

The Decline of the Small Landowner in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England: Some Regional Considerations¹

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TOWARDS the end of the nineteenth century considerable concern was expressed about the future of agriculture and the structure of English land-ownership. It was widely believed that the greater magnates had been steadily accumulating property at the expense of the small owner, and evidence derived from the 1861 census appeared to confirm a trend towards concentration of land holdings. The survey of landowners carried out in 1873, commonly known as the 'new domesday', was partly inspired by the desire of several territorial aristocrats to explode what they considered to be the myth of monopoly control. They hoped thereby to deflate the land reform movement, which had been quick to exploit the propaganda value of the 1861 figures. In fact, the census actually served to strengthen the radicals' case since it was shown that 80 per cent of the land was in the hands of fewer than 7000 proprietors.² Clearly small owners had been displaced in large numbers, and, perhaps not surprisingly, historians began to ask when this had happened. Equally unsurprisingly common agreement was not to be found; indeed, since the 1880's different schools of thought have placed the blame for decline on the post-1815 agricultural depression, the parliamentary enclosure movement, and the economic

conditions of the century or so to 1760. Attempts have been made to synthesize these views and to decide between their relative merits, but only recently have historians begun to recognize that the timing of decline might have varied regionally according to local agricultural characteristics.³ In this paper evidence drawn from Cumbria will be tested against existing theories of small owner displacement. By looking at a region well away from the Midland counties, where the most detailed research has been concentrated, it is hoped to develop this theme of regional variation, and to draw some general conclusions relevant to the overall debate about decline.⁴

I

One of the earliest hypotheses concerning small owner decline was put forward by John Rae in the 1880's. Using the Board of Agriculture reports prepared in the 1790's he reached the conclusion that 'up till the close of the eighteenth century no really serious breach had as yet been made in the ranks of the yeomanry, if indeed their ranks had not positively risen'. In his opinion the blame for decline could be placed on the agricultural depression which

¹ An earlier version of this paper was read to the staff research seminar of the Nottingham University History Department. I should like to express my gratitude to members of that seminar for helpful criticisms. For reading and commenting upon the paper at various stages of preparation I should like to thank Dr Joan Thirsk, Dr Michael Turner and Mr Alan Cameron.

² J Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, new edn, Leicester, 1971, pp 8-13.

³ See especially the work of Joan Thirsk, 'Seventeenth Century Agriculture and Social Change', in *Land, Church and People*, supplement to the *Ag Hist Rev*, XVIII, 1970, pp 148-77. Dr Thirsk has developed the theme in an unpublished paper, 'The Disappearance of the English Peasantry', which was read to the University of London Centre of International and Area Studies Peasant Seminar, March 1974.

⁴ By 'small owner' is meant a copy or freeholder with a small holding worked in the main as a family farm. In this paper I do not intend to look at the question of definition, and shall therefore avoid debatable terms such as 'peasant'.

followed the Napoleonic wars: 'when the war ceased the whole fabric they had built for themselves fell in . . . they may be said to have fallen at Waterloo'. Some survived, and Rae cites the example of the Isle of Axholme in Lincolnshire; but, in general, economic conditions in the wake of the war acted against the small owner. Any doubts about this could be dispelled by looking at the reports produced during the 1830's by the Agricultural Distress committees.⁵ Although Rae's argument has been largely ignored in the twentieth century it is by no means an unreasonable one. Quite recently Thompson has restated it along the lines that a stability thesis for the eighteenth-century small owner is just as plausible as one of decline, given the similarity of Gregory King's and Patrick Colquhoun's figures, for 1688 and 1803 respectively.⁶

In the early years of the twentieth century a number of writers argued that parliamentary enclosure was the chief cause of small owner decline. An agricultural revolution combined with enclosure seemed to them to provide reasons for positing a corresponding increase in farm sizes and a diminution of occupiers (small owners and tenant farmers). According to Gonner, 'there is little room for wonder at the steady and widespread disappearance of the small farmer, and especially of the small owner cultivating his own little farm'.⁷ Such a view was particularly attractive to radical historians anxious to picture aggressive capitalist landowners trampling over the rights of small owners in order to establish large tenant farms. For the Hammonds, enclosure was fatal to the small owner, the cottager and the squatter. In their opinion the costs involved severely undermined the small owner, and even if

he could meet these he seldom survived the loss of fallow and stubble pasture. The cottagers' position was equally bad if not worse: 'before enclosure the cottager was a labourer with land, after enclosure he was a labourer without land'.⁸ Lord Ernle shared this view: 'hundreds of cottagers, deprived of the commons, experienced that lack of rural employment which drove them into the towns in search of work'.⁹ Such opinions assumed that enclosure was a massive swindle which permanently undermined the small man in favour of the capitalist landowner, and judging from the literature many contemporaries also thought in this way. It would be short-sighted to argue that no one left the land as a result of enclosure, but recent research has played down the importance of the movement for depopulation. Chambers suggested that

the enclosure acts had the effect of further reducing, but not of destroying, the remaining English peasantry . . . since the rural population was unmistakably on the increase during this time, the contribution which the dispossessed made to the labour force came, in the majority of cases from the unabsorbed surplus, not from the main body.¹⁰

Some correlation cannot be denied. Hunt's study of Leicestershire has shown a steady transfer of land into larger units during the period 1780-1831; Turner's work on Buckinghamshire has led him to question the universality of Chambers' argument; Hoskins regarded the enclosure award of 1766 as being ultimately responsible for the end of the old peasant community in Wigston Magna; and Martin has shown that in parts of Warwickshire considerable disruption followed enclosure.¹¹ Econometric models

⁵ John Rae, 'Why Have the Yeomanry Perished', *Contemporary Review*, XLIV, 1883, pp 551-3.

⁶ F M L Thompson, 'Landownership and Economic Growth in England in the Eighteenth Century', in E L Jones and S. J. Woolf (eds), *Agrarian Change and Economic Development*, 1969, pp 42-9.

⁷ E C K Gonner, *Common Land and Inclosure*, 1912, p 369.

⁸ J L Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer*, new edn, 1978, pp 58-9.

⁹ Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, 6th edn 1961, p 301. Other books taking a similar line were Gilbert Slater, *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields*, 1907; W Hasbach, *History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, 1908, and H Levy, *Large and Small Holdings*, Cambridge, 1911.

¹⁰ J D Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, V, 1952-53, p 335.

