

Farm rents and improvement: East Lothian and Lanarkshire, 1670–1830*

by Muir Johnstone

Abstract

This paper examines changing farm rents between 1670 and 1830 across six estates in two contrasting Scottish Lowland counties. It largely endorses the established view that payments in kind generally started to be commuted to money rents in the mid-eighteenth century, although significant conversions occurred on some estates much earlier. Before the 1750s, progress towards monetization was often limited by proprietors' preference for cautiously progressive estate improvement, their continuing command of the market (which inhibited wider tenant market participation), and their conviction that grain rents provided surer protection against market price fluctuations than fixed or only infrequently renegotiable money rents. In the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries farm rents (by then, mainly money rents) rose between three and a half and four times original rents, calculated over 30-year periods of sustained improvement on four of the six estates, a rise of increase thought by some to be optimal for improving farms at the time. Tenant allowances, temporary rent-abatements and punitive legal action were all employed to promote farm improvement.

The gradual conversion of customary farm rents from payments in kind – delivery of grain *fermes* and kain produce, and sometimes tenant labour obligations – to rents paid mainly in cash is well-documented in published accounts of Scottish Lowland agrarian history between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, as is the rapid growth in farm and estate rents as improved and increasingly market-responsive Lowland farming emerged in the later eighteenth century.¹ However, some aspects of this transformation may not yet be fully understood. Firstly, emergence of principal money rents across the Lowlands did not progress uniformly; landed proprietors, who largely controlled agricultural development until at least the mid-eighteenth century, while keen to increase estate revenues, were often cautious in adopting wide-ranging change. By examining the experience of six lowland estates, it is hoped that the relevant processes of change, including monetization of farm rents, might be further analysed. Second, the scale and pace of farm rent increases as estate improvement spread across the region in the latter part of the eighteenth century are again not precisely known. We have the prescription of leading Scottish Improver, Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster (1754–1835),

* The author is indebted to the anonymous referees and the *Review's* editor for their perceptive observations and lucid advice, and to Professor Ian D. Whyte of Lancaster University for his encouragement and support.

¹ *Fermes and kain produce*. Respectively, grain consignments and live animals or animal produce supplied by tenants as elements in stipulated annual farm rents.

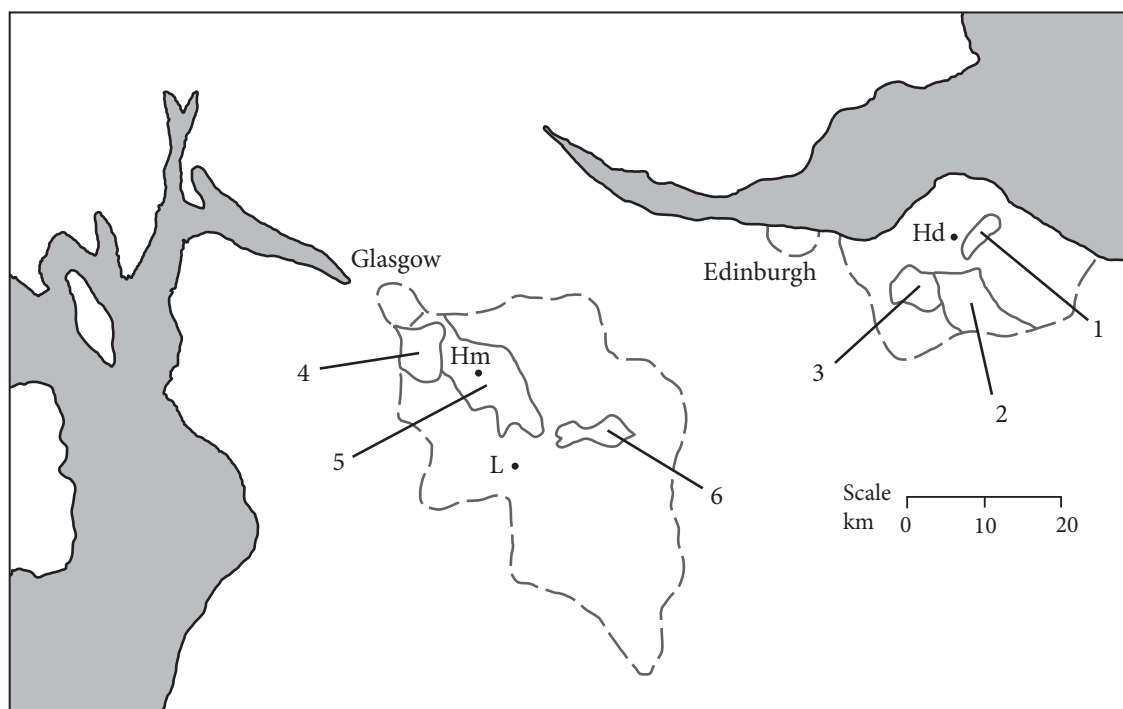


FIGURE 1. Location of estates, East Lothian and Lanarkshire

Key: Hd – Haddington; Hm – Hamilton; L – Lanark; East Lothian estates: 1 – Newhailes; 2 – Yester; 3 – Saltoun; Lanarkshire estates: 4 – Castlemilk; 5 – Hamilton; 6 – Lee

who suggested that a fourfold farm rent increase over a period of 30 years would promote ‘enterprise’ among tenants and offer a reasonable return for improving landlords.² Did such a ‘moderate’ increase, as Sinclair described it, reflect typical ‘improving’ farm rent increases on the selected estates? How were improving rents set and implemented on improving Lowland estates?

The absence of any published long-run series of agricultural rents within the central Lowlands has contributed to the continued uncertainty in this area. In this respect, Scotland lags well behind England.³ This article attempts to make up for the deficiency by tracing and analysing the progress of rent monetization and rates of rent increase on six estates located in two Lowland rural counties, East Lothian and Lanarkshire. This juxtaposition allows examination of changing rents against a variety of indigenous specialisms involving pastoral, arable and mixed farming, and characteristic variables in farm size and labour organization in the eighteenth century. Lanarkshire farms were ‘most properly organized in smaller units’ of less than 100 acres, and typically family-run, whilst East Lothian had more ‘large farms’,

² Sir John Sinclair, *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland* (1825, repr., 2 vols, 1970), I, p. 260.

³ M. E. Turner, J. V. Beckett and B. Afton, *Agricultural*

rent in England, 1690–1914 (1997) was designed to ‘fill the gap’ in long-run agricultural rent series across England.

often relying on hired labour.⁴ Lothian farms are often regarded as paradigms of pioneering agricultural improvement, while Lanarkshire has been considered 'laggard' in that connection.⁵ Direct comparison of the improving records of the two counties is neither intended nor, with the limited extent of the study, feasible, but analysing estate improvement in counties with such ostensibly different improving reputations intrinsically offers a varied range of improving proficiency.

The main source of evidence is the voluminous accumulation of surviving estate papers for the six estates, but, where relevant, printed contemporary sources have been consulted. The Hamilton estate (over 40,000 acres) and Yester (around 20,000 acres) were owned throughout the period by the Dukes of Hamilton and Marquises of Tweeddale. While the former estate listed over 220 tenants and subtenants in the later eighteenth century, Saltoun, Castlemilk, Newhailes, and Lee estates, all of under 8000 acres, had never more than 50 leaseholders. These smaller estates were owned respectively by lairdly or minor noble families, the Fletchers, Stuarts, Dalrymples, and Lockharts (later Barons of Lee). Mixed arable and dairying was predominant across the Lanarkshire estates; in East Lothian, corn farms were more prevalent. Upland areas on the southerly margins of the Hamilton, Yester, and Lee estates were populated with sheep and black cattle (see Figure 1).

I

It is tempting to regard the conversion of traditional payments in kind to cash rents and the subsequent substantial increase in annual farm rents as part of a continuous progression from medieval subsistence to modern commercial farming. The reality is more complex. Agricultural development as a whole, in the Lowlands as elsewhere, was driven between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries by a number of changes, only one of which involved rent monetization. These are shown schematically in Figure 2.

