and the possibility of heavy maintenance costs, but fourteen years' purchase was still regarded as a satisfactory price.

In their pursuit of a bargain the governors seemed prepared to risk some long-term problems for immediate gains. Their careful survey of the Herefordshire estate had not only revealed the poor state of its buildings but, more significantly, the 'great deal' of land that was 'not worth 5s nay not half a crown p acre'.³¹ This clearly pointed to the number of clay farms in the northern half of the property, and, as it was to prove, such heavy land yielded the poorest rent returns. The Bardfield estate also had a high proportion of such land, while the problems and cost of defending Sutton Marsh from inundation were well known to the trustees during its purchase. That they were prepared to accept such disadvantages for the sake of immediate benefits must be considered a criticism of their management. Yet the estates also had a number of advantages which qualifies this judgement to some extent.

Both the Herefordshire and Essex lands were generously endowed with woodlands

²⁸ Chandos to Davies, 1 Jan 1730, *Chandos Letter Books*, p 101; Huntington Library, San Marino, Cal, Stowe MS ST20-ST57.

²⁹ Chandos to Halsey, 10 June 1729, *ibid*.

³⁰ Lady Carnarvon, however, survived another twenty-two years, and the hospital calculated a loss on the purchase, at compound interest, of £14,300. *Journal*, 1753-63, p 185.

³¹ Copy of Thomas Matthew's letter [undated] to the Duke of Chandos conveying . . . further observations on the Duke's letter received on 17 December, Misc Estates 1729.

which could bring valuable contingent profits. Good land was also to be found in extensive parts of the estates, such as the Beaumont property in north-east Essex for which the governors paid twenty-five years' purchase, and the ryelands of south Herefordshire. Similarly, there was some rich pastureland, which usually yielded more rent than arable, on the Lincolnshire estate. It was in these areas where the governors could expect immediate rent increases, and, indeed, there was some evidence of rents rising slowly in Essex during the period of purchase in the 1720s.³² The Beaumont property soon proved its worth in this respect. Up to 1742 its rents rose by 39 per cent, and on a few farms the increase was as much as 75 per cent. The fact that both the Herefordshire and Essex estates contained mainly enclosed land, and that there was a prospect of expansion by reclamation in Lincolnshire, were other attractions.

The governors evidently appreciated these merits as much as they might regret any weaknesses, for at no time during the eighteenth century, and for most of the nineteenth, did they ever consider selling their estates for some more favourably situated. But from the late eighteenth century they did become more interested in buying urban rather than agricultural property, and accordingly sold detached portions of their estates for this purpose. And, during the following century, many of the drainage problems affecting Sutton Marsh were also eased by the opening of the new Nene outfall in 1830.

Once the land was purchased, the hospital did not seek much direct contact with its farms, although the governors always showed interest in their estates, and would occasionally visit them to inspect their condition. Their reluctance to travel to Herefordshire was undoubtedly not the result of indifference but more the hazards of eighteenth-century roads. When such inspections did occur, the

advice and assistance of local landowners was often sought, and some of these, such as John Biddulph of Ledbury Park, became governors themselves. Visits from London to the nearer Essex and Lincolnshire³³ were far more frequent, especially as the banks, sluices, drains, and jetties of the latter were often in mind.

But such visits were still in the nature of special events. In the general day-to-day supervision of the estates, the trustees had to rely upon their agents. 'At this distance', wrote the clerk in 1765, '[I] can know nothing of their affairs or proceedings any further than as you give me information.'³⁴ The hospital's choice of agents was therefore central to its policy. 'A Person fit to be a Bailiff to a Nobleman or Gentleman would be very sufficiently qualified for the Service', Avery wrote to a local Herefordshire landowner, 'provided he were master enough of his Pen to relate Observations & Proceedings in Writing.'³⁵ One of the earliest Herefordshire agents, William Fortune, had previously been employed by the Duke of Kent.