¹¹ H G Hunt, 'Landownership and Enclosure, 1750-1830', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XI, 1958-59, pp 497-505; M E Turner, 'Parliamentary Enclosure and Landownership Change in Buckinghamshire', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXVIII, 1975, pp 565-81; W G Hoskins,

have added weight to this argument. Crafts, for example, has suggested that 'at a county level there was a small but perceptible positive association between Parliamentary enclosure of common fields and outmigration'.¹² Finally, several writers have suggested that whatever the position of the cottager, small owner-occupiers were not in general severely affected by enclosure. There may even have been an increase in both numbers and acreage during the 1780-1832 period.¹³

Decline as a phenomenon pre-dating the parliamentary enclosure movement has been supported by a line of commentators stretching back to Marx. It was his opinion that

As late as the last decade of the seventeenth century the yeomanry, as an independent peasantry, formed a more numerous class than did the farmers. . . . By about 1750 the yeoman had disappeared, and, in the closing decades of the eighteenth century the last traces of communal ownership of land followed in their train.¹⁴

Substantial backing for this thesis can be found in the work of A H Johnson, based on the land tax records, and published two years before the Hammonds' study. Although they consulted Johnson's work, the Hammonds ignored his conclusion that decline preceded Parliamentary enclosure: ' . . . by far the most serious period for the small owner was at the close of the seven-

teenth and during the first half of the eighteenth century'.¹⁵ Nor were H L Gray's findings about Oxfordshire, published in 1910, taken seriously, even though they supported Johnson's findings, again using land tax returns. This data suggested that during the war years small owners enjoyed something of a renaissance, because agricultural prices were high enough to make small holdings profitable. Yet such arguments had little impact, and the interpretation remained out of favour even after Davies published similar findings in 1927 for a group of Midland counties. Substantive backing eventually came from Habakkuk's work on landownership. He argued that falling agricultural prices through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, coupled with heavy government taxation from the 1690's, combined to squeeze the small man. His property became attractive to *nouveaux riches* anxious to invest part of their fortune in property, and he himself deserted the land.¹⁶ Mingay has taken the argument further, suggesting that in the century or so prior to 1780 'small farmers who owned their land did decline drastically . . . small owner occupiers were not very severely affected by enclosure'. At the same time he has been careful to point out that this was not a wholesale changeover because even though during the eighteenth century 'small farms between 21 and 100 acres were halved in number, while farms of over 100 acres were correspondingly increased', as late as 1878 70 per cent of tenant farms were of less than 100 acres.¹⁷

On the face of things these three hypotheses cannot be reconciled. All three, however, are general arguments, though often largely based on local evidence, and recent

The Midland Peasant, 1957, p 267; J M Martin, 'The Small Landowner and Parliamentary Enclosure in Warwickshire', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXXII, 1979, pp 328-43.

¹² N F R Crafts, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply Revisited', *Expl Econ Hist*, XV, 1978, p 182. See also B D Baack and R P Thomas, 'The Enclosure Movement and the Supply of Labour during the Industrial Revolution', *Jour European Econ Hist*, III, 1974, pp 401-23; Jon S Cohen and Martin L Weitzman, 'Enclosures and Depopulation: A Marxian Analysis', in W N Parker and E L Jones (eds), *European Peasants and their Markets*, Princeton, 1975, pp 175-6.

¹³ A H Johnson, *The Disappearance of the Small Landowner*, 2nd edn, Oxford, 1963. H L Gray, 'Yeoman Farming in Oxfordshire from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth', *Quart Jour Economics*, XXIV, 1910, pp 293-326. E Davies, 'The Small Landowner 1780-1832 in the light of the Land Tax Assessments', *Econ Hist Rev*, I, 1927, pp 87-113.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital*, II, Everyman edn, London, 1930, pp 800-1, 803, 829-30. On Marx's view of peasants see also Michael Duggett, 'Marx on Peasants', *Jour Peasant Studies*, II, 1975, pp 167-8.

¹⁵ Johnson, op cit, p 147.

¹⁶ Gray, loc cit; Davies, loc cit; H J Habakkuk, 'La disparition du paysan anglais', *Annales ESC*, XX, 1965, pp 649-63.

¹⁷ G E Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer in the Age of the Industrial Revolution*, 1968, pp 16, 24, 30; 'The Size of Farms in the Eighteenth Century', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XIV, 1961-62, pp 480-4.

studies have suggested that regional characteristics may have produced very different responses and results. The seventeenth-century price fall, which is integral to the argument for pre-1780 decline, was mainly a grain growers' problem: as Joan Thirsk has pointed out, 'the economics of smallholdings in pastoral regions were not such as to drive the peasant worker from the land'.¹⁸ Those who suffered most difficulty were farmers in less well-favoured situations, particularly on the heavy Midland clays, where the possibilities for intensifying and diversifying output to offset the effects of low prices were restricted. Their solution to the crisis was to convert common field arable to permanent pasture.¹⁹ Such evidence suggests that regional disparities may have been considerable, yet most of the work undertaken on land tax data has been concentrated in the Midland counties. By looking at a region well away from the Midland clays and reputedly with little unenclosed open field by the eighteenth century it may be possible to obtain a clearer picture of how the small owner was faring.

II

The Cumbrian small owner was the 'yeoman': a title accepted by the community as being applicable to anyone holding an estate of inheritance, either freehold or customary tenure. In addition, a number of tenant farmers also used the style. The key feature of customary tenure, and the one which made it 'very different from the copyholds of the south',²⁰ was in the method of land conveyancing. The purchase, sale or mortgage of customary prop-

erty was transacted by title deed. Although enrolment in the manor court usually followed, the use of title deeds established that the tenants were virtually freeholders. Hence the term yeoman, used to describe more or less anyone to whom a gentry style was not applicable.

Estimation of numbers is almost impossible. According to a correspondent of the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1766, there were then about 10,000 customary tenants in Cumberland, but this can have been little more than a guess. Bailey and Culley, the Cumberland agricultural reporters of the 1790's, suggested that two-thirds of the county's land was occupied by customary tenants: 'there are probably few counties where property in land is divided into such small parcels as in Cumberland and the small properties so universally occupied by the owners'. A correspondent of Lord Lowther in 1805 claimed that 'property in the counties of Cumberland and Westmorland is very much divided, perhaps more so than any other county in England'. As late as 1833 a witness before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Agriculture could report that 'property is more divided here I suppose than in any other part of the kingdom'.²¹

These commentators were unwilling to give figures, but the size of holdings, and consequently of incomes, must generally have been small. At Witherslack, in the south of the region, 42.9 per cent of the tenants in 1736 held less than 10 acres, the same proportion held between 10 and 35 acres, and only 14.3 per cent held more than 50 acres. The third group comprised 5 men, who between them held 41 per cent of the customary property. The average size of holding was 15.7 acres, and the largest 104.25. In Lupton, one of the Kirkby Lonsdale townships, 'almost all the

¹⁸ Thirsk, 'Seventeenth Century Agriculture', p 177. See also E L Jones, 'Agricultural Origins of Industry', *Past and Present*, 40, 1968, pp 58-71.

