OLD WEALTH OR NEW MONEY?
THE LANDED CLASSES OF
MID-VICTORIAN LEICESTERSHIRE

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This article examines the origins and background of Leicestershire’s major landowners during the 1870s and early 1880s. It draws on the 1873 Return of Owners of Land, which was analysed by Dave Postles in the Society’s Transactions of 2010, to identify those people who owned 1,000 acres or more, or owned land with a gross annual value of at least £1,000. Using a range of published and unpublished sources, and based on research for a doctoral thesis, it traces in particular those who had invested in land since 1830 from the proceeds of wealth created in business or the professions.

This article considers the nature and composition of the landed classes in Leicestershire during the 1870s and early 1880s. It centres on the 80 or so people who together owned just under half the county, with estates in excess of 1,000 acres each. This social and political elite inhabited country houses which varied from magnificent halls to the architecturally plain, lived principally on rental income from tenant farmers, and played a prominent role in public life as members of parliament, magistrates, in the church, and in offices such as High Sheriff and as Lord and Deputy Lieutenants. Around these common themes, landed society was not, however, monolithic: its members differed in their individual character and outlook, and within its own hierarchical structure it encompassed the powerful and hugely wealthy magnate and the village squire.

In particular, the article examines a topic that has been much debated by historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries especially: the extent to which business and professional men invested in land. It also touches on some related aspects of that debate, including the question of whether the existing members of landed society accepted into their rarefied circles newly-rich representatives of the middle classes, as part of a process of adaptation at a time of wider political and social change. The article is based on research carried out for a doctoral thesis at the University of Leicester on the Leicestershire gentry between 1790 and 1875.¹

AN ‘OPEN’ OR ‘CLOSED’ ELITE?

Writing in 1963, F. M. L. Thompson was able to state that ‘it has long been recognized that the rise of new gentry is a permanent feature of the English social

scene’. His view was shared by Harold Perkin, who wrote six years later of the ‘familiar rise of new men into the gentry and nobility which became the most distinctive feature of English history’, and of familiar paths ‘open for merchants and industrialists’. G. E. Mingay said that the ranks of the gentry were constantly replenished by the arrival of new families from backgrounds such as law, trade, finance and office-holders. Later, David Cannadine portrayed a Victorian elite which was ‘much more new than old’, reinforced at the end of the eighteenth century not just by an influx of Scots and Irish families to form a British elite, but by ‘self-made merchants, nabobs and industrialists’, as well as public servants who bought their way in and gradually established themselves as bona-fide landowners.

This view has, however, been widely challenged by those historians who have emphasised the ‘closed’ rather than the ‘open’ nature of landed society. In a study published in 1981, W. D. Rubinstein maintained that most nineteenth-century business or professional men were landless or owned smaller estates. In a pioneering but controversial study three years later, Lawrence and Jeanne Stone pronounced that ‘the traditional concept of an open elite – open to large scale infiltration by merchant wealth – is dead’. Other historians, however, have argued that although landed society was not a rigid ‘caste’ that was in any formal sense closed to newcomers, it could be difficult to enter: from the eighteenth century many existing landowners added significantly to their estates and newcomers could purchase only lesser properties, either because that was what was available to buy or because they did not have sufficient resources to invest on a larger scale. M. J. Daunton, however, argued that there was ‘no contradiction between the continued entry of new men and the consolidation of great estates by larger owners, for the mechanism was the same: an active land market’.

Various attempts have been made to quantify the outcome of transactions in this market and have produced a range of conclusions. The Stones calculated that over the period from 1540 to 1880, only 157 businessmen bought their way into the elite in the three counties they had studied (Northumberland, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire). They amounted to only 7 per cent of all 2,246 owners of some 362 houses, but were a third of new purchasers.

10 L. and J. C. F. Stone, Open Elite, p. 403.
Beckett also stated that no more than 7 per cent of the 700 or so largest estates had been constructed from business fortunes. In a study of Lancashire cotton masters, Anthony Howe found that 39 out of 351 (11 per cent) owned more than 1,000 acres in 1872. Another study found that 900 (21 per cent) of owners of more than 1,000 acres in England and Wales between 1780 and 1879 were ‘new rich entrants’.