Clear standing rules were also drawn up for the agents to follow, especially after the considerable trouble the hospital had with some local officers during its early years of landownership. William Fortune was eventually demoted, whilst among the Lincolnshire receivers Maurice Delamore became bankrupt and William Scribo was dismissed. Although the hospital still had occasional problems with later stewards, these early difficulties can be seen as teething troubles for the governors acting collectively as new landlords of an infant corporation. During the century the agents soon settled into dynasties. There were the Yeldhams, father and son, in Essex, and the Woodhouses, uncle and nephew, in Herefordshire. This tendency continued into the

³² K H Burley, *The Economic Development of Essex in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries*, unpubl London PhD thesis, 1957, p 75.

³³ The south Lincolnshire estate lay near the Norfolk border, and was just over 100 miles from London compared with the 140 miles to Herefordshire. There was also the added convenience that the governors on view in Sutton Marsh could, and sometimes did, visit parts of Essex *en route*.

³⁴ Neale to Russell, 29 Jan 1765, TLB 1761-78, p 71.

³⁵ Avery to Westphaling, 29 July 1755, TLB 1737-73, p 310.

nineteenth century when the Armitages of Herefordshire were agents from 1809 to 1889, while similar successions were to be found in both Essex and Lincolnshire.

The various treasurers frequently sent advice to their agents, but there was always the danger of going too far. 'I don't charge you with carelessness or neglect in this or any other affair,' Avery reassured John Yeldham of Essex,

you are as diligent and faithful . . . as any Steward we have, or are likely to have in any Branch of our Estate; but you must bear with my telling you, that were you to write with less assurance that you can never be in the wrong, I shou'd not have at all the lower opinion of your Judgement or fidelity. . . .³⁶

Constant interference, though, could be self-defeating. The treasurers realized that agents needed some freedom of action to protect or build their own status. Some, such as the Woodhouses, were smaller landed off-shoots of well-established families. The treasurers asked for the agents' opinions more than they gave them advice, and they discouraged tenants writing to the hospital direct. The clerk, John Harrison, explained to one applicant for a lease that as the agent had never mentioned his name he could not be recommended.³⁷

There were other areas in its estate administration where the hospital's influence was more direct. The court of committees, for instance, was closely involved in promoting building and repair work, and vouchers for the latter were constantly being demanded. Enclosure of land and consolidation of farms also came under the more direct control of the governors. Although the hospital bought estates which had already been enclosed by private agreement, much of this land was still intermixed with that of others. Consolidation, involving the buying, selling, and exchanging of small pieces of land, continued annually throughout the century, while the only extensive enclosures undertaken con-

sisted of land reclamation on the south Lincolnshire property.

The landowner's influence was also apparent in farm leases, most of which were for a number of years during this period, although the tenants still had a considerable degree of independence in the management of their farms. That the estates were, for the hospital, primarily sources of income was reflected to some extent in their leases. The governors appeared more interested in preventing damage and waste than promoting agricultural improvement. The many preventative clauses included ones forbidding farmers to grow certain crops, such as hops, without permission, preventing tenants from lopping or shredding timber trees, and not allowing them to assign their leases without permission. But there were also many maintenance clauses instructing the tenants to carry out repairs, scour ditches, maintain hedges, and in Herefordshire graft fruit trees and fill the gaps in orchards.

The number of husbandry covenants increased during the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the period they tended to be very general, and were usually of the type exhorting the tenant to conduct his farm in a husbandlike manner. This sort of language certainly continued into the second half of the century, but more detail had also crept in by that time, especially concerning the last few years of a tenancy. In the Herefordshire lease for Wearend farm in 1779, for example, no more than 47 acres of arable could be sown with wheat in the final year, 'and that only on a summer fallow'. During the last three years 47 waggon loads of 'good well-burnt lime' had to be ploughed into the arable, while on expiration of the lease the tenant was also required to leave 47 acres of clover and ryegrass of the first year's growth, and the same amount of the second year's growth.³⁸

It is difficult to know how far these covenants were implemented. That the

³⁶ Avery to Yeldham, 2 Sept 1756, *ibid.*, p 341.