¹⁹ John Broad, 'Alternate Husbandry and Permanent Pasture in the Midlands, 1650-1800', *Ag Hist Rev*, XXVIII, 2, 1980, pp 77-89. M Turner, *English Parliamentary Enclosure*, Folkestone, 1980, pp 135-51.

²⁰ Carlisle Record Office (CRO) D/Lons/W, James Lowther to John Spedding, 12 June 1725.

²¹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXXVI, 1766, p 582; J Bailey and G Culley, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cumberland*, Newcastle, 1797, p 178; CRO D/Bs, Tax Commissioners Letters, ? to Lord Lowther, 27 Feb 1805; *BPP*, 1833 (612) V, p 309.

land was held by customary tenants with holdings of between 15 and 40 acres apiece, and some rights in the common grazing'.²² Size was reflected in incomes. At Wither-slack 28.6 per cent of the tenants held land with an annual value of £5 or less, 17.1 per cent of over £20, and 54.3 per cent of between £5 and £20. These figures make no allowance for additional holdings outside the parish, but other writers imply that such levels were not unusual. The *Gentleman's Magazine* correspondent quoted minimum-maximum income figures for Cumberland of £10 and £100. In the 1790's Bailey and Culley gave figures of between £15 and £30, with only a few above £100, while Andrew Pringle, the Westmorland reporter for the Board of Agriculture, suggested that incomes were between £10 and £50. County historian, William Hutchinson, claimed in 1794 that many of the Cumberland customary tenants had an income of less than £10 a year, but a writer of 1811 suggested that yeomen were then worth between £10 and £200 or even £300 annually. This evidence of rising prosperity is also reflected in a claim made in 1872 that Cumbrian yeomen then averaged around £150, although in part this reflected the disappearance of many of the smallest holdings in the interim.²³

Given the reluctance of contemporaries to enumerate the Cumbrian yeomanry it is hardly surprising that any attempt to measure decline in quantitative terms is impossible. However, general trends can be established, and these suggest that numbers held steady between the sixteenth and

eighteenth centuries, before declining in the nineteenth. In the sixteenth century population growth created impoverished cottagers and sub-tenants who scratched out a living on tiny plots of poor land. Many of these did not survive for long, and numbers began to decline in the seventeenth century. The process was slightly accelerated after 1660 by a change of policy on the part of landowners with regard to customary property. Even so, by 1700 the elimination of small holders was not very far advanced. Gradual erosion continued in the first half of the eighteenth century. A tentative estimate suggests that property to the value of around £15,000 may have passed to the aristocracy between 1680 and 1750, and more would also have passed to the gentry.²⁴

The first evidence that decline was becoming sufficiently obvious to elicit contemporary comment comes only in the second half of the eighteenth century. In about 1770 the vicar of Beetham, Westmorland, noted in the Winster valley that 'I find everywhere the Yeomandry extinct, not an Owner lives on his Estate'. Dorothy Wordsworth, not perhaps the most reliable of witnesses, wrote in 1800 of how 'all those that have small estates are forced to sell and all the land goes into one hand'.²⁵ The Napoleonic war years witnessed a reversal of any trend in the direction of decline since, along with other regions, Cumbria benefited from the high agricultural prices of the period. Evidence to the Agricultural Distress committee of 1833 implies that these were optimistic years for Cumbrian farmers, many of whom invested in their estates in order to improve them.

It was the years following the cessation of hostilities which appear to have been critical for the Cumbrian yeoman. This

²² G P Jones, 'The Wither Slack Survey, 1736', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, 2nd ser (CW2), LXIX, 1969, p 214; *A Short History of the Manor and Parish of Wither Slack to 1850*, Kendal, 1971, pp 13-14; A Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism*, Oxford, 1978, p 89.

²³ Jones, loc cit, p 215. C M L Bouch and G P Jones, *A Short Economic and Social History of the Lake Counties 1500-1830*, Manchester, 1961, p 228; Bailey and Culley, op cit, p 178; A Pringle, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Westmorland*, Newcastle, 1797, p 262; W Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 1794, I, p 39; [Rev Mr Hodgson], *Westmorland*, 1811, p 8; H Lonsdale, *The Worthies of Cumberland The Howards*, 1872, p 202; *Gent's Mag*, XXXVI, 1766, p 582.

²⁴ A Appleby, *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England*, Liverpool, 1978, pp 66, 158-9, 182-9; J V Beckett, 'Landownership in Cumbria 1680-1750', unpubl Univ Lancaster PhD thesis, 1975, p 358.

²⁵ J R Ford, ed, *The Beetham Repository*, 1770, Kendal, 1906, pp 135-6; W Knight, ed, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 1897, I, p 33.

was the message conveyed to the 1833 Select Committee on Agriculture by William Blamire, MP for East Cumberland and nephew of the famous agricultural improver, John Christian Curwen. Since 1815 he had noted a considerable diminution in the number of small owners, 'and the situation of those who are still in existence is considerably worse than it was; there are very few of them whose properties are altogether unencumbered . . . their number is constantly diminishing'. In his opinion the changes since Waterloo were greater than in any preceding period. Blamire repeated his allegations to a similar committee which reported 4 years later: the condition of the yeomanry, he claimed, 'at the present moment is truly lamentable; a vast number of those properties has passed from the possession of the yeoman, and there are others that must ere long pass away'.²⁶ Other evidence tells a similar tale. The yeoman farming 15-40 acres in the village of Dalston, a few miles south of Carlisle, disappeared in the post-war years. The number of Westmorland yeomen fell dramatically in the two decades between the compilation of Parson and White's *Directory* (1829), and that of Mannex (1849). *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature* claimed in 1838 that the whole race was 'dwindling away'. Rae, writing in 1883, emphasized the general evidence for post-1815 decline. Significantly, when Dickinson wrote his prize essay on Cumberland agriculture in 1852 he took the small owner to be the man with 40-100 acres, thereby suggesting that there was no longer a viable group below that level.²⁷

The evidence of decline is reasonably conclusive, but the timing raises several interesting questions. Why, for example,

were the Cumbrian yeomen able to ride out the 1660-1780 period? What, if any responsibility for decline attaches to the Parliamentary enclosure movement? Finally, what significance does the timing have for general arguments relating to the disappearance of the small owner? Some attempt to find answers will be made in the following sections.