THE PATTERN OF CHANGE

Much that has been written about landownership in Leicestershire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries suggests that it experienced relatively little change at the highest levels, and appears to confirm the view that new entrants from business and industry were very few. As Joan Thirsk wrote in the *Victoria County History of Leicestershire*, after changes in the early modern period: ‘The majority of the great landed families were unshakeably rooted.’ Yet, she also conceded that it would be easy to exaggerate this social immobility, which was most noticeable among the large landowners and because of the contrast to the century before 1660. H. J. Hunt found that between 1780 and 1831 there had been a steady transfer of land in the county following parliamentary enclosure, from small to the large owners. Thirsk further noted that businessmen ‘were content to invest the bulk of their capital in other enterprises [than land]’. Her views were echoed by Jack Simmons, who noted in the context of the alleviation of distress in periods of economic depression that none of the main manufacturers in Leicester, in industries such as hosiery, was making a fortune on the scale of the ironmasters, shipbuilders or cotton merchants in other parts of the country. And Temple Patterson argued that men like William and John Biggs belonged to a ‘new type of businessman who did not do the squirearchy the compliment of imitation’.

This pattern of landownership at the top levels – of entrenched families, the enlargement of great estates and few entrants from the local business world – is, however, only one part of the picture. Leicestershire was noted as much for its small to middling-sized estates and the independent gentry families who owned them as for its great aristocratic magnates. Eric Acheson wrote, for example, of a ‘gentry community’ in Leicestershire in the later fifteenth century, whose

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members were the major players in the county's affairs in the absence of a dominant aristocracy. Among this gentry class with land of 1,000 or 2,000 acres, or even in the hundreds, there had always been a high turnover. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw numerous leading families die out, sell up or succumb to the vagaries of political or economic fortune: Skipwith of Prestwold, Faunt of Foston, Pretymann of Lodington, Staresmore of Frolesworth, and the Villiers family, the Dukes of Buckingham, all departed over time. Falling families had been succeeded by men of new money, such as Sir William Herrick, a goldsmith in London, who purchased Beaumanor in 1595 and was the son of a Mayor of Leicester; Sir Wolstan Dixie, a furrier and former Lord Mayor of London who bought an estate in Market Bosworth in 1593; Christopher Packe, a draper and Mayor of London in the Interregnum, who acquired Prestwold from Sir Harry Skipwith in the 1650s; the Parliamentarian lawyer from Lancashire, James Winstanley, who at about the same time purchased Braunstone from the Royalist Hastings family; and Ambrose Phillipps, a London lawyer who bought Garendon from the Duke of Buckingham in 1683. These six families remained among the county's leading landowners and prominent members of its 'gentry' into the mid-Victorian period; yesterday's new money had become today's old wealth.

Change in the composition of Leicestershire's landed classes continued into the nineteenth century. The decline of some existing families, however, was less the result of political upheaval, as seen in the early modern period, and more the consequence of factors which are ever-present: personal ruin and the failure of a family line. In 1800, Charles Clopton, the high-living friend of the Prince Regent, shot himself with a pistol at his house in C larges Street, London, after losing several inherited fortunes; following the death in 1821 of Walter Ruding, a noted radical Whig, whose family had owned Westcotes Hall since the 1570s, the estate was sold; in 1850, Sir Lumley St George Skeffington, the heir to Skeffington Hall, died at the age of 79 in his lodgings in London, having dissipated his fortune; and the Nevill family, who had lived in Leicestershire since the fifteenth century, sold their Hall and 1,645-acre estate at Nevill Holt in 1868.

The misfortunes of one family presented opportunities for others, and helped ensure that throughout the nineteenth century there was an active market in Leicestershire for country houses and modest or middling-sized estates of up to 2,000 or so acres. Although few of the largest estates came up for sale, there were some opportunities for new men. The county's appeal for landowners, existing and prospective, rested first on its agricultural prosperity, the product of the rich grazing pastures which lay mainly in the south and east of the county. In 1830,