³⁷ Harrison to Russell, 2 Oct 1773, TLB 1761-78, p 255.

³⁸ Hereford RO: C99/III/117; Guy's Hospital Coll.

hospital thought it worthwhile to introduce increasingly detailed covenants does suggest that, in general, the terms were carried out. There seems little point including such detailed clauses if there had only been small hope of implementation. The covenants also reflected the charity's tendency to follow trends rather than initiate new practices. A group of Essex leases showed the hospital following the well-established practice of forbidding the tenants to plough the arable for more than two successive years.³⁹ In a number of instances the governors accepted customs of which they actually disapproved. On some Herefordshire farms the ploughing of land for three or even four consecutive years was allowed because it was local practice; and although the governors on view in Herefordshire in 1781 thought the use of cots to house sheep ill-advised, the clerk still wrote to the agent that as 'it is a custom so generally practised in your County it could not be broke thro'.⁴⁰

The hospital was by no means unusual amongst landowners in thus acknowledging custom and following well-tried methods. Yet there is no evidence that its leases unnecessarily tied the hands of improving tenants. During the century many of its farms did adopt practices associated with improvement. A lease of 1775 showed that the four-course Norfolk rotation was in use on its few south Essex farms. By the 1750s the use of clover, both on fallows to form temporary leys and as a crop to sow with corn, had become a common feature on farms in both Herefordshire and Essex; while at the turn of the century the hospital's Herefordshire agent was promoting the use of swedes as a suitable field crop on heavy land. But such advances were gradual and piecemeal. The hospital had little direct influence on the adoption of new farming methods. It used leases to protect its property and to ensure an outgoing tenant left his land in good heart. Its covenants

contained none of the detailed positive instructions found in some of Coke's later leases.⁴¹ In the management of its lands the hospital preferred to follow the rule than encourage the exception.

The officers, however, were certainly keen to implement its covenants, and were known to take action when they were broken. In 1769 the clerk wrote to a tenant:

You have broke your Covenant in the Lease by Letting the Land to another man without Licence from the Hospital & have forfeited your Lease by so doing. . . .⁴²

The following year he wrote to the Lincolnshire agent of the need to see that covenants were kept, while in 1786 he thought the tenants 'Roberts & Peele ought to be prosecuted as examples for breach of Covenants'. He would have liked the hospital to be rid of them, with all their rents paid, without litigation, but added that 'if they continue in their farms I think their bad conduct shou'd not be passed over in silence'.⁴³

But if the discussion of leases frequently recurred in the correspondence of the hospital's treasurers and clerks, the collection of rents dominated it. This was the primary concern of the governors as landlords, although there were a few other sources of revenue available. Woods were kept permanently in hand because timber sales brought valuable casual profits. Manorial dues were sometimes pursued with interest, but usually yielded very little, while tithes were another form of revenue from land when the governors were the lay proprietors. It was, however, rents from farms which constituted the main source of the charity's income.

The third treasurer, Benjamin Avery, denied that the hospital ever raised its rents unreasonably; and the increases in its gross rents during the second half of the century, after the charity had finished purchasing its main agricultural estates, certainly appeared

³⁹ Essex RO: D/DGh, E15/3.

⁴⁰ Harrison to Keyse, 20 June 1781, TLB 1778-1807, p 52.

⁴¹ J D Chambers and G E Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1880*, 1966, p 47. R A C Parker, *Coke of Norfolk*, 1975, esp pp 138-45.

⁴² Harrison to Gould, 16 Oct 1769, TLB 1761-78, p 158.