III

Perhaps the major reason why the 1660-1780 period was relatively unimportant in the decline process was that Habakkuk's arguments do not stand up when applied to Cumbria. Falling grain prices had a beneficial effect in pastoral regions, since any surplus income accruing as a result of cheap bread was likely to be spent on meat and dairy products. As a result their prices remained steady. Although the evidence is scanty the Cumbrian cattle trade appears to have been buoyant in the early years of the eighteenth century, at least until the cattle plague interrupted business in the 1740's. The primacy of cattle rather than sheep in the regional economy, and the rising value of stock recorded in inventories, suggests that agricultural conditions were favourable.

Heavy taxation, the bugbear of small owners further south, hardly touched the north-west. Generations of MPs had ensured that Cumberland and Westmorland enjoyed a reputation for poverty. Whatever the truth of this assertion, it enabled the two counties to secure relatively favourable assessments when the land tax was introduced in the 1690's. Rather than the 4 shillings in the pound which ought to have been paid their assessment worked out nearer to 9d. From 1705 customary tenants were expected to pay land tax only if the rent on any particular property was less than 20 shillings, and properties could not be grouped together in order to exceed the limit. Although this provision ensured

²⁶ BPP, 1833 (612) V, pp 309-11, 1837 (464) V, pp 315-17.

²⁷ J G Waddington, 'Dalston 1720-1880', Univ Lancaster MA thesis, 1972, pp 80-2; G P Jones, 'The Decline of the Yeomanry in the Lake Counties', *CW2*, LXII, 1962, p 218; 'The Cumberland Statesman', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature*, 28 Aug 1858, p 139; Rae, loc cit, p 553; W Dickinson, 'On the Farming of Cumberland', *JRASE*, XIII, 1852, p 220.

that most customary tenants should have been rated the practice varied. At Holme Cultram in Cumberland in 1731 full land tax was allowed on rents both above and below 20 shillings. By contrast, in 1706 Benjamin Browne, a prosperous yeoman in the Westmorland village of Troutbeck, was paying tax even though his rent exceeded 20 shillings.²⁸ On a 4 shilling rate he paid £1 3s, hardly a crippling burden for one of the region's more substantial customary estate owners.

The nature of this prosperity is interesting. Marshall has demonstrated from inventory evidence a considerable increase in wealth,²⁹ but the fact that nearly one-third of testators were worth under £40 in the early eighteenth century indicates the continuing presence of a large body of poor yeomen. Although this is hardly surprising given the size of estates, the figures suggest an air of prosperity, and other evidence confirms this view. The post-1660 period saw a great rebuilding of statesmen houses in Cumbria with stone replacing the common clay daubing. Travellers' comments reflect the change. When Celia Fiennes passed through the region in the 1690's she commented on the poor state of the housing. Near Penrith she noted 'little huts and hovells the poor live in like barns', and in Westmorland 'villages of sad little huts . . . for the most part I took them at first sight for the sort of houses or barns to fodder cattle in not thinking them to be dwelling houses'. By contrast, Bailey and Culley noted that except in the north-east of Cumberland all the houses were of stone, while Pringle pointed out that in Westmorland customary tenants generally had their houses slated. Dickinson, in the mid-

nineteenth century, also commented on the solidity of yeoman housing.³⁰

TABLE I

	Proportion of inventories (%) (Sample 775 in each time period)			Gross value (£s)
	Under £40	£40-£100	£100+	
1661-90	44	37	19	71.23
1721-50	31	30	39	124.72

What accounts for this prosperity? The possible effect of declining grain prices has already been mentioned, and the rise in average value of farm and household goods recorded in inventories, from £44.33 in the later seventeenth century to £72.93 in the early eighteenth century, may well reflect this situation.³¹ Little evidence survives to suggest that improved agriculture was practised on yeoman estates. Sir James Lowther of Whitehaven complained in 1752 that 'one thing that keeps our country so backward in improvements is the vast number of customary estates that are in it', and in his attack on customary tenure at the end of the century William Hutchinson claimed that 'these base tenures greatly retard cultivation'. Bailey and Culley reported that the yeomanry 'seem to inherit with the estates of their ancestors their notions of cultivating them'.³² Of course, exceptions can be found. Benjamin Browne limed his arable ground in the 1730's, and grew cabbages, mustard and turnips in his garden. Furthermore, even on the smallest estates, the Napoleonic war years seem to have been a time of improvement. In 1810 William Fleming of Rowhead noted that 'throughout Furness [agriculture] has become so improved within the last 25 years that I may within bounds

²⁸ J V Beckett, 'Local Custom and the "New Taxation" of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: the Example of Cumberland', *Northern History*, XII, 1976, pp 116-17; Kendal Record Office (KRO) D/TE, IX, fos 49-50.

²⁹ J D Marshall, 'Agrarian Wealth and Social Structure in Pre-Industrial Cumbria', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXXIII, 1980, p 509.

³⁰ J Thirsk, ed, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol IV, 1500-1640, Cambridge, 1967, p 757; C Morris, ed, *Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, 1949, pp 196, 202; Bailey and Culley, *op cit*, p 179; Pringle, *op cit*, p 263; Dickinson, *loc cit*, pp 276-7.

³¹ Marshall, *loc cit*, p 509.

³² CRO D/Lons/W Sir James Lowther to John Spedding, 7 May 1752; Hutchinson, *op cit*, I, pp 39, 133; Bailey and Culley, *op cit*, p 181.

venture to affirm that the produce was 5 times so much as it was at that period'. William Blamire's evidence to the Agricultural Distress committees also suggested that the yeomen had made considerable efforts to improve their farms in order to benefit from the high prices of the war years.³³

Such change, if it came at all, came late; but the situation on yeoman farms needs to be carefully distinguished from that on larger estates in the region. As early as the 1690's Celia Fiennes had noted 'very good rich land enclosed' in the Kendal basin, and Colonel James Grahme, whose property lay in the same area, leased five of his predominantly arable farms for rents in excess of £100.³⁴ He did little to encourage improved agricultural practices through lease clauses, but new husbandry techniques were employed on his home farm during the 1690's. In 1731 Sir John Clerk passed through the Eden valley, noting on the Musgraves' estate 'enclosures . . . where I saw plenty of rich pasturage and fine corns just a reaping'. At roughly the same time engrossing was taking place on the somewhat less hospitable territory of the earl of Carlisle between Carlisle and the Northumberland border. Askerton was let to two yeomen in 1741 for a rent of £265, the largest known rent for a single farm in the region at that time. Turnips were also cultivated on the estate. Admittedly the *Gentleman's Magazine* correspondent claimed in 1766 that 'there are not 40 farms in the county [Cumberland] of 100^l a year each, mostly from 10^l to 50^l a year', but in the 1770's Arthur Young noted that clover had been unsuccessfully tried in the Keswick area, and that liming was widely practised. By the 1790's, according to

Pringle, cultivated land east of the Eden in Westmorland was all enclosed.³⁵ Such evidence indicates that landowners were not slow to grasp the possibilities open to them for improving arable land, even if they were unable, and perhaps unwilling, to do very much about the upland pastoral areas.