Farm and estate improvement characteristically involved increased single tenancy occupation of farms, often accompanied by granting of longer leases: organizational changes involving abolition of runrig possession and eradication of traditional infield-outfield systems were followed eventually by establishment of individually-run farms that had been enclosed and subdivided, often enlarged by amalgamation or engrossment and gradually adopting technologically advanced farming operations. Rent monetization emerged with growing tenant market-involvement, as commercial farming became widespread. More efficient estate administrative infrastructure was often an accompanying feature of farm and estate improvement (see Figure 2).

There was no standard pattern of change, further exacerbating the complexity of the process; examples of relatively early and much delayed developments in many of the 'components' can be identified. For example, single tenancy, a critical element in the transformation from ancient,

⁴ T. M. Devine, *The transformation of rural Scotland. Social change and the agrarian economy, 1660–1815* (1995), p. 31; M. Gray 'The social impact of agrarian change in the rural Lowlands', in T. M. Devine and R. Mitchison (eds), *People and society in Scotland*, I, (1988), p. 59.

⁵ The 'quintessence of the new farming class' of capitalist farmers managing improved farms was most notably represented by 'Lothian farmers'. T. C. Smout, *A history of the Scottish people, 1560–1830* (1969), p. 292; Gray, 'Social impact', p. 59.

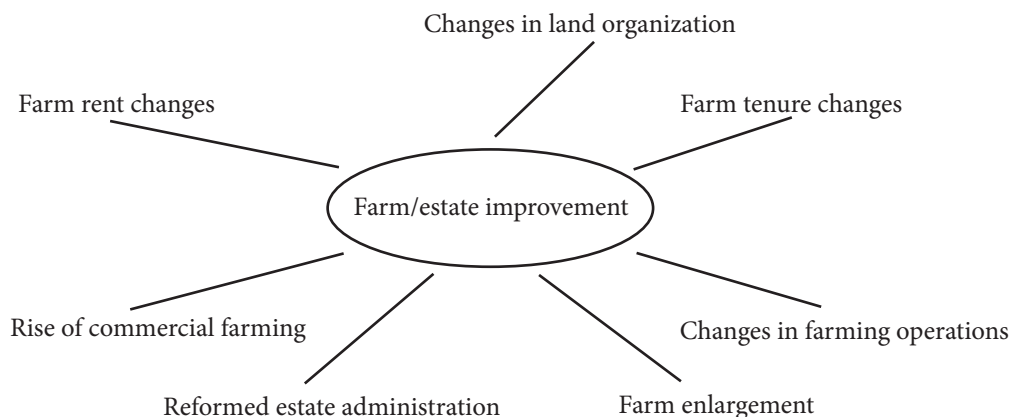


FIGURE 2. Components of change in Lowland agricultural development

communally-managed fermtouns to modern, individually-run farms, was well under way on some estates by 1700. At Yester, 42 of 49 farm tacks conferred between 1650 and 1700 were for single tenancy, as were 80 per cent of new farm tacks on the nearby Newhailes estate by 1670.⁶ Between 1700 and 1730, on the Castlemilk and Saltoun estates, around three in four new farm tacks conferred single-tenancy occupation.⁷ Longer farm leases are often regarded as another key component, allowing tenants security of tenure to improve their holdings; at Castlemilk and Newhailes 19-year leases were predominant from the 1720s and at Saltoun, by the later 1740s.⁸ In one interpretation, such early developments offered important 'foundations' for later, more comprehensive farming improvements.⁹ At Hamilton however, longer leases became usual only as part of a policy of systematic estate improvement introduced in the mid-1760s.¹⁰

Early farm rent monetization, another recognized concomitant of agricultural development, can similarly be identified on some estates. On the Yester estate, all 33 surviving farm tacks between 1650 and 1680 specified annual delivery of grain fermes and kain rent payments, with fewer than half (15) also including an element of cash payment. Between 1680 and 1700, nearly 80 per cent of new tacks had money rent elements.¹¹ Most remarkably, a 1698 rental for Colstoun barony shows 10 of 14 farm tenants paying rents solely in cash. Total grain fermes and kain payments were valued at £1011 Scots against accumulated money rents of £2820 Scots, cash payments apparently amounting to 74 per cent of total rent.¹² An annual rental for Covington

⁶ National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Ms 14,747, fos 5–168; 14,748, fos 2–89; 25,788, fos 4–36.

⁷ NLS, Ms 5329, fos 42–9; 17,148, fos 1–135.

⁸ NLS, Ms 5329, fos 49–68; 25,788, e.g. fos 9, 11, 18, 19; 17,149, e.g. fos 33, 41, 51, 53. 'Improving' tacks specified obligations regarding, for instance, regular liming of the soil, creating or maintaining enclosure and subdivision fences, applying improved crop rotations, etc.

⁹ I. D. Whyte, *Agriculture and society in seventeenth-*

century Scotland (1979), p. 261.

¹⁰ At Hamilton, new 'improving' farm leases varied from 9 to 19 years.

¹¹ NLS, Ms 14,747, fos 3–54/55–104; 14,748, fos 2–39/40–55.

¹² NLS, Ms 14,746, fo. 2. The cash value of grain fermes was provided in the rental. These values were usually derived from contemporary local fiars prices (see n. 16).

TABLE 1. Money rent and payments in kind, Walston, Lee 1713–16.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Money rents (£Scots)</i>	<i>Payments in kind (cash value £Scots)</i>	<i>Total rent (£Scots)</i>	<i>Money rent (% of total)</i>
1713	5349	578	5927	90.2
1715	4805	379	5185	92.7
1716	4702	482	5184	90.7

Note: Money rent payments and the cash value of payments in kind (oatmeal, barley and kain hens and capons) are directly provided within the rent records.

Source: NLS, Ms 27,594 (Walston fo.).

barony, on the Lee estate in the 1690s, appears to indicate money payments of £1394 Scots and grain fermes worth around £1317, money payments constituting 51 per cent of the total.¹³ A series of rentals for Walston barony 20 years later indicates almost entirely money rents, with produce rents forming no more than 10 per cent of total income (see Table 1).

However, a rental for the Newhailes estate in 1682 records delivery of 1495 grain bolls (barley, wheat and oats) with *no* accompanying money payments, and on the Castlemilk estate in the 1650s, and nearby Glassford and Coats parishes ten years later, three-quarters of the tenants paid their annual rents almost entirely in kind, with only minor cash contributions.¹⁴

A cautionary note must be sounded in all discussions regarding rent monetization. As Mitchison noted, farm rents shown as money payments in rentals or farm tacks ‘might in practice (have) been made in kind’ or, conversely, nominal obligations in kind might have been paid off in cash.¹⁵ Local grain fiars, introduced between the mid-sixteenth and later seventeenth centuries in lowland Scotland, facilitated such conversions by specifying annually the cash value of locally marketed grains of varying quality.¹⁶ Fiars might have offered a means of working out a price the tenant should pay the landlord for grains marketed by the tenant; the potential for tenant involvement in the market from at least the seventeenth century has therefore to be acknowledged (although there is no direct evidence of this before the 1750s on the six estates under examination).

The scholarly consensus is that most conversions of payments in kind to principal cash rents across the Lowlands occurred in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁷ Castlemilk estate records generally support this conclusion, six of seven new farm tacks conferred between 1730 and 1750 specifying money-only rents.¹⁸ At Yester between the same dates 12 of 13 new farm tacks

¹³ NLS, Ms 27,594 (Covington fo.).

¹⁴ NLS, Ms 25,789, fo. 3; 5324, fo. 1; 5335, fos 18–330; 5329, fo. 176. A boll was a regionally-variable dry-weight measure, usually around 140 lbs (63.5 kg).

¹⁵ R. Mitchison, *Lordship to patronage: Scotland, 1603–1745* (1983), p. 156.

¹⁶ County sheriffs or substitutes consulted panels of local farmers and set a ‘medium sort’ fiars price for each grain as the average price farmers received; a mean of all

prices received above the medium sort was set as ‘higher sort’ and a similar mean of all prices below the medium sort was set as ‘lower sort’. This allowed price variation for differing qualities of grain, but within defined price limits.

¹⁷ Devine, *Transformation of rural Scotland*, p. 23; R. A. Dodgshon, *Land and society in early Scotland* (1981), p. 255; Mitchison, *Lordship to patronage*, p. 289.

¹⁸ NLS, Ms 5329, fos 50–68.

TABLE 2. Rental of Milton barony (three tenants), Saltoun, 1746 (£Sterling).