⁴³ Harrison to Russell, 9 Dec 1786, TLB 1778-1807, p 155.

moderate in comparison with those of some other landowners. From 1760 to 1793 the hospital's gross agricultural rents rose by 28 per cent. In Herefordshire and Essex they increased by over 30 per cent, but the Lincolnshire estate lagged behind with a rise of only 18.5 per cent.⁴⁴ In comparison, from 1750 to 1790 the Duke of Kingston gathered an extra 48 per cent, while Lord Monson's rents increased by 44.5 per cent.⁴⁵ However, the Duke of Ancaster's Lincolnshire lands, like those of the hospital in the same county, experienced a modest rise from the late 1750s of between 22 per cent and 29 per cent although the increase on his Essex estate at Colchester was a more impressive 45 per cent.⁴⁶

Throughout its history the hospital never experienced the considerable rent increases enjoyed by some estates. During the French wars the difference was even more marked than previously. While the hospital's gross agricultural rents rose by 54 per cent, some other properties, such as those of the Duke of Kingston and the Kent estates of Aylesford and Radnor, recorded rises of well over 100 per cent.⁴⁷ But this does not mean that the governors were necessarily more sympathetic to their tenants in this respect than other landowners. They were just as anxious to get as much rent as they could. In 1738 the second treasurer had bluntly declared, 'the Hospitall is not for buying anything but what will produce Profit'.⁴⁸ Among the reasons for

the generally modest increase in the charity's rents was the important one that both the Herefordshire and Essex holdings contained a considerable amount of clay land — one of the most difficult, expensive, and unrewarding soils to work. Yet even in comparison with some other Herefordshire estates, the hospital's performance was uninspiring. While its gross rents for that county rose by 58 per cent during the wars, those on Cornewall's 6500-acre property at Moccas went up by as much as 119 per cent.⁴⁹ Contemporary rental records of the 5000-acre Foley estate at Stoke Edith run from 1771 to the early years of the war only; but to 1799 it too showed a larger increase than that on the charity's estate, though only by 46 per cent compared with the hospital's 35 per cent.⁵⁰ In Lincolnshire, though, the performance was far better than before the wars. The rise in rent kept up well with some of the neighbouring estates, with the hospital's 74 per cent increase comparing favourably with the 80 per cent rise on Lord Monson's much larger property.⁵¹

However, if the charity's rent increases were moderate, the demand for payment of arrears was more extreme. The treasurer was at his most acrimonious when dealing with this subject. One of the complaints about William Fortune was his neglect to collect, or at least explain, the large arrears of rent in Herefordshire. In 1745 Avery demanded the agent should 'multiply distresses' for the non-payment of rent, although they might 'make a noise in a Country'.⁵² In 1753 he found an Essex tenant's three years of arrears 'frighten-

⁴⁴ During the late eighteenth century the Sutton Marsh rent did not fulfil the promise of the 'very rich strong soil' which had attracted the governors on purchase. (Report of the Sub-committee . . . to view Sutton Marsh, p 10, SC 1725.) However, Grigg points out the drainage problems and backwardness of farming in south Lincolnshire at this time. He says: ' . . . the majority of farmers carried on traditional ways and general productivity did not rise': D Grigg, *The Agricultural Revolution in South Lincolnshire*, 1966, p 191. The hospital's modest rent increases undoubtedly reflected this situation to some extent.

⁴⁵ G E Mingay, *Landownership and Agrarian Trends in the Eighteenth Century*, unpubl Nottingham PhD thesis, 1958, p 78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p 486.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p 492.

⁴⁸ Hollister to Fortune, 11 April 1738, TLB 1737-73, p 13.

⁴⁹ Hereford RO: J56/III/1-20, Rent Account, Moccas estate. The increase from 1814 to 1815 was as much as 50.5 per cent, but the 1814 rent was exceptional in a series which had been steadily increasing to the 1815 figure of £8287 for most of the year.

⁵⁰ Hereford RO: F/H3/Rentals 1771-1803, Foley MS. This series is incomplete. There was also a 37 per cent rise from 1799 to 1801 (the amount of rent for 1800 is missing); but this is quite unusual in a run of generally modest annual changes before this date, and was probably the result of a revaluation.

⁵¹ Mingay, thesis, op cit, p 492.