The absence of improvement on small estates before the later years of the eighteenth century suggests that the yeomanry experienced little need for change. If so, then two other factors contributing to their continued prosperity may well have been the level of fines and the availability of by-employment. Two types of fine were payable on customary estates: a dropping fine in order to obtain admittance, either by descent, devise or purchase, and a general fine, payable by all tenants on the death of the lord. A fine was also due when a customary estate was mortgaged, although it could be avoided on some estates. Fines represented the landowners' major compensation for the small size of annual rents. At Kirkclinton in Cumberland the annual average rent per head per acre was 15 7¼d, while in Greystoke it was 9s 4d. In Westmorland it was 3s 9d in Grasmere, and 17s 1¼d in Helbeck. Such disparities reflected the timing of the introduction of tenant right into the various manors, but as annual rents these were derisory. Lady Elizabeth Otway paid £4 14s 7d customary rent for her Ambleside estate, but she leased it to a tenant farmer at the economic rent of £89. Consequently, the size of fines was important to landowners. According to Hutchinson fines could leave tenants 'perpetually impoverished',³⁶ and should a descent and general fine occur within a

³³ KRO D/TE, IV, 21, Benjamin Browne's books; William Fleming's 'Journal and Commonplace Books', XVII, fos 2180-1, 2184 (microfilm in the University of Lancaster library).

³⁴ Acreage-equivalents for these rents do not exist, but in the 1790's Bailey and Culley reckoned that rents averaged 15s an acre. Farms attracting a rent of £100 or more must therefore have been considerably over 100 acres in the first half of the eighteenth century.

³⁵ Morris ed, op cit, p 190. Levens Hall MSS, T Banks to J Grahme, 21 Jan 1703, Box 6/3, Box 2/18, Box 14/29, plus an unlisted bundle in Box 14; W A J Prevost, 'A Journie to Carlyle and Penrith in 1731', *CW2*, LXI, 1961, p 218; Durham University, Howard of Naworth MSS, C/170/53; A Young, *A Six Month Tour Through the North of England*, 1770, III, pp 127, 135; Pringle, op cit, p 269.

³⁶ Jones, 'Decline of the Yeomanry', pp 202-3; KRO D/TE, VII, 236, Benjamin Browne's books, 1737, p 6; Hutchinson, op cit, I, p 39.

short space of time the results could be disastrous. It was in the owners' interest to push up the level of fines. In some manors, they were fixed at a certain multiple of the rent, but trouble occurred when the owner was entitled to assess arbitrary fines, in effect to extract as much as he could squeeze from his tenants. This was happening in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in the early eighteenth the tenants were enjoying a measure of success in resisting it. In theory, the owner was financially better able to fight the legal cases which ensued over disputed fines, but in practice the tenants seem to have organized themselves well. Robert Lowther of Maulds Meaburn in Westmorland discovered in the 1730's that the tenants were 'so numerous they look on their expense as nothing'. After a dispute between the Duke of Somerset and his tenants in the 1720's the tenants, having lost, were able to pay the fine without apparent difficulty, in spite of their legal costs, and with only a few being caught short for resources.³⁷ The Earls of Carlisle and Thanet, together with several gentlemen, all had to face expensive contests in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The availability of by-employment was of considerable significance. With its populous community of small farmers, many of them customary tenants, pursuing a pastoral economy, Cumbria enjoyed the conditions in which rural handicraft industries were likely to flourish.³⁸ The Kendal area was particularly blessed with domestic textile manufacture, but throughout the region yeomen were to be found in different occupations. Some earned a living by labouring on the estates of other landowners as well as cultivating their own holding. Others doubled as blacksmiths, carpenters

and tanners, whilst along the west coast yeomen developed interests in salt panning, coal mining and shipping. At Harrington, south of Workington, yeomen worked part-time in the mines, and reared cattle in their spare hours.³⁹ Some of the wealthier yeomen acted as stewards to local landowners. Benjamin Browne was steward of Lady Otway's Ambleside estate between 1703 and 1718, and bailiff of Lord Lonsdale's property in Kendal barony from 1729 until 1737, positions for which he received annual salaries of £8 and £6 13s 4d respectively. He also acted as executor to many local yeomen, receiving as his reward a small legacy. Alan Wilson of Levens was steward to Colonel James Grahme from 1707 until 1730 on a salary £24. Such was his total income that he was able to buy his customary tenement into freehold in 1724 for £200.⁴⁰

According to Habakkuk's argument the corollary to economic pressures forcing the small owners to consider selling was to be found in the favourable market for small properties. Large landowners extending and enclosing their property, and newcomers anxious to establish themselves with land, snapped up any small estates which came on to the market. In Cumbria, however, neither played much of a role, for the most part disdaining to purchase customary property. Established landowners faced the problem that estate improvement necessitated their buying out customary tenants so as to consolidate farms. Only one or two owners followed such a policy with any enthusiasm. Fifty-three of the first Viscount Lonsdale's 79 known property purchases in the last two decades of the seventeenth century cost under £100, and the vendors were almost invariably

³⁷ CRO D/Lons/W Sir James Lowther to John Spedding, 31 Dec 1734, D/Lec/170, John Christian to Thomas Elder, 31 Jan, 12 Feb 1726.

³⁸ Joan Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside', in F J Fisher ed, *Studies in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England*, 1961, p 86.

³⁹ Jones, 'Decline of the Yeomanry', p 214; J D Marshall, 'The Domestic Economy of the Lakeland Yeoman, 1660-1749', *CW2* LXXIII, 1973, pp 196, 208-10; Bailey and Culley, *op cit*, p 182.