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21 In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, these included Thomas Pares (1716–1805), a Leicester attorney who bought Hopewell Hall in Derbyshire in the 1780s, and William Blake (1774–1852), a London banker who acquired property in Hertfordshire and Leicestershire in the 1820s. Pares’s sons, Thomas (1746–1824) and John (1749–1833), were hosiers and partners in a bank in Leicester with Thomas Paget (see below), and the latter extended the family’s holdings in Leicestershire.
approaching Melton Mowbray from Lincolnshire, William Cobbett observed ‘the beautiful pastures of this verdant little county of Leicester’. By 1854, some 59% of the county was given over to grass. Towards the end of the eighteenth century rents were between 15s and £1 an acre; by the 1870s they were approaching £2. The purchase price of land had risen during the mid-nineteenth century to 25 to 30 times annual rental value, and occasionally more; in 1864, William Herrick paid the non-resident Jacomb Hood family just £45,000 for Bardon Park, with its 1,400 acres worth £1,800 a year, 25 times its rental value. Eight years later, Nathaniel Curzon paid £190,000 for Lockington with 2,193 acres, 40 times its annual rental. And in 1876, Edward Cunard bought Holt, the former Nevill estate, for £105,000, 29 times its annual rental income of £3,600. In addition, hunting had made the county the centre of a fashionable social scene, which each winter drew in the wealthy from across the country and from overseas. Country houses and smaller properties were let out as hunting ‘boxes’ for the season; these were not so often purchased by the occasionally-resident aristocrats and financiers who came for the sport, which helped ease the competitive pressure on the property that did come onto the market.

This brief summary indicates that change in the composition of the landed classes in Leicestershire was continual, as families rose and fell, and the political and economic landscape shifted. This had been so from the early modern period and by the middle of the nineteenth century, while some at the top did indeed appear entrenched, estates frequently changed hands at lower levels.

**THE LANDED ELITE OF LEICESTERSHIRE 1873–83**

*The Return of Owners of Land*, which was compiled in 1873 for the whole of the UK, excluding London, and was known as the ‘New Domesday Book’, was the most comprehensive survey of landownership undertaken in Britain for nearly 900 years. The *Return* gave the names of 4,927 individuals and corporate bodies who owned more than one acre of land in both the borough and the county, the land’s gross annual value, and their place of residence (usually a town or village). Here, it has been supplemented by the 1883 edition of John Bateman’s *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, which lists all those who owned at least

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29 *Return of Owners of Land* (ROL), PP. LXXII, C.1097 (1874).
30 The background to the *Return*, and the data it contained for Leicestershire, were the subject of detailed discussion and analysis by Dr Dave Postles in ‘The Return of Owners of Land and the Transformation of the 1870s’, *TLAHS* 84 (2010), pp. 223–50. I am grateful to Dr Postles for his comments on a draft of this paper.
2,000 acres of land in total and worth £2,000 a year, with additional information for people whose land exceeded 3,000 acres, or was worth £3,000 a year, which included the amounts held in individual counties and their value.\textsuperscript{31}

The Return showed that 82 people owned estates of more than 1,000 acres in Leicestershire in 1873: 22 peers or members of peerage families and 60 'commoners', including baronets, knights and untitled landowners, who constituted the 'gentry'. The backgrounds of these people, and their history of landholding in Leicestershire, has been investigated here through a range of sources. These included Land Tax records from 1780 to 1832 for 348 towns, villages and estates in the county.\textsuperscript{32} These annual returns present many problems for the historian, especially in equating the sum assessed in each case with a precise amount of land. The difficulties are, however, greater at the lower end of the scale, where payments amounted to a few shillings or pounds a year.\textsuperscript{33} For the purpose of identifying the names of those who were the highest payers, they are adequate. Based on previous work by Davis and Hunt, an annual payment of £65 was taken to represent the ownership of 1,000 acres.\textsuperscript{34} The usefulness of the Land Tax records in revealing the names of owners was confirmed in so far as changes in ownership that they indicated year-by-year corresponded closely to information on property transactions contained in other sources. These included contemporary documents such as family and estate papers, newspaper reports of property sales, and of the social and public lives of the landed classes, John Nichol’s four-volume \textit{History of Leicestershire}, published between 1790 and 1815, John Throsby’s \textit{Select Views in Leicestershire}, published in two volumes in 1790, and numerous directories and gazetteers, local, professional, social and academic. Modern reference sources included the Transactions of this Society, the Victoria County History, the Dictionary of National Biography and the History of the House of Commons series, which gives biographies of MPs, as well as more recent volumes of Burke’s \textit{Peerage and Baronetage} and \textit{The Landed Gentry}.\textsuperscript{35} From these documents and works, it has been possible to trace the origins of all those who owned 1,000 acres or more in Leicestershire, and of more than 80 per cent of the 63 people who owned less than 1,000 acres but received at least £1,000 in annual rental income.