<i>Crop</i>	<i>Quantity (bolls)</i>	<i>Cash value per boll</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Wheat	82	14s. 0d.	£57 8s. 0d.
Barley	156	10s. 5d.	£81 5s. 0d.
Oats	80	8s. 3d.	£33 0s. 0d.
Total cash value of grain payments			£171 13s. 0d.
Cash payments			£79 17s. 2d.
Total			£251 10s. 2d.

Source: NLS, Ms 17,149, fos. 17–18.

specified exclusively money rents (although, as previously noted, cash rents were prevalent on some parts of the estate much earlier).¹⁹ In the 1740s virtually all Saltoun rents specified both grain rents and cash payments.²⁰ Cash payments, however, were often less than half the cash value of grain rents, as shown in Table 2.

A later Milton rental (1766) records cash payments of £503 Sterling against grain fermes and (minor) kain payments valued at £473, suggesting that principal cash rents were gradually emerging.²¹ By the 1770s, Saltoun, Lee, Yester, Castlemilk and Hamilton estate papers record only money rents. The formal estate improvement scheme that was begun at Hamilton in the mid-1760s (and which is discussed later) was entirely predicated on money rents. The Newhailes estate was the major exception; rent payments for the whole estate in 1751 consisted of grain payments of 443 bolls of wheat, 474 of barley, 242 of oats and 32 of pease, with additional money contributions of £242 Sterling.²² Using relevant Haddington fiars, the approximate value of the grains due was £830 Sterling, so cash accounted for only 23 per cent of the money-equivalent of whole rent payments.²³ By the 1790s, Newhailes rentals *were* recording more substantive money rents but, in 1791, three out of ten Newhailes tenants still paid annual rents ‘solely by delivery of victual’.²⁴

As noted earlier, the temptation is to regard the emergence of monetized farm rents, even with the chronological variations recorded above, as representing a general progression from medieval subsistence to modern commercial farming. However, such an interpretation is questionable. Firstly, examples of commercial marketing, often regarded as integrally linked with rent monetization, were present in Scottish Lowland farming in the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries, when, despite the continuing prevalence of subsistence farming

¹⁹ NLS, Ms 14,747, fos 134–43; 14,748, fos 64–86.

²⁰ NLS, Ms 17,148, fos 175–8; 17,149, fos 1–114.

²¹ NLS, Ms 17,151, fo. 3.

²² NLS, Ms 25,789, fos 19–20.

²³ ‘Medium sort’ Haddington fiars for 1751 are taken

from A. J. S. Gibson and T. C. Smout, *Prices, food and wages in Scotland, 1550–1780* (1995), Tables 3.4 (oats, 12s. Sterling per boll), 3.10 (wheat, 17s. 2d.), 3.13 (barley, 12s.), 3.19 (pease/beans, 12s. 6d.).

²⁴ NLS, Ms 25,789, fos 26–7.

in many areas, a significant amount of marketing of grains, especially near Edinburgh and other growing towns, was evident. In most years, Scottish grain was exported to Europe and Scandinavia.²⁵ The Yester estate exemplifies this trade, which was almost exclusively run by or on behalf of landed proprietors. Between the 1650s and 1700, Yester barley and oats were 'contractually' supplied to local maltmen and meal-makers for subsequent processing and retail.²⁶ Wheat was simultaneously sold to local bakers and grain merchants or exported via Leith or Dunbar.²⁷ Such commercial activity was not exclusive to Edinburgh and the Lothians; a Castlemilk estate memo of 1681 records the supply of proprietary oatmeal and hay to Glasgow markets and, around 1710, a Lee estate factor recorded dispatch of oats 'to Glasgow merchants' (some 30 miles distant from the estate).²⁸ It has been suggested that, even in the early eighteenth century, the ever-increasing volume of agricultural trade was beginning to contribute towards growing lowland market integration exhibited by increasing synchronicity in grain fiars prices across multiplying market centres, encouraged by the Edinburgh and emerging Glasgow 'sub-national' market networks.²⁹ But, despite burgeoning trade, proprietary marketing, at least on the estates under examination, was apparently predominant until the 1750s.

Proprietary marketing activities largely depended upon the delivery of traditional grain rents from tenant to landlord. Farm tack specifications instructed tenants to deliver stipulated grain consignments to landlords' girnells (storage barns) or to specified markets, or 'places of like distance' (for delivery to individual customers) 'when required' by the laird or his factors, ensuring maximum marketing flexibility for the laird (and carriage at his tenants' expense).³⁰ Tenants were routinely required to supply marketable grains, for example in a Newhailes tack 'the best grains grown on the land', in a Castlemilk version 'good, sufficient victual', or, in a Saltoun estate memo 'well-dight [winnowed] mercat stuff'.³¹ Such arrangements excluded tenants from meaningful market-involvement on their own account.

From the later sixteenth century grain fermes had been 'a more important source of revenue for (Scottish) landowners' than money rents.³² Grain prices rose appreciably in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries while the Scottish currency during that period (and up to the Union of 1707, when Sterling was adopted as the national currency) was serially debased and devalued, largely through deliberate government action.³³ In this continuing situation, collecting rents principally as grain payments protected the real value of rents in a way that money rents could not, because annual feus were often fixed amounts and cash rents were renegotiable only

²⁵ A. Fenton and T. C. Smout, 'Scottish agriculture before the Improvers', *AgHR* 13 (1965), p. 90.

²⁶ NLS, Ms 14,709, e.g. fos 72, 115, 134; 14,713, fo. 59.

²⁷ NLS, Ms 14,710, e.g. fo. 93; 14,713, e.g. fos 20, 43.

²⁸ NLS, Ms 5324, fo. 16; Ms 27,594 (Walston fo.).

²⁹ A. J. S. Gibson and T. C. Smout, 'Regional prices and market regions: the evolution of the early modern Scottish grain market', *EcHR* 48 (1995), p. 271.

³⁰ NLS, e.g. Ms 17,149, fos 51-2; 25,788, fo. 4; 17,148,

fo. 1; 17,150, fo. 182.

³¹ NLS, Ms 25,788, fo. 13; 5329, fo. 45; 17,148, fo. 7.

³² Mitchison, *Lordship to patronage*, p. 49.

³³ Grain prices rose at varying rates between 1550 and 1620 and were steady or rose more slowly thereafter (Gibson and Smout, *Prices, food and wages*, p. 6). The debased Scottish coinage was valued at one-twelfth of sterling from 1603.

TABLE 3. Grain fermes, Yester, Saltoun, Newhailes, 1660s–1760s.

Year	Estate/barony/farm	Rent fermes (bolls)		
		Wheat	Barley	Oats
1665	Yester (Bolton Barony)	22	38	12
1755	Yester (Barony)	86	106	96
1709	Saltoun (farm)	43	73	36
1766	Saltoun (farm)	211	401	192
1670	Newhailes (estate)	574	592	247
1751	Newhailes (estate)	1106	1199	621

Sources: Yester, NLS, Ms 14,748, fos 16, 24; 14,746, fos 10, 15; Saltoun, Ms 17,148, fos 1, 7; 17,149, fo. 17; 17,151, fo. 3; Newhailes, Ms 25,789, fo. 1; 25,788, fos 13, 17; 25,799, fos 40–7.

on the renewal of a lease.³⁴ As Table 3 shows, grain fermes increased significantly between the seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries.