⁵² Avery to Fortune, 17 Jan 1745, TLB 1737-73, p 170.

ing⁵³ while in October 1759 he adopted his most sanctimonious tone when he thought the 'poor pittance' from Herefordshire a meagre reward for the repairs and new buildings the hospital had undertaken, and hoped 'for a better share of their produce to help answer the weekly disbursements of this House of Charity . . .'.⁵⁴

The Herefordshire property was to claim the largest share in the hospital's expenditure on estates for that year, and the charity actually overspent by £476 on its general account. In fact, in proportion to its gross income, the amounts spent on the estates in the late 1750s and early 1760s were the highest for the century. In 1758 it was 49 per cent, and in the following year 55 per cent. In 1760 the governors spent over £5200 on their property, representing 44 per cent of their income. The reason for such high expenditure during these years is partly explained by the heavy building and repair work done on the recently acquired jointure estate in Herefordshire, as well as some new jetties which were installed on the Lincolnshire coast. The cost of maintenance in Lincolnshire actually made this the most expensive estate to run during the eighteenth century, as the outgoings rarely fell below 40 per cent of the rent. In 1762 and 1775 the cost of a new embankment and heavy repair work pushed up the total outgoings to 41 per cent and 42 per cent respectively of the hospital's whole gross income for those years. But on average, from 1748 when the Lincolnshire property was bought to 1800 the expenditure on all the hospital's estates was a third of the corporation's gross income. This was the margin between gross and net rents before any expenditure on the hospital itself was made.

Although they spent as much as a third of their gross income on the agricultural property,⁵⁵ the governors could still not be

regarded as notable improving landlords. It is difficult to separate the amount spent on permanent improvements from running costs, but on the item 'building and repairs' the hospital spent from 1762 to 1815 an average of 9.5 per cent of its gross income from all its estates.⁵⁶ This is 2 per cent below the average for this period given by Holderness on the 'less renowned estates' of East Anglia,⁵⁷ although it does compare favourably with the amount spent on property outside this area. On his Nottinghamshire estate, the Duke of Kingston, for instance, devoted only 1 to 5 per cent of his gross income on this item during most of the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ It is also true that the hospital's buildings in Herefordshire were praised by both reporters to the Board of Agriculture, while in the early 1760s the trustees also constructed a new embankment in Lincolnshire for £1275, and later enclosed over 200 acres of salt marshes at a cost of almost £1000 in 1768-69. A few years afterwards a further £850 was approved to strengthen the weaker parts of the coastline. This Lincolnshire policy, however, was as much survival as improvement, and from 1762 to 1815 the hospital had to spend as much on its coastal defences as on buildings and repairs. The governors also refused to embank another 348 acres of salt marsh in 1777, estimated at £4864, because it was considered too expensive, while in 1771 they admitted blame for carrying out 'no material repairs . . . for several years'⁵⁹ to the part of the Lutton Leam outfall which cut through its land. Indeed, when William Skelton was appointed assistant agent in 1803 he wrote that 'the drainage was in a wretched state', and added that there was hardly any fencing

⁵³ Avery to Bevan, 24 Feb 1753, *ibid*, p 284.

⁵⁴ Avery to Woodhouse, 30 Oct 1759, *ibid*, p 385.

⁵⁵ This expenditure included taxes, rates, repairs and buildings, surveys and maps, maintenance of sea banks and fences, and the expenses of administration, such as agents' salaries.

⁵⁶ The category 'buildings and repairs' is first recorded in the central abstracts in 1762. During the period, more was spent on this item in Herefordshire and Essex than in Lincolnshire.

⁵⁷ B A Holderness, 'Landlord's Capital Formation in East Anglia', 1750-1870, *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXV, 3, 1972, p 440.

⁵⁸ Mingay, *English Landed Society*, *op cit*, p 178; Holderness, *ibid*, p 442.