⁴⁰ KRO D/TE, VII, 37; CRO D/Lons/L Cash account books of William Armitage for Lord Viscount Lonsdale, no 70, f 42; Levens Hall MSS, box C (3rd series), 'A copy of Mr Alan Wilson's accounts', Box E (correspondence), A Wilson to J Grahme, 7 Mar 1712, box 14/4.

styled yeoman. His aim was to turn the land into a park. The Wilson family of Dallam Tower purchased 47 properties between 1660 and 1750, the majority for consolidation purposes. Seventeen were in Haverbrack, of which the largest was 4½ acres, 6 in Milnthorpe, 6 in Beetham and 5 in Preston Richard. A similar policy was followed by the Carletons, a family of Appleby lawyers, who acquired a series of properties from yeomen, mainly in the vicinity of the town.⁴¹ Mostly, however, owners seem to have been content to allow customary property to fall into their hands as families became extinct, and until about the middle of the seventeenth century to re-grant it in the same tenure. The policy changed at about the time feudal tenures were abolished in 1660. This legislation is often blamed for the expropriation of English copyholders, and in Cumbria landowners began to extinguish the tenant right, enabling them to let the land for terms of years at economic rents.⁴²

Nor were the local *nouveaux riches* interested in customary property. Several merchants grew wealthy on the profits of west Cumberland's expanding trade links with America, the Baltic and the West Indies, and established themselves as landowners by purchasing small estates not too far from their commercial interests. They preferred freehold land, as is clear from the acquisitions of one of the most substantial of their number, Peter How. By the time of his bankruptcy in 1763 How had bought a number of properties. Details survive concerning 7 of the 11 which were sold in order to pay his debts. Only 1 of these was a customary estate, the other 6, including

property in Egremont and St Bees let at £165 10s a year, were all freehold.⁴³

Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that the erosion of customary properties was a slow process. Admittedly property was gradually passing into the hands of greater landowners, but the process was not only one way. Lady Elizabeth Otway sold her Ambleside estate to 11 different yeomen, and something like £7000 was paid by yeomen to members of the aristocracy between 1680 and 1750 for the freeholds of their property. Money must also have been paid to the gentry, amongst whom Colonel James Grahme was a pioneer: he enfranchized 139 tenants around the turn of the seventeenth century, while his successor, the earl of Berkshire, added a further 118 between 1741 and 1744.⁴⁴ Despite such examples, contemporaries complained that the process was not pushed far or fast enough. Sir James Lowther claimed that 'one of the principal things that makes our country so miserable is the great number of little tenancy estates', and 'if the gentlemen would set their tenants free it would in time oblige the lords to do the same'. However, he was reluctant to set a good example and in the 1790's William Hutchinson complained that most owners had still to enfranchise.⁴⁵ The cost deterred many tenants from responding to overtures from landowners. In 1737 the third Earl of Carlisle ordered his steward to draw up a scheme for enfranchizing his tenants. It was estimated that if they all bought the freehold £25,430 would be raised, but only 10 responded. One of them, Robert Scott of Brampton, paid £110 for the freehold of a property on which his annual rent had been 4s 6¾d.⁴⁶ As it transpired, the lack of enthusiasm

⁴¹ CRO D/Lons/L, Box Acc/5, Sir John Lowther to Lord Lonsdale, 3 July 1699, Lonsdale's acquisitions are recounted in detail in Beckett, *op cit*, p 199. KRO D/D (deeds scattered through archives). J V Beckett, 'English Landownership in the Later Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: the debate and the problems', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXX, 1977, p 572.

⁴² Point made to the author in private discussion by Dr C B Phillips. Feudal tenure was abolished by 12 Car II, c 24.

⁴³ PRO, B/1/43.

⁴⁴ KRO D/Ry, Temp Box 65, 'A Copy of the Sale Bill, 9 Feb 1727'. Levens Hall MSS, box 14, nos 10, 25, also 'Mr Craven's contracts for Enfranchisements, 1741-2'.

⁴⁵ CRO D/Lons/W Sir James Lowther to John Spedding, 1 Jan 1751, 19 May 1752. Hutchinson, *op cit*, I, p 35.

⁴⁶ Durham University, Howard of Naworth MSS, C/115/77, C/170/60, C/181a/21.

shown by the landowners was in the tenants' interest.

IV

Early twentieth-century writers blamed the decline of the small owner on the process of parliamentary enclosure, and Cumbria experienced its fair share of legislation. Opinions vary, but according to one modern account 281,000 acres of common waste in Cumberland, and 124,000 acres in Westmorland, were enclosed by Act of Parliament between 1760 and 1900, respectively some 29 per cent and 24 per cent of each county. In both the peak period was between 1800 and 1830.⁴⁷ However, such activity did not necessarily affect the small owner, since it was the enclosure of common arable fields which was regarded as depopulating. In Cumbria these were largely untouched by parliamentary activity, which accounted for only 1.2 per cent of Cumberland's acreage and 0.06 per cent of Westmorland's.⁴⁸ Piecemeal enclosure had taken place since the sixteenth century, but only in the second half of the eighteenth were the common fields tackled systematically. In Cumberland, apart from Arlecdon in 1697 and Bothel in 1726, the other eight known enclosures by private agreement all date from between 1753 and 1797. Such a procedure was found to be cheaper and quicker than the formal approach to parliament, but the overall effect was to fossilize the common field strip within the enclosed landscape, small holdings continuing to exist into the twentieth century.⁴⁹

Most commentators clearly did not regard enclosure as having a depopulating effect in Cumbria. Admittedly Hutchinson claimed that the enclosure of Skelton,

which was the earliest award (1768) and one of the three parliamentary agreements of the eighteenth century, 'occasioned many cottagers to quit the country', but other evidence does not support his opinion. Bailey and Culley believed that the increased demand for labour following enclosure ensured that few people were likely to be forced to leave the land permanently.⁵⁰ Deane and Cole's figures, however defective, fail to support the view that enclosure led to an increase in emigration. From their figures (see Table 2), it can be seen that movement out of the region was a characteristic of the whole period from 1701 until 1831, but that in absolute terms the region increased its stock of labour. Migration, as a proportion of natural increase, declined in each of these three periods; indeed, in Cumberland it even fell in absolute terms, although the third period is shorter than the others. Presumably this trend reflected the growing opportunities in the expanding towns. Most questionable are the 1701-51 figures, showing a net decrease at a time when parts of the region were undergoing rapid industrialization, particularly the port towns on the west coast. It seems probable that Deane and Cole began from too low a base figure but, if the trend shown by their calculations is generally correct, in the period of greatest enclosure the level of emigration was actually declining.

V

When decline came in the nineteenth century it resulted from a series of inter-related causes rather than a single one. Agricultural prices were clearly significant. Rising grain prices in the second half of the eighteenth century coincided with the earliest evidence of decline, but the effect was cushioned by demand for meat, which continued to outrun supply and therefore held up the price. Agricultural production was generally profitable during the war

⁴⁷G Elliott, 'Field Systems of North-West England', in A R H Baker and R A Butlin, eds, *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles*, Cambridge, 1973, p 71.

⁴⁸These figures are derived from the recalculations of W E Tate's figures given in Turner, *op cit*, pp 180-1. See also W E Tate, 'A Hand List of English Enclosure Acts and Awards', *CW2*, XLIII, 1943, pp 175-98.

⁴⁹Elliott, *loc cit*, pp 76-84.