Increased output was achieved by improvements, amongst them regular liming, the use of new crops and modified crop rotations, but often without widespread general enclosure. There was a gradual extension of cultivable land.³⁵ While examples are not numerous within estate records, it is noted that, in 1682, '(rent) augmentations' were 'imposed on Glassford moors' and, in 1712, a Lee estate factor was 'poinding, measuring and setting (moorland) wastes' being prepared for cultivation.³⁶

Application of local grain fiars facilitated monetary evaluation of retrospective shortfalls in tenant grain rent payments (examples of which proliferate within various estate papers). In addition, it allowed accurate calculation of proprietary compensation for poor quality grains supplied by tenants. For example, the proprietor of Newhailes in 1745 reckoned due financial compensation for seven 'deficient' grain bolls in one tenant's fermes consignment at the medium-sort Haddington fiars price of 14s. per boll.³⁷ Application of fiars eventually hastened 'translation of obligations from grain to money'; more immediately, local fiars, by ensuring clearer tenant rent accountability, probably enhanced the attractiveness of continuing grain rents from a proprietary viewpoint.³⁸

³⁴ Interestingly, in the 1850s, long after money rents had emerged, the continuing practice of basing at least half of annual Lothian farm rents upon relevant grain fiars was praised as providing an inbuilt correlation between farm rents and grain prices not found 'anywhere else within the United Kingdom' (although other Lowland examples can be found). W. Neilson Hancock, *What are the causes of the prosperous agriculture in the Lothians of Scotland?* (1852), pp. 9–10. The Laird of Ochertyre (Perthshire) set, from the 1770s, cash rents that included equivalent fiars' prices for a stipulated quantity of oatmeal (agreed between the laird and the tenant), so that

farm rents should 'in some measure reflect the price of oatmeal'. J. Ramsey of Ochertyre, *Scotland and Scotsmen in the eighteenth century* (ed.) Alexander Allardyce (2 vols, 1887), II, p. 360.

³⁵ Dodgshon suggests proprietary rent 'augmentations' were often drawn from crops grown annually in what had previously been only periodically ploughed 'outfield' lands (Dodgshon, *Land and society*, p. 248).

³⁶ NLS, Ms 5335, fo. 27; Ms 27,594 (Walston fo.)

³⁷ NLS, Ms 25,799, fos 22–31.

³⁸ Mitchison, *Lordship to patronage*, p. 49.

So, with such encouragement for proprietary continuation of rents in kind, why did money elements in Lee and Yester estate rentals (as noted earlier) appear at all in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries? Tenant market involvement and rent monetization is often seen as emerging earliest in livestock farming regions, and some pastoral farming *was* practised in upland areas on the Lee and Yester estates (although mixed arable and livestock was more general in both places).³⁹ The earlier Lee farm rents and feus were paid in 'money, victual fermes and kain' but, as already noted, by 1711 in Walston barony, money elements apparently contributed more than nine-tenths of annual rent (see Table 1).⁴⁰ Clearly, cash-paying tenants had to acquire rent money from somewhere, and livestock marketing in upland baronies such as Walston appears the most likely source. However, in Colstoun barony on the Yester estate in 1698, around three-quarters of total rents were apparently paid in cash, but Colstoun was situated in the lower stretches of the estate, more suited to corn growing than livestock rearing (in fact, residual non-cash rents there almost entirely consisted of grain fermes).⁴¹ There was significant livestock marketing. Extensive grazing parks at Hamilton were leased from the 1760s, and similar, if smaller-scale, activities on the Saltoun parkland estate of Wester Pencaitland after 1818, but in both cases the marketing operations were largely proprietary, so any monetization of tenant rents on those estates cannot be specifically attributed to significant increase in tenant livestock marketing.⁴²

If estate records fail to elucidate the particular contribution of tenant livestock farming in rent monetization, they do indicate increasing tenant involvement in grain marketing from the 1740s and '50s. At that time, on many estates, the proprietary-dominated marketing system described earlier was increasingly under pressure, as tenants on improving, more efficient farms, sometimes enlarged via engrossment and amalgamation and with growing freedom to manage their own affairs, were increasingly producing regular surpluses.⁴³ By the 1750s, Saltoun tenants, although mainly still paying mixed victual and cash rents, regularly undertook estate-based market transactions, both buying and selling grains (mainly wheat, the major 'cash crop'). In 1753 the Saltoun factors compiled lists of tenants wishing to sell surplus wheat and, in 1756, while five tenants offered to buy surplus wheat from the laird at 'the fiars of that year', others offered to sell wheat to the estate 'at 14s. 6d. per boll'.⁴⁴ There is some evidence that tenants were simultaneously selling wheat at the nearby Haddington market; some tenants apparently acted as selling 'agents' for their neighbours, comparing prices in Haddington and Edinburgh grain markets to secure advantageous deals.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most comprehensive tenant market involvement emerged on the Castlemilk estate, where, by the 1750s, all new farm tacks specified money-only rents and routinely

³⁹ A 1759 Lee farm tack allowing 'pasturing of cattle' is a rare reference to livestock farming, NLS, Ms 27,578, fo. 3.

⁴⁰ NLS, Ms 17,593, fo. 8.

⁴¹ NLS, Ms 14,746, fo. 2.

⁴² Hamilton Public Library (hereafter HPL), 631.1/277 Burrell journal, 1790-2, p. 232; 279, Burrell journal, 1795-6, p. 31; NLS, Ms 17,158, fos 108-9 (Saltoun).

⁴³ By the 1790s, enlargement had been considered for

around 62 per cent of farms in East Lothian and 38 per cent in Lanarkshire, *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-99* (20 volumes, repr. 1973), II, VII. Individual estate records suggest that Hamilton (with 46 post-1745 references to farm enlargement), Saltoun (32) and Castlemilk (29) most frequently considered this option.

⁴⁴ NLS, Ms 17,150, fos 13, 15, 54-5, 68.

⁴⁵ NLS, Ms 17,150, fos 54-5.

authorized tenants to sell in nearby Glasgow markets not just current surpluses but whatever 'hay, corns, straw and fodder growing on the lands they shall think proper'.⁴⁶ In Torrance, a largely pastoral barony within Castlemilk, 'the produce of the dairy and occasionally some ryegrass hay [was] sent to Glasgow and Hamilton markets'.⁴⁷ Clearly, access to local markets was a critical factor in growing tenant market involvement at Saltoun and Castlemilk, but equally important were market price trends. The consensus among historians is that the overall market tendency between the mid-seventeenth and later eighteenth centuries was towards relatively stable Scottish grain prices (which, despite short-term upward fluctuations typically reverted to lower price norms within three- or four-year cycles).⁴⁸ Persistently sluggish cash returns doubtless contributed to the hesitant proprietary investment in enclosure and other costly innovations noted earlier, which delayed the fundamental transformation of the organizational structure and productive capacity of Lowland farming. The scholarly consensus is that the real surge in commercial production (involving tenant as well as proprietary market involvement) occurred in the final decades of the eighteenth century, as 'unprecedented market pressures emanating from an urban and industrial structure in the first throes of economic revolution,' exacerbated by general European war (which, from 1793, put greater pressures on domestic food supplies), brought about the long-awaited return of consistently rising food prices.⁴⁹ As trading profits and growing capital accumulation subsequently progressed, so investment in improvements increased, eliciting a situation in which 'rising prices coincided with [a] fall in real [production] costs,' adding further impetus to the process.⁵⁰

This market-led explanation of post-1780 Scottish agricultural development has obvious merit; but what this paper suggests is that the necessary preconditions for extended market-growth – an emerging tenant capacity to produce regular crop surpluses and growing tenant market-participation – were already well advanced on some Lowland estates as proprietary marketing dominance slackened from the 1750s.

II

While it has been noted that farm rents that were predominantly paid in kind did increase in value during the early- and mid-eighteenth century on at least some of the estates under examination (see Table 3), the most significant rent increases probably took place after the emergence of principal money rents. The aim of this section of the paper is to try – as already noted, in the absence of comprehensive agricultural rents data for the Lowlands as a whole – to quantify average farm rent increases and their speed of implementation during identifiable periods of intensive improvement on the selected estates.

As previously noted, while increasing money payments within mixed victual and cash rents can be found in earlier times on some estates, by the mid-eighteenth century, principal money

⁴⁶ NLS, Ms 5329, fos 79, 81. Tenants also purchased some of their manure supplies as Glasgow 'city waste,' expanding their control and financial accountability as independent farmers.

⁴⁷ NLS, Ms 8220, fos 92–4.

⁴⁸ S. G. E. Lythe and J. Butt, *An economic history of*

Scotland, 1100–1949 (1975), pp. 34–5; Gibson and Smout, *Prices, food and wages*, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Devine, *Transformation of rural Scotland*, p. 42.

⁵⁰ H. Hamilton, *An economic history of Scotland in the eighteenth century* (1963), p. 85.

rents were almost fully implemented at Yester, Lee and Castlemilk. From the mid-1760s they were being implemented on the Hamilton estate via the formal estate improvement scheme, and were largely established at Saltoun by 1780.⁵¹ Only at Newhailes did farm rents continue to be paid substantially in kind after that time.