⁵⁹ 25 June 1771, *Court of Committees Minute Book*, 1756-76, p 192.

and 'only about six convenient Farm-houses . . . but scarcely any other Buildings'.⁶⁰

On the whole, the governors were more maintainers than improvers of their estates during this period. The hospital always had prior claim on the funds. In the second half of the eighteenth century, from 1748, an average of 61 per cent of total revenue was spent on it, while a mere 5.7 per cent provided the average balance. During these years expenditure on the hospital only once fell below 50 per cent, while in the 1790s it usually hovered around 70 per cent. In 1795 it claimed as much as 81 per cent of the total revenue, but that year the charity as a whole spent 15 per cent beyond its income. This was a period when considerable improvements were being made to the main building itself. When John Howard visited Guy's in 1788 he noted that 'the alterations in this hospital are to go on', and although it was situated

in a very close part of the town, and surrounded with buildings, they are highly commendable, that the patients may enjoy the advantages of a free circulation of air.⁶¹

In the fifteen years from 1800 the improvements continued apace, and claimed on average as much as 88 per cent of the charity's gross income from rents. As this expansion coincided with some disastrously expensive storm damage in Lincolnshire the governors would have spent beyond their income every year but for some substantial timber sales which reduced the number of deficit years to seven.

This policy of hospital development, accelerating from the late eighteenth century, coincided with the acquisition of more land surrounding the charity in Southwark. The trustees had been interested in buying such property from the beginning of the hospital's history, and small pieces were periodically

acquired throughout the century. In 1789 the governors bought the more substantial Snowsfield estate for £4200. This can be seen as the start of a more determined policy to acquire neighbouring property, one which culminated in 1861 with the purchase of the Holcombe estate for £27,000. With the governors controlling as much as possible of the area they could, for instance, convert houses into accommodation for hospital staff, rid the neighbourhood of noisome public houses, or prevent the nearby buildings affecting the light in the wards. The policy also ensured the physical expansion of the hospital itself, and during the eighteenth century impressive developments occurred. The charity's first lecture theatre was built in 1770, the west wing completed ten years later, while the 1780s saw not only the construction of a millhouse and mill for grinding drugs but also the important alterations to the wards observed by John Howard. Payment for such improvements and acquisitions was made either out of the proceeds of large timber sales or by selling detached portions of the agricultural holdings. The estates were always made to serve the charity — a policy which constantly influenced the governors in the management of their property.

IV

In their correspondence a number of the treasurers were clearly conscious of a difference between institutional and private landowners. Avery wrote to the Herefordshire agent that the corporations in London suspected that:

their rents in these remote Counties are neither paid so expeditiously or the repairs done on so reasonable Terms as the Gentlemen who reside near their Estates [who] have the one paid and the other performed.⁶²

His predecessor had complained that the hospital had been unfairly treated in a particular transaction with a certain Roberts because 'He tells you wee don't lay out our

⁶⁰ W Skelton, *A Report on the condition and management of the several Farms in the County of Lincoln, the property . . . of Guy's Hospital*, 1853, p 27; Lincs Bundle 284.

⁶¹ J Howard, *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe . . . together with . . . Additional Remarks on the Present State of those [prisons and hospitals] in Great Britain and Ireland*, 1791, pp 135–6.

⁶² Avery to Keyse, 9 Jan 1758, TLB 1737–73, p 374.

own money & may afford good Rates'.⁶³ It has been seen that this difference between public and private landlords can be exaggerated. The similarities were often more striking, and at times it seems as if the treasurers were trying to make a distinction when one hardly existed.

They were also anxious to appear amongst fellow landlords in as favourable a light as possible. Hollister wrote that

the Hospitall should be Esteem'd to be good Landlords, & yett, I would not Indulge the Tenants in any thing, which should make them think us weak Landlords instead of Good Ones.⁶⁴

There were certainly gestures of goodwill, and some distressed tenants were helped with their arrears. Donations were given to worthy causes. Tenant improvements, such as the drainage of Thaxted Lodge in Essex during the 1730s, were sometimes encouraged and financially assisted. Yet the governors were never sweeping in their generosity either to the tenants or parishioners. Acts of kindness were tempered by expediency; and it was the fact of the corporation which so qualified their benevolence. In discussing distressed tenants in the 1780s, the clerk wrote to one of them,

it is not to be expected that the Gov^{rs} of the Hospital as Trustees of a Charity can grant them such relief as you or they may wish or expect.⁶⁵