⁵⁰Hutchinson, *op cit*, I, p 514n; Bailey and Culley, *op cit*, p 187.

TABLE 2
Migration and Natural Increase, 1701-1831

	Estimated population increase	1701-1751 Estimated natural increase	Gain/Loss +/- migration	Estimated population increase	1751-1801 Estimated natural increase	Gain/Loss +/- migration	Estimated population increase	1801-1831 Estimated natural increase	Gain/Loss +/- migration
Cumberland	-9,122	33,504	-42,626	39,912	61,944	-22,032	50,599	70,644	-20,045
Westmorland	-4,183	10,172	-14,355	6,994	26,875	-19,881	12,709	25,200	-12,491

Source: P Deane and W A Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688-1959* (Cambridge, 1962), pp 108-9.

years, a fact which helps to explain the continuing hold of the Cumbrian yeoman as much as it does the resurgence of the southern small owner. Extensive enclosure of wastes and commons in the early decades of the nineteenth century is a further indication of the expectations of these years. After the war, however, prices tumbled. For example, with the return to the gold standard in 1821, the price of wool fell rapidly: within a few years it was fetching only just over half the 1819 price. In the scramble for survival small estates were over-cropped. Falling prices were regarded by William Blamire in the 1830's as having contributed to the decline of the yeoman.⁵¹

A second factor was the loss of by-employment. The significance of domestic industrial employment for the survival of the French peasant has been emphasized by Johnson,⁵² and as late as 1800 this still provided a vital supplementary source of income for Cumbrian yeomen. According to Housman,

The Cumbrians are almost all manufacturers in miniature, there being few families in the country who do not spin their own linen and woollen cloth; and also spin and knit their own stockings. Every village is supplied with a weaver or two, who weave their home made cloth.⁵³

The loss of this employment to factory

production was a considerable setback. Wordsworth was of the opinion that the machine undercut the Cumbrian yeoman, who, deprived of this essential additional income, could not survive as an independent producer. By the mid-1830's it could be claimed that 'no domestic manufactures are now carried on',⁵⁴ and whatever the truth of such an assertion there can be little doubt that this important supplementary income had considerably declined. The growing textile towns of Carlisle, Cockermouth, Penrith, and Kendal had creamed off much of the employment for full-time workshop production.

Enfranchisement was a further cause of decline. Once a man owned the freehold of his property, in adverse economic circumstances the temptation increased to sell up and seek more profitable employment. He thereby became attractive prey to the engrossing landlord. An early twentieth-century commentator on Westmorland agriculture argued that many of the Westmorland yeomen disappeared in the early nineteenth century, simultaneously with mass enfranchisement.⁵⁵

Finally, some commentators believed that the yeomanry were their own worst enemies in that they copied habits from the south of England which their slender incomes could not stand. During his tour of the Lake Counties in 1772 William Gilpin expressed the fear that the contact local people were

⁵¹ P Deane and W A Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688-1959*, Cambridge, 1962, pp 70-74, 91; Jones, 'Decline of the Yeomanry', pp 219, 223. *BPP*, 1833 (612), V, p 310.

⁵² Johnson, *op cit*, p 156.

⁵³ J Housman, *A Topographical Description of Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire and a part of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, Carlisle, 1800, p 56.

⁵⁴ W Wordsworth, *A Guide to the District of the Lakes*, 5th edn, Kendal, 1835, pp 86-7; Jones, 'Decline of the Yeomanry', p 220.

⁵⁵ F W Garnett, *Westmorland Agriculture*, Kendal, 1912, p 12.

beginning to enjoy with outsiders was likely to make them dissatisfied with their lot. He was concerned that whereas 'the sons and daughters of simplicity enjoy health, peace and contentment, in the midst of what city-luxury would call the extreme of human necessity', appreciation of the material goods available elsewhere might provoke jealousy and imitation. By the middle of the nineteenth century John Gough was convinced that Gilpin's fears had been well founded; in his opinion the yeomanry had adjusted to the standards of national fashion during the eighteenth century, acquiring the customs of the capital because travel had become easier once major roads had been turnpiked.⁵⁶ The practice of giving portions to younger children certainly seems to have brought considerable difficulty. According to William Blamire many yeomen:

from a miscalculation of their real situation [have] been induced to leave to their children larger fortunes than they ought to have done, and to saddle the oldest son with the payment of a sum of money which it was impossible he could provide for. This has been the case to a very great degree, particularly where the lands so devised were lands of inferior quality. I know some remarkable instances where parents have left a provision for younger children out of estates which have not been sold during the continuance of high prices, and which have fallen so much within their calculations as to leave the eldest son hardly anything.⁵⁷

VI

The Cumbrian evidence suggests that the region's small owners suffered their greatest period of decline neither before 1760, nor as a result of parliamentary enclosure, but rather in the years after 1815. By way of conclusion these findings can be juxtaposed with those of other studies to develop the theme of regional disparities in the decline of the small owner, and to reassess the general chronology.

⁵⁶ William Gilpin, *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty made in 1772, on several parts of England*, 1786, p. 197; John Gough, *The Manners and Customs of Westmorland and the adjoining parts of Cumberland, Lancashire and Yorkshire in the former part of the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd edn, Kendal, 1847, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁷ BPP, 1833 (612), V, p. 309.

Plenty of evidence can now be marshalled to show that adverse economic conditions were widespread in the corn counties during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the best corn growing land the price fall was offset by rationalization of holdings, and already by the end of the seventeenth century England was developing a sizeable group of landless tenant farmers and labourers. If Gregory King's admittedly inaccurate figures are to be believed only 13 per cent of English families were owner-occupiers as against 11 per cent tenant farmers and 26 per cent labourers.⁵⁸ On soils less suitable to corn, specialized, labour-intensive cropping, and market gardening, might prove economic;⁵⁹ but on the Midland claylands the real answer was to convert from arable to pastoral farming. Efforts were made to introduce new husbandry practices on the open fields,⁶⁰ but most landowners saw the means of salvation to be in engrossing and enclosing. Once they had turned the wastes into grass lands attention switched to the common arable fields. Thus, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Midlands, in particular, were subject to rationalization, and it is no coincidence that the major area of common field parliamentary enclosure lay in a belt stretching south from the east and west ridings of Yorkshire to a line drawn through Wiltshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire. Countryside industrial projects held some communities together as, for example, was the case in Wigston Magna, but there is little doubt that the prevailing economic conditions *did* tend to reduce the number of people owning and working the land. Perhaps they also help to explain why the majority of closed parishes were to be found in arable areas, the barriers having been erected in order to exclude small, and possible

⁵⁸ Gregory King, *Two Tracts*, ed C Barnett, Baltimore, 1936, p. 31.