As monetary rents became established, and especially as the later eighteenth-century rise in food prices began, some Lowland landlords, like their English counterparts, might have been tempted to 'rack up' individual rents 'to the highest money rent the farm could ... sustain'.⁵² But most realized that maximizing rent revenue would have inevitably led to tenant bankruptcies and vacant farm leases – an outcome in no-one's economic interest. It has been claimed that most Lowland proprietors set 'realistic', rather than rack rents, although tenant failure to discharge increased farm rents in full was often ruthlessly dealt with, as will be described later.⁵³

But what constituted a 'realistic' improving rent increase? Contemporary political-economists offered theoretical answers. Adam Smith saw profits, wages and rents (in traditional subsistence farming economies) as equal income streams deriving from the business of farming. David Ricardo defined farm rent as payment to the landlord 'for use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil'.⁵⁴ But how should rents reflect enhanced 'powers of the soil' brought about by agricultural improvement? The Board of Agriculture from 1793 tried to provide practical guidance to improving landlords by compiling English county rent rolls (with little success). The Board's President, the Scottish improver Sir John Sinclair suggested, on the basis of observed 'good improving practice', that an 'optimum' fourfold farm rent increase over a period of 30 years would allow proprietors a fair return for improving investment, while encouraging 'enterprising and independent' tenants.⁵⁵ This advice did not appear in print until 1825 (although it is feasible that Sinclair, a tireless publicist for agricultural improvement, might have peddled the idea in the course of his earlier career). Do actual rent increases conform to such a prescription on the six estates in East Lothian and Lanarkshire?

Annual farm rents are usually specified within individual farm tacks. Estate rentals provide (usually biannual) records of all farm-rent payments, revenues from rented-out estate utilities such as lime and coal workings, and returns from proprietary parks or fields leased for seasonal grazing or cropping (these latter often providing the highest rent increases on improving estates).⁵⁶ The specific purpose of this paper is to examine changes in individual farm rents, improving farms being seen as the main vehicle of agricultural development. To ensure compatibility, only improving farms not engrossed or amalgamated during estate improvement (a fairly

⁵¹ John Burrell, the 'Manager of Improvements' at Hamilton, noted in 1764 that estate improvement, just then begun, would probably take 'twelve years' to complete (HPL, 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763–9, p. 4). He believed emphatically in abolition of rents in kind (HPL, 631.1/240, Burrell journal, 1769–70, pp. 82–3).

⁵² Turner *et al.*, *Agricultural rents*, p. 14.

⁵³ T. M. Devine, 'The making of a farming elite: Lowland Scotland, 1750–1850' in Devine (ed.) *Scottish Elites* (1994), p. 71.

⁵⁴ A. Smith, *An enquiry into the nature and causes of*

the wealth of nations (1900 edn), p. 134; D. Ricardo, *The principles of political economy* (1973 edn), p. 33.

⁵⁵ Sinclair, *Analysis of the Statistical Account*, I, p. 260. The 'good improving practice' was observed within estates in Kirkcudbright that Sinclair believed were notably effective in promoting improvement.

⁵⁶ For instance, rents for 'Hamilton Parks' increased fivefold between 1777 and 1816, compared to corresponding general improving increases of up to three and a half times the original rents, HPL, 333.3, fos 19–24.

frequent practice) are compared.⁵⁷ Moreover, since the intention was to compare actual rent increases on the six estates with Sinclair's 'optimum' rent increase, rent rises are extrapolated on an average, *pro rata* basis over the 30-year period he specified. The analysis concentrated on farm rent increases during significant periods of estate improvement.

As already noted, the formal introduction of the Hamilton improvement scheme in 1764 clearly marked the start of significant estate improvement there. An 'improving rents' schedule for an initial tranche of 42 farms set on improving leases (shown in Table 4) shows that 'Advanced' rents – first rents after initial estate-led improvements – were to be on average 56 per cent higher than existing 'unimproved' rents. An interim 'review' of these farms in 1767 recorded average 'Advanced' rents at 62 per cent above previous rents, indicating progress was marginally better than expected.⁵⁸ Because improving leases invariably required tenants to 'be agreeable to the methods of improvement and proposed rentals', these figures also suggest that willing tenants were readily found.⁵⁹ According to the schedule, 'improved' rents, introduced after expiry of the initial 19-year improving lease, were to be on average over two and a half times (160 per cent) higher than unimproved rents. Extrapolating this 19-year rate of increase over a *pro rata* 30-year period, Hamilton improving rents were scheduled to increase by 252 per cent, to three and a half times the unimproved rents – an increase not far short of Sinclair's prescribed fourfold increase.

But the schedule shows projected rather than actual rents. A sample of improving (but unenlarged) farms on the Hamilton estate shows *real* rent rises, as shown in Table 5. In 1799, 30 years or so after initial improving tacks were conferred, only three of the eight sampled farms had actually attained their scheduled 'improved' annual rent target; by 1811 five had done so. Annual rents for individual farms had risen by between 115 and 316 per cent by 1799; by 1811 farm rents were between double and eight and a half times the original rents. Only Townhead farm achieved Sinclair's prescribed fourfold increase over 30 years, although four of the eight had done so after 40 years. Average farm rent increases amounted to 393 per cent over 46 years; extrapolated *pro rata* over 30 years, this represents an average rise of 256 per cent – three and a half times higher than unimproved rent. Farm size was not a distinguishing factor. Townhead, with the most rapidly rising rent, had only 36 acres, while the largest overall rent increases were recorded on Hookhead, Floors and Cornsulloch farms, ranging in size between 120 and 300 acres. Average rent increases for the sample farms, although just below Sinclair's 'optimum', largely met the estate improvement schedules, the £956 rents total collected from the eight sample farms in 1799 representing 92 per cent of the projected 'improved' rents total of £1041.

On the Saltoun estate, some forms of improvement, including farm rent monetization, were implemented from the 1780s, but the most intensive period of comprehensive estate improvement began in 1803.⁶⁰ Between 1765 (when grain farms still accounted for a substantial

⁵⁷ However, farm rent increases on enlarged, improving farms might have been proportionately greater than those on unenlarged, improving farms. Further research might elucidate this matter.

⁵⁸ HPL, 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763–9, pp. 62–75.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁰ NLS, Ms 17,246, fo. 1. Inaugurated by proprietor General John Fletcher-Campbell, as noted by Andrew Fletcher in 1832.

TABLE 4. Improvements schedule, 42 farms on the Hamilton estate, 1764 (£Sterling).

<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Present rents</i>	<i>Improved rents</i>	<i>Advanced rents</i>	<i>Enclosure costs</i>
12,362	£1514 2s. 0d.	£3878 13s. 0d.	£2362 11s. 0d.	£4659 18s. 0d.

Source: HPL, 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763–9, pp. 62–75.

TABLE 5. Individual farm rents (sample), Hamilton estate, 1765–1811 (£Sterling).

Farm	Rent					Change 1765–1811 (%)
	1765		1770s	1799	1801–11	
	existing	projected				
Allanton	77	191	205	180	180	134
Merryton	141	310	247	250	250>650	361
Skellyton	67	160	123>134	144	155	131
Netherburn	14	44	40	48	48	243
Townhead	15	62	9	60	60	300
Floors	33	119	90	85	85>255	673
Hookhead	28	67	60	99	99>183	554
Cornsulloch	26	88	70	90	90>220	746

Source: HPL, 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763–9, pp. 61–70: 333.3/19, fos 20, 24.

proportion of annual rents) and 1799 (when money rents predominated), the value of total annual estate rents rose from £1250 to £2396.⁶¹ Subtracting additional annual rent of £325 for Lampuckwells and Huntlaw Mains farms, added to the estate in the 1780s, the 1799 estate rent was therefore around 1.7 times higher than that of 1765.⁶² Table 6 provides a survey of ongoing rents for a sample of unenlarged, improving farms on the more intensively improving estate after 1799. The sample shows an average farm rent increase of 155 per cent over a 19-year period, which, when extrapolated *pro rata*, represents an average rise of 245 per cent over 30 years, farm rents rising nearly three and a half times, a rate only marginally lower than the 256 per cent increase on the Hamilton estate during a correspondingly intensive improving phase.