Forty years earlier Hollister had summed up the accepted position:

... tho' I am truly unwilling to ruin a Family, I must & will do All I can to prevent Loss to the Hospitall...⁶⁶

The remoteness of the hospital seemed to underline an attitude to the tenantry and provision of charity which was correct but also a little cold. Although the governors expressed interest in their property, the indefinable and personal bond which often existed between the private landlord and his estate could not so easily be achieved by an

institution. Even though the scattered nature of many estates meant that some degree of absenteeism was unavoidable, the owner's physical presence in his permanent home helped to create such a bond with his tenants. A distant corporation could have no such rapport. The governors had no local political interests to pursue for the hospital, they took no part in social activities, and they had no home farm from which they could promote agricultural improvements. It was essentially government by committee. When a particularly important matter arose, such as the buying of an estate or enquiry into the conduct of an agent, a sub-committee was usually formed; and this was required to report its findings to the court of committees. Much consideration was given to the problems of management. Standing rules were carefully drawn up, and some treasurers sent a battery of instructions to the local agents. The regard for their trust made the governors generally unadventurous in their policies. They did not particularly discourage agricultural improvement, but often preferred to accept established custom as the safer course to take. Indeed, on their furthest estate they appeared so remote during this period that too heavy a responsibility fell upon the local stewards. From 1780, and especially during the war years, the younger James Woodhouse became so independent that he boldly ignored the rules for purchasing pieces of land, was able to filch from timber sales, and also bought land for himself from the governors at below the market price. He became more landlord than representative; but at least he did provide a personal touch, albeit an unsavoury one, which a distant committee found impossible to give.

Yet in the general management of its estates to 1815 Guy's hospital does not emerge as a particularly inefficient, harsh or demanding landlord. The governors showed a constant anxiety to avoid waste and neglect on their farms, and do not appear as heartless rackrenters. Like other landowners they pursued rent increases to yield more income,

⁶³ Hollister to Fortune, 4 [?] 1739, *ibid*, p 112.

⁶⁴ Hollister to Fortune, 9 Sept 1738, *ibid*, p 26.

⁶⁵ Harrison to Harvey, 12 Jan 1781, TLB 1778-1807, p 42.

⁶⁶ Hollister to Yeldham, 12 July 1740, TLB 1737-73, p 71.

but during this period they were generally less forward in raising their rents. It is true that from another point of view this policy can be criticized. The hospital relied on rents for its survival, and as the modest increases also reflected to some extent the type of land the corporation owned the governors can be condemned as much for their initial choice of property as praised for any generous spirit they might display. On the other hand, their management did not lead to neglect of the charity itself. At certain times there were indeed some unfavourable reports of conditions inside the wards,⁶⁷ and there was no increase in the number of resident patients during this period, but some major improvements to the institution were made in every decade. On the whole, the administrators

demonstrated their clear aim to protect the hospital's interests, and yet, in doing so, did not abuse their agricultural holdings. The estates carried no social prestige for them, and unlike a number of private landlords there was no desire for aggrandisement. It was 'not the wish of the Gov^{ts} to purchase for the sake of encreasing their property'.⁶⁸ Their stately home was the hospital; but the only similarity it had with the nobleman's country house was that it 'was the hub of the landlord's existence'.⁶⁹ Its purpose was to serve the poor, not to reflect ostentation and grandeur. It was a constant trust, and the estates were bought solely for the purpose of its maintenance.

⁶⁷ G Williams, *The Age of Agony*, 1975, pp 100-1.

⁶⁸ Harrison to Woodhouse, 21 June 1781, TLB 1778-1807, p 53.

⁶⁹ Mingay, *English Landed Society*, op cit, p 209.

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