⁵⁹ Thirsk, 'Seventeenth Century Agriculture', p. 166.

⁶⁰ M A Havinden, 'Agricultural Progress in Open-Field Oxfordshire', in W E Minchinton, ed, *Essays in Agrarian History*, Newton Abbot, 1968, I, pp. 147-59.

inefficient, landowners.⁶¹ Small holdings again became viable during the Napoleonic war years under the stimulus of high prices, but this was a short-lived renaissance even if it led John Rae to believe that the yeomanry were as much the losers at Waterloo as Bonaparte.

When attention is turned to the pastoral areas the contrast could hardly be more striking. Just about all the cards seemed to have been stacked in favour of these regions: they were not subject to the full impact of falling prices; they were often in the lightly taxed extremities of the country; they generally had the benefits of by-employment; and they were not greatly affected by parliamentary enclosure. For one reason or another Cumberland, Westmorland, county Durham, Lancashire, Cheshire, Kent, Shropshire, Monmouthshire, Devon, and Cornwall, had less than 2 per cent of common arable field enclosed by legislation.⁶² Under the circumstances late decline was not surprising. As long ago as 1909 Johnson recognized that 'the small owner has survived where the circumstances were favourable'. He named Lincolnshire (the Isle of Axholme), Norfolk, Kent, Essex, Cumberland, Westmorland, the Vale of Evesham Gloucestershire, and Worcestershire, the New Forest Hampshire, and Devonshire, as the survival areas.⁶³ He might also have added Wales. The predominance of small farms in pastoral Wales may be thought to render illustrations drawn from that country of dubious value, yet several examples demonstrate a similar pattern to that found in north-west England. According to Howell 'the lesser gentry and occupying owners were by no means a disappearing class in eighteenth century Pembrokeshire'. Neither were they on the decline in

Merioneth or Glamorgan.⁶⁴ Nonetheless it would be misleading to omit evidence which does not fully accord with this picture, and it must be pointed out that Hoskins found a process of decline among the Devon small owners between 1650 and 1800 similar to that in the corn counties.⁶⁵

Generally, historians have failed to give full weight to these regional disparities, largely because they have concentrated on areas of England where conditions were most likely to favour decline. Gray looked specifically at Oxfordshire (the county with the highest proportion of common arable parliamentary enclosure), and Davies at midland counties. Admittedly Davies also used evidence from Cheshire, which he claimed gave similar results, but a recent study of the county has revealed disparities between the highland and lowland areas.⁶⁶ Chambers based his argument on the evidence of Nottinghamshire, Hunt on Leicestershire, and Turner on Buckinghamshire. Nonetheless a few historians have recognized the importance of regional characteristics. Mingay has hinted in that direction: 'present evidence suggests that on the heavy clays of the Midlands the small farmers were particularly vulnerable, their costs of cultivation and of transport made high by the nature of the soil, which also had the effect of restricting the possibilities of intensifying and diversifying the output'.⁶⁷ Local studies add considerable weight to Mingay's tentative suggestion. Spufford found a striking

⁶¹ B A Holderness, '"Open" and "Close" Parishes in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Ag Hist Rev*, XX, 2, 1972, pp 126-39.

⁶² Turner, *op cit*, pp 180-1.

⁶³ Johnson, *op cit*, p 149.

⁶⁴ D W Howell, 'The Landed Gentry in Pembrokeshire in the 18th Century', Univ Wales, MA thesis, 1965, p 23; P R Roberts, 'The Landed Gentry in Merioneth, c.1660-1832', Univ Wales MA thesis, 1963; Joanna Martin, 'The Landed Estate in Glamorgan, 1660-1760', Univ Cambridge PhD thesis, 1978; Small owners did not decline in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Myddle, also a pastoral area; see David Hey, *Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts*, Leicester, 1974. Other examples are given by Joan Thirsk, 'The Disappearance of the English Peasantry'.

⁶⁵ W G Hoskins, 'The Ownership and Occupation of the Land in Devonshire, 1650-1800', Univ London PhD thesis, 1938, pp 79ff.

⁶⁶ Davies, *loc cit*, p 110. C Stella Davies, *The Agricultural History of Cheshire 1750-1850*, Chetham Soc, Manchester, 1960, pp 25, 27, 30-1.

⁶⁷ J D Chambers and G E Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880*, London, 1966, p 41; Mingay, *Enclosure and the Small Farmer*, p 30.

example in Cambridgeshire, where the small owner in the fenland village of Willingham continued to make a living, and was able to resist the incursions of large farms, whereas at Chippenham (corn-sheep) holdings of 15 to 40 or 45 acres disappeared in the period 1560–1636. Thus the small owner survived in one village, but disappeared early in the seventeenth century in the other. In the eighteenth century Wiltshire small owners declined rapidly in the chalk areas (corn-sheep), but they continued to dominate the cheese areas, which concentrated on dairy farming. Similarly in Lincolnshire small owners survived, and indeed still survive on the fens and marsh lands, while they disappeared on the wolds, heath and cliff, much of which was enclosed by legislation.⁶⁸ Taken together with the Cumbrian phe-

nomenon of large farms existing alongside the small holdings of customary tenants, this evidence reveals the importance of making local distinctions. Furthermore, such regional disparities remain apparent in the twentieth century. By the middle of the last century large farms (defined by then as over 500 acres) were found mainly in the south Midlands, East Anglia and the southern counties, while small farms (100–150 acres or less) predominated in the north-west, the north Midlands, Wales, the south-west, and the Lincolnshire fenlands. This cannot be explained entirely by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century economic difficulties, or by parliamentary enclosure, although regional differences in the latter movement may help to account for the situation of large farms. The pattern of larger farms in the eastern and southern arable areas, and smaller in the pastoral lands, remains largely unchanged in the mid-twentieth century.⁶⁹ It suggests a complicated and diverse picture of small owner decline stretching from the sixteenth century and not finally complete today.

⁶⁸Margaret Spufford, 'Peasant Inheritance Customs and Land Distribution in Cambridgeshire from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries', in J Goody, J Thirsk and E P Thompson, eds, *Family and Inheritance*, Cambridge, 1976, pp 160–1. The theme is developed in her book *Contrasting Communities*, Cambridge, 1974. E Kerridge, 'Agriculture, 1500–1793', V C H Wiltshire, IV, pp 49–50, 59–60; D B Grigg, 'Small and Large Farms in England and Wales', *Geography*, XLVIII, 1963, p 270; Joan Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, 1957, p 2; W O Massingberd's review of Johnson, op cit, in *Lincolnshire Notes and Queries*, XI, 1910–11, pp 26–32.

⁶⁹Grigg, loc cit, pp 268–79.

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