While, as previously noted, partial rent monetization occurred even on the seventeenth-century Yester estate, principal money rents probably did not predominate there until the mid-eighteenth century. Given this very gradual progression, farm rent increases on this estate should perhaps be examined over a longer period. Table 7 shows ongoing rents for a sample of unenlarged, improving Yester farms between 1760 and 1818.

Over this extended period, farm rent increases ranged from a doubling of annual rent (Castlemains) to a greater than tenfold rise (Walden). The average increase works out at 566 per cent over 56 years. Duly extrapolated, this suggests a 303 per cent rise over a pro-rata

⁶¹ NLS, Ms 17,151, fos 3, 277.

⁶² NLS, Ms 17,151, fos 165–6.

TABLE 6. Individual farm rents (sample), Saltoun estate, 1799–1818 (£Sterling).

<i>Farm</i>	<i>Rent</i>		<i>Percentage rise</i>
	<i>1799</i>	<i>1818</i>	
Huntlaw	180	290	61
Lampuckwells	145	372	157
East Mains	114	265	132
Blanceburn	146	512	251
Greenhead	130	354	172

Source: NLS, Ms 17,151 – 17,157 (various rentals).

TABLE 7. Individual farm rents (sample), Yester estate, 1761–1817 (£Sterling).

<i>Farm</i>	<i>Rent</i>		<i>Percentage rise</i>
	<i>1761</i>	<i>1817</i>	
Longyester	103	850	725
Castlemains	500	1000	100
Reidshill	34	300	782
Ewington	67	200	198
Broadwoodside	24	168	600
Marvington	44	400	809
Priestlaw	50	420	740
Walden	22	235	968
Westhopes	89	245	175

Source: NLS, Ms 14,746, fos 1–2, 98–9.

30-year period, average farm rents rising to just over four times unimproved rents, a higher proportional rise than comparable Hamilton and Saltoun increases and one precisely fitting Sinclair's 'optimum' improving rent rise.

A retrospective memo concerning Milton barony on the Castlemilk estate in the relatively early period, 1731–61, indicates annual rent revenue rose over three and a half times (from £175 to £632) in those 30 years.⁶³ Table 8 shows ongoing rents for a sample of unenlarged, improving Castlemilk farms during a later period. Farm rent increases ranged from zero (Netherton/Gartsheugh) to over five and a half times original rents (Windlaw), with average farm rent increase of 240 per cent over those 22 years. Extrapolated pro-rata over 30 years, this suggests average farm rents rose by 327 per cent – higher than the earlier Milton barony increase and substantially above Sinclair's 'optimum' fourfold rise. Farm rents did not, however,

⁶³ NLS, Ms 8200, fos 82–3.

TABLE 8. Individual farm rents (sample), Castlemilk estate, 1799–1821 (£Sterling).

<i>Farm</i>	<i>Rent</i>		<i>Percentage rise</i>
	<i>1799</i>	<i>1821</i>	
Bowhouse	110	325	195
East Cassilton	82	250	204
Croftfoot	55	174	216
Gallowhill	70	230	231
Netherton/Gartsheugh	150	150	0
Windlaw	45	250	455
Parklees	30	119	296
Picketlaw	50	210	320

Source: NLS, Ms 5325, fos 2–19, 241.

rise uniformly across the estate. Total annual rents for five improving farms within Torrance and Kilbride baronies (where livestock pasturing predominated) rose from £165 p.a. in 1801 to £339 p.a. in 1831, effectively only doubling over 30 years.⁶⁴

In the 1750s, most Newhailes tenants paid predominantly grain rents; as noted earlier, three out of ten tenants still did so in the 1790s.⁶⁵ Specific details on individual farm rents are, however, scarce and somewhat contradictory; Morham Mains and Ludgate Loch farms are recorded as paying the same annual rents in 1791 as they paid in 1751 (respectively £160 and £8 8s.), but Overhailes farm, delivering an exclusively victual rent of 64 bolls wheat, 72 bolls bear and 64 bolls oats, valued (using relevant ‘medium-sort’ Haddington fiars) at £136 10s. in 1751, apparently paid £370 in annual cash rent in 1791, representing a pro-rata doubling of farm rent over 30 years.⁶⁶

The foregoing analysis – with due acknowledgement to the inevitable inaccuracies brought about through the processes of extrapolation – suggests that, over 30-year periods of estate improvement, average farm rents on the improving Hamilton, Saltoun, Yester and Castlemilk estates rose between three and a half and just over four times. These rent rises occurred mainly in times of consistently rising market prices. On one estimate, average (Scottish) grain prices (oats) in the early 1800s were around 226 per cent higher than those in the later 1760s.⁶⁷ Corresponding 40-year average farm rent increases for the four improving estates referred to (extrapolated from the 30-year averages calculated earlier) were between 326 (Saltoun) and 436 per cent (Castlemilk). While average farm rent increases might thus have outstripped rises in grain price, the potential for greatly enhanced farm output ensured both profits and capital accumulation continued to grow for tenants and proprietors on these improving estates.

⁶⁴ NLS, Ms 8220, fos 84–6, 97–100: The farms were Hurlawcrook, Upper Backraw, Murrayhill, Lachlyock, and Newfarm.

⁶⁵ NLS, Ms 25,799, fos 14–21, 40–47; 25,789, fos 26–7.

⁶⁶ NLS, Ms 25,789, fos 19–20, 26–7. See n. 23.

⁶⁷ T. M. Devine, *Clearance and improvement. Land, power and people in Scotland, 1700–1900* (2006), p. 53.

TABLE 9. Rental value of Craighead farm, Crawford, 1772 (£Sterling).

<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Type of land</i>	<i>Rental value per acre</i>	<i>Total rental value</i>
120	Enclosed cultivated land	15s.	£80 0s. 0d.
130	Hard hill pasture	4s.	£27 12s. 0d.
			£117 12s 0d.

Source: HPL, 631.1/245, Burrell journal, May-July 1772, pp. 87–8.

TABLE 10. Valuation, Netherton farm, Crawford 1771 (£Sterling).

<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Total value</i>
101 acres	Croft	20s. per acre	£101 0s. 0d.
580 acres	Outfield	5s. 6d. per acre	£159 10s. 0d.
1566 acres	Pasture	5s. 2d. per acre (average)	£404 0s. 0d.
232 soumes	Cattle and sheep	25s. per soume (average)	£290 0s. 0d.
159 bolls	Sowing	10s. per boll (average)	£79 10s. 0d.
Value (annual rent plus farm output)			£1034 0s. 0d.

Source: HPL, 631.1/242, Burrell journal, Feb.–Aug. 1771, pp. 127–8.

The similarity in farm rent increases on the improving Hamilton, Saltoun, Yester and Castlemilk estates might suggest application of common rent-setting formulae. Across the six estates improved rents appear to derive mainly from application of variable rent-per-acre assessments, an example of which is shown in Table 9, illustrating how an initial improving rent was set for a 250-acre farm on the Crawford Estate in South Lanarkshire. Other examples of the same practice can readily be found. Improved rents for newly enclosed holdings in Coulston parish in Castlemilk in 1817 had rent-per-acre rates ranging from £1 1s. to £3; tenant bids for the improved farm of Wester Maigrie at Saltoun in 1818 offered between £1 18s. and £2 5s. per acre, while bids for varied enclosures at Newhailes ranged between £1 8s. and £2 6s. 8d.; Yester factors valued former outfield areas of the improving farm of Newbigging at 15s. per acre when ‘properly enclosed’.⁶⁸ Rent-per-acre values were derived from crop estimates; East and Mid Coats farms on the Hamilton estate in 1771 had rent-per-acre rates of 33s. and 24s. for former infield and outfield lands, based upon estimated average (mixed?) grain output of eleven (infield) and eight (outfield) *firlots* per acre.⁶⁹ John Burrell, Hamilton improvements manager, set initial improving rents for mixed arable and grass farms ‘by the seed and by the acre’, as in the example in Table 10.⁷⁰ The calculations appear to suggest an annual rent of £664 10s., employing ‘rent by the acre’ categories as set out in the first three lines, but estimated livestock

⁶⁸ NLS, Ms 5325, fo. 199; 17,157, fos 129–30; 25,789, fo. 42; 14,746, fo. 58.

⁶⁹ HPL, 631.1/242, Burrell journal, Feb.–Aug. 1771,

p. 147. A *firlot* was a quarter-boll (around 1.2 English bushels).

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 127–40.

and crop returns apparently amount to only £369 10s. In fact, this calculation only makes sense if what is shown is *projected* improving rent against *existing* (unimproved) farm output, in which case farm output needed to double in value (not unachievable for an improved farm) for rent and output to be in reasonable balance.

Other examples provide a more appropriate correlation between improved rents and farm output. Lowerton farm on the Saltoun Estate had crop returns valued at £410 in 1819 against an annual rent of £302, while Hookhead farm on the improving Hamilton Estate in 1781 had an annual rent of £29 15s. against farm output valued at £59 10s., setting improved rents at half to three-quarters of the estimated annual output.⁷¹

III

The unprecedented changes that accompanied comprehensive estate improvement must have bewildered and dismayed many farm tenants, some of whom, even in the 1760s and '70s, had remnants of ancient runrig and infield-outfield divisions within their holdings.⁷² In general, however, lowland landlords, despite tenant apprehensiveness and frequent failure to stock improving farms adequately, still apparently preferred to carry forward estate improvement, where possible, via the 'indigenous tenantry'. In the Hamilton improvement scheme, it was proposed, perhaps sometimes reluctantly, to bring tenants on 'by degrees' rather than replacing them with more willing, 'substantial' tenants.⁷³

In formal terms, the 'methods of improvement' and the 'proposed rentals' specified within improving tacks had to be fully accepted by tenants.⁷⁴ All estate papers nevertheless record tenant lease bids well below proposed rent levels. The lowering of the stipulated improved rent to accommodate such bids was rarely allowed. (An uncharacteristic reduction from £1300 to £788 per annum for the 'much improved' Middlemains farm at Saltoun in 1814 was soon withdrawn, and the farm let on a short-term 'holding lease' until a tenant willing to pay the full rent was found.)⁷⁵ But improved tacks were complex packages specifying both rents and intrinsic 'improvement' allowances, often including the regular supply of processed lime for soil-enrichment, estate-sponsored enclosures or 'rewards' for tenant-led enclosures, or investment in the extension or repair of farm buildings. Any farm rent concessions were usually tied to such allowances. On the Castlemilk estate in 1782, a reluctant tenant was offered a reduced initial annual rent if he agreed to erect enclosure fencing in subsequent years. A prospective tenant for the amalgamated farm of Monkrigg-Mitchellhall on the Saltoun estate in 1806 was offered £100 reduction from his annual rent of £700 if, in the course of his lease, he undertook

⁷¹ NLS, Ms 17,159, fo. 101: HPL, 631.1/264, Burrell journal, 1780–82, p. 359.

⁷² Of the 42 farms set for improvement at Hamilton in 1765, over 30 required scattered runrig possessions to be 'laid together and enclosed' before improvement could proceed (HPL, 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763–9, pp. 62–75): at Saltoun areas of the estate were still 'largely unenclosed' even in the 1770s (NLS, Ms 17,246, fo. 7).

⁷³ Devine, *Transformation of rural Scotland*, pp. 106–7;

Devine's specific reference was to the characteristic approach employed on the improving Hamilton Estate, although Burrell admitted that reliance on the existing tenantry was partly conditioned by a failure to attract 'expert and substantial' tenants (HPL, 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763–9, p. 202).

⁷⁴ HPL, 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763–9, p. 79.

⁷⁵ NLS, Ms 17,156, fos 16–17.

to repair farm buildings and supervise the installation of a new threshing mill.⁷⁶ A Hamilton tenant was assured in 1819 that his new improving tack, while requiring increased annual rent, bound the proprietor to erect 'a stable, byre, cart shed and milkhouse', while another, fretting over the asking rent of £80 per annum for Skellyton farm in 1765, was promised 'ten kilns of lime yearly' for the first three years of his lease if the full rent were paid.⁷⁷ Such concessions were designed to improve the estate as well as cajole tenants to pay higher rents. John Burrell noted that, while 'nothing will prompt tenants more to come up to the proposed rent than a premium of lime', neither could it 'be more for the Duke's interest'.⁷⁸

Valued tenants had such concessions increased in difficult times. Allowances for poor crop yields, where the estate had failed to complete stipulated enclosures, were paid out at Hamilton and Saltoun, following poor harvests in the early 1770s and 1780s.⁷⁹ Between 1773 and 1778 the Hamilton estate journals record 35 instances of action initiated against tenants with serious rent arrears, but also itemize 32 grants of increased allowances against rent.⁸⁰ Between 1783 and 1787, when rent arrears were even more extensive, tenant allowances were proportionally higher (51 against 25 instances of punitive action).⁸¹ Burrell strove to provide financial compensation for 'every article of improvement' made by tenants during difficult times.⁸² Such generosity, specifically focused on 'good' tenants struggling in adverse circumstances, even encompassed market fluctuations. In the difficult early 1780s, the tenant of Allanton farm had his annual rent of £200 reduced by £25 because, having leased his farm 'when prices of grains were high', he struggled to meet his obligations as prices slumped.⁸³ The principal tenant of Lettrick-Dechmont farm, paying annual rents of nearly £500 with debts of over £1,500 'for arrears of crop 1777 and preceding years', was similarly granted a generous 'one-off' allowance of £700 'on account of falling markets since the commencement of the tack [in 1771]'.⁸⁴ Interestingly, the estate, presumably afraid that such generosity might provide a potentially ruinous precedent, ordered that the tenant 'never let it be known what indulgence was given'.⁸⁵ At Saltoun, such allowances were especially notable in the serious market depression following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. The tenants of Maigrie and Middle Mains farms were given rent abatements because, 'despite much-improved practice', falling market prices had made their farms 'too high-rented'; a neighbour in Blanceburn farm had his annual rent reduced by one-third to compensate for the fall in 'local grain prices'.⁸⁶ By 1816, total Saltoun rent arrears amounted to £4383 against corresponding annual rents of £3331.⁸⁷ The most successful Saltoun 'capitalist farmers' William Hepburn and John Walker, with debts to the estate of £1770 in 1816, were offered up to 25 per cent reduction on their total annual rents of £1835, it being thought

⁷⁶ NLS, Ms 5329, fos 144-5; 17153, fos 54-5.

⁷⁷ HPL, 631.1/288, Burrell journal, Jan.-Dec. 1819, pp. 26-7; 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763-9, p. 98.

⁷⁸ HPL, 631.1/236, Burrell journal, 1763-9, p. 98.

⁷⁹ HPL, e.g. 631.1/249, Burrell journal, 1773-8, pp. 89, 92-6 (1774); 631.1/274, Burrell journal, 1784-7, pp. 139, 186 (1786). NLS, Ms 17151, fos 126, 127, 129 (1780s).

⁸⁰ HPL, 631.1/249, Burrell journal, 1773-78, e.g. pp. 6, 31, 53, 92.

⁸¹ HPL, 631.1/269, Burrell journal, 1782-3, e.g. pp. 36,

125, 210; 631.1/274, Burrell journal, 1784-7, e.g. pp. 27, 81, 94.

⁸² HPL, 631.1/249, Burrell journal, 1773-8, pp. 134-5.

⁸³ HPL, 333.3 fo. 19; 631.1/264, Burrell journal, 1780-2, p. 26.

⁸⁴ HPL, 631.1/ 259, Burrell journal, 1778-80, p. 91.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ NLS, Ms 17156, fos 227-30; 17158, fos 162-3.

⁸⁷ NLS, Ms 17156, fos 220-1.

'inadvisable to part with these tenants if they can possibly be supported'.⁸⁸ In a remarkably sustained episode of proprietary support, an improving tenant of Spittal farm on the Castlemilk estate between 1811 and 1831 had his annual rent of £310 reduced progressively to £260, and finally to £180, because 'although industrious ... he met with many losses'.⁸⁹

Harsher proprietary actions often accompanied such concessions. In the bad years of the mid-1770s and '80s (see above), indebted Hamilton tenants were persistently 'pushed for payment' and some subsequently ordered to 'pay up or be removed'.⁹⁰ 'Due diligence' – provision of surety for arrears, often from friends or relations – was frequently demanded; 'ultimate diligence' – imposing sequestration of assets to clear arrears, accompanied in the most hopeless cases by forced eviction via a 'decreet of removing' – was the wretched final step.⁹¹ On the improving Hamilton estate, 'due diligence' was applied when arrears exceeded a year's rent. In the earlier 1770s, 43 of 82 Hamilton tenants in significant arrears had crop returns and livestock 'valuated' against respective arrears – a preparation for sequestration of assets.⁹² In the earlier 1780s, 101 Hamilton tenants with arrears 'thought recoverable' owed £3556 against total annual rents of £4390, while 41 tenants had 'doubtful' or 'desperate' arrears totalling £2849, more than double their annual rents.⁹³ At Yester, as early as the 1730s, farm tacks stipulated that if a tenant had arrears of two or more years rent 'it shall be lawful for the proprietor summarily to remove him'.⁹⁴ By the 1760s Castlemilk farm leases were '*ipso facto* void and null' in similar circumstances, and the same procedure applied by 1820 on the Lee Estate.⁹⁵ From around 1800 Saltoun proprietors were authorized by tack to apply to the 'Judge Ordinary' (the county sheriff or his substitute) to remove tenants owing over one year's rent.⁹⁶

Despite such apparent willingness to evict, the actual extent of tenant removal for non-payment of rent is often unclear. Individual tenants with conspicuous rent arrears can be readily identified, and their ultimate fate sometimes discovered. Saltoun evictions in the post-1815 years included both the indebted tenant of Blanceburn farm, and the estate's most substantial tenants, Hepburn and Walker.⁹⁷ The struggling tenants of Lampuckwells and Barleymill farm were similarly evicted in 1819 and 1820.⁹⁸ Others, variously threatened with sequestration of crops or proprietary repossession, appear to have survived.⁹⁹ But, even if the five verifiably evicted Saltoun tenants were the only removals, this loss still represents around 20 per cent of the whole Saltoun tenantry.¹⁰⁰ It has been estimated that Hamilton estate tenant numbers fell by around 13 per cent between the 1750s and 1790s, but this resulted from farm amalgamations and voluntary migration as well as from forced evictions, and, as at Saltoun, specific references to forced removals are rare within Hamilton estate records.¹⁰¹ As noted earlier, preliminary

⁸⁸ NLS, Ms 17,156, fos 226–8.

⁸⁹ NLS, Ms 8220, fos 97–100.

⁹⁰ HPL, 631.1/249, Burrell journal, 1773–8, e.g. pp. 67, 95; 631.1/264, Burrell journal, 1780–2, e.g. pp. 29, 30, 31.

⁹¹ HPL, 631.1/249, Burrell journal, 1773–8, e.g. pp. 31, 92–3; 631.1/269, Burrell journal, 1782–3, pp. 344, 355.

⁹² HPL, 631.1/249, Burrell journal, 1773–8, pp. 12, 40–49, 55–6.

⁹³ HPL, 631.1/264, Burrell journal, 1780–2, pp. 52–8.

⁹⁴ NLS, Ms 14,747, fos 136–7.

⁹⁵ NLS, Ms 5329, fo. 77; 27,578, fo. 18.

⁹⁶ NLS, Ms 17,152, fos 143–4.

⁹⁷ NLS, Ms 17,158, fos 28–9; 17,157, fos 61–2.

⁹⁸ NLS, Ms 17,158, fos 58–9, 181; 17,159, fos 7–8, 18–19.

⁹⁹ For example the tenant of Cauldshiel farm, who was threatened at one stage with removal, but apparently survived (NLS: Ms 17,158, fos 60–1; Ms 17,159, fos 98–9).

¹⁰⁰ There were 24 listed farm tenants in 1817–19 (NLS, Ms 17,157, fos 73–4, 232–3).

¹⁰¹ Devine, *Transformation of rural Scotland*, p. 115.

sequestration of crops and livestock were initiated against 43 tenants with serious rent arrears in the mid-1770s, and 41 tenants had rent arrears considered to be 'irrecoverable' in the mid-1780s. If forced removal was applied in all these cases, up to 20 per cent of estate tenants might have been dispossessed in each decade (which is in line with the estimated Saltoun evictions for the post-1815 period).¹⁰²

IV

Despite seventeenth and early-eighteenth century examples of partial monetization of farm rents, notably on the Yester, Castlemilk and Lee estates, principal cash rents, as established in published research for Lowland agriculture as a whole, did not predominate across the six estates until the mid-eighteenth century and Newhailes farm rents retained significant elements of payment in kind even in the 1790s.

Detailed analysis of developments on the six estates between c.1670 and c.1760 suggests that rent monetization was delayed by a general proprietary desire to retain control of ongoing change by instituting gradual rather than comprehensive estate improvement, which served to delay the more costly innovations. The notion of such 'top-down' agricultural change in the first half of the eighteenth century is hardly a novel concept, but the detailed repercussions of the typically conservative proprietary approach have arguably not been fully explored. Examples of pre-1760 improvements in soil enrichment, adoption of new crops, farm enlargement and other categories can of course be found, but comprehensive farm enclosure and subdivision were often postponed. The Hamilton and Saltoun estates were still 'largely unenclosed' in the 1760s and '70s. Increased crop output, although modest in scale, came from limited improvements that included the extension of regular cultivation to moorland and 'outfield' areas previously only periodically ploughed and cropped. Such conservative agricultural development could be supported by the continued employment of traditional rent structures, adapted to proprietary market requirements for gradually increasing grain fermes (proportional to rising farm output) and market quality produce. Continuing rent payments in kind additionally gave proprietors a stake in increased profits in times of rising food prices (fixed or only periodically renegotiatiable money rents were less flexible), while the application of local grain fiars facilitated accurate assessment of proprietorial losses caused by poor quality grain fermes. Significant tenant market involvement was not apparent on these estates until the 1750s; at Castlemilk and Saltoun such market-participation was initially tenant-led, although by the early 1800s at Saltoun, and at Hamilton from the mid-1760s, full tenant market-participation and farm-rent monetization were established components of comprehensive, estate-sponsored improvement schemes.

Consistently rising agricultural prices after 1780 encouraged both wider tenant market-involvement and increasing rent monetization. After that date, the only references in estate papers to payments in kind are at Newhailes. Cash rents increased rapidly in the later eighteenth century, although precise rates of overall Lowland farm rent increases have not yet been fully researched. It is generally agreed that rack-renting was rare across the region; on the selected estates proprietors typically set improving rents using graduated rent-per-acre assessments

¹⁰² Around 220 tenants are listed in the annual estate rentals for 1775–83 (HPL, 333.3, fos 3–19).

for different types of land, with some consideration for estimated individual farm output. This paper suggests that this process resulted in notably similar increases on the improving Hamilton, Saltoun, Yester and Castlemilk estates, average farm rents rising to three and a half or just over four times unimproved rents, calculated over corresponding 30-year periods of continuous estate improvement, increases on or around Sir John Sinclair's 'optimum' fourfold increase in farm rents over such a period. Farm rents actually rose faster than average grain prices between 1780 and 1815, but substantially increased productive output on improved farms ensured continuing profitability.

Improving proprietors on the selected estates (as generally across the Lowlands) tended to retain existing tenants rather than take on wealthier outsiders. Stipulated 'improving' farm rents, in principle non-negotiable, were in practice frequently reduced, usually on pledges of subsequent tenant-driven improvements. Allowances for already completed improvements and, in bad years, compensation for crop failures were permitted. On the Hamilton estate, following poor harvests in the early 1770s and 1780s, such allowances outnumbered legal actions against tenants with rent arrears. Rent reductions for falling market prices were allowed at Hamilton and, especially during the post-1815 market depression, at Saltoun. But legal measures involving debt security, sequestration of assets and warrants of eviction simultaneously increased – at Yester, Castlemilk, Hamilton and Lee against tenants with two or more years' accumulated rent arrears, at Saltoun with one year only. One in five tenants at Hamilton in the 1780s and on the post-1815 Saltoun estate were subjected to serious legal action, although the numbers ultimately suffering forced eviction are unclear. In retrospect, we can see that rent modernization and improvements were responses to rising market demand in the late eighteenth-century. When these favourable conditions faltered in the post-1815 depression, continuation of the impressive pace of lowland estate improvement was seriously challenged.