\textsuperscript{32} ROLLR, QS 62, pp. 1–238.
\textsuperscript{34} E. Davies, ‘The Smaller Landowner 1780–1832 in light of the Land Tax Assessment’, \textit{EconHR} 1 (1927), pp. 87–113, calculated that the Land Tax in Leicestershire was paid at the rate of 1s 4d per acre. Hunt also adopted those figures.
\textsuperscript{35} References for these sources will be given as they occur. Other essential guides include Heather Broughton, \textit{Family and Estate Records in the Leicestershire Record Office} (Leicester, 1997); and Leonard Cantor, \textit{The Historic Country Houses of Leicestershire and Rutland} (Leicester, 1998).
The five largest owners – and seven of the leading 10 – were peers or members of noble families. The Duke of Rutland, although the leading landowner in the county with 30,188 acres – nearly three times more than any other owner – held another 39,949 acres in six other counties, according to Bateman. Only the Earl of Loudoun, with 10,174 acres, also reached five figures in Leicestershire. They were followed by Earl Howe (9,755 acres in Leicestershire), the Earl of Stamford (9,012 acres) and Earl of Dysart (8,420). All the leading four, however, had more than two-thirds of their total land in other counties. The majority of peers who had property in Leicestershire did not own large estates there: four held between 2,000 and 3,000 acres and six between 1,000 and 2,000. Of the 15 peers who owned under 1,000 acres in Leicestershire, four had under 100. The majority of peers lived elsewhere and their engagement in county affairs was limited. Although in total just under 25 per cent of Leicestershire was owned by peers and their families, the proportion was lower than in any of its seven neighbouring counties.

Just two of the peers can be said to have represented new money:

- Edward Strutt (1801–80), the 1st Baron Belper, was the grandson of the cotton spinner and inventor, Jedediah Strutt. He was one of the first men to be created a peer from a family which had made its wealth in industry. He owned 1,912 acres in Leicestershire in 1873, rising to 2,030 a decade later, when he also owned 2,950 acres in Nottinghamshire and another 246 in Derbyshire. He had earlier served as an MP in both of those counties, and was High Sheriff and later Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire. One of his sons, Arthur, married Alice de Lisle, daughter of the largest gentry landowner in Leicestershire, Ambrose de Lisle (formerly March Phillipps).

- Samuel Jones Loyd (1786–1883) was a banker who was made Baron Overstone in 1849. He was an immensely wealthy man – he left more than £2,118,000 on his death apart from the value of his property – and owned 30,849 acres in 1883, with a gross annual value of £58,098. Just over 15,000 acres of his land was in Northamptonshire, with 4,460 in Warwickshire, 1,276 in Leicestershire and pockets in eight other counties.

Thus, although these two were relatively recent entrants to the peerage and came from commercial backgrounds, some of the other peers who owned land in Leicestershire were newcomers to the county, while others had inherited estates which had previously belonged to non-peerage families in the county. Two of the main peerage landowners in the county held Scottish titles inherited through their maternal ancestors. Lionel Tollemache (1794–1878), the 8th Earl of Dysart, was the grandson of the second Duke of Rutland and Lady Louisa Tollemache, the

36 Postles, TLAHS, p. 230.
37 Based on the Tables in Bateman, Landowners, pp. 503–10.
41 Bateman, Great Landowners, p. 348.
daughter of the 4th Earl, and Countess of Dysart in her own right.\(^{42}\) Charles Abney-Hastings (1855–1920), the 11th Earl of Loudoun, succeeded his mother, the Countess, in 1874, and inherited land which formerly belonged to the Earls of Moira and Charles Abney-Hastings MP (1792–1858).\(^{43}\)

Five landowners among the peerage families in the 1870s had inherited property from members of the gentry:

- **Richard Curzon-Howe** (1822–1900), the 3rd Earl Howe, was the grandson of Penn Assheton Curzon MP (1757–97), whose wife, Lady Sophia Charlotte Howe, was the daughter of Admiral Earl Howe. Penn Curzon inherited what was reputed to be one of the grandest eighteenth-century houses in Leicestershire, Gopsall Park, built by his great uncle, the Birmingham ironmaster, Charles Jennens, and one of the first country houses in the county to be built on the proceeds on industrial wealth.\(^{44}\)

- **George Butler-Danvers** (1794–1866), the 5th Earl of Lanesborough in the Irish peerage, was the son of Augustus Butler and Mary Danvers, the daughter and heiress of Sir John Danvers (1723–96) of Swithland. After his death the property passed to his nephew, John Danvers Butler (1839–1905), the 6th Earl.\(^{45}\)

- **Henrietta Otway-Cave**, Baroness Braye (1809–79), an Irish peeress in her own right, inherited the estates of the Cave family at Stanford, where the family had lived since the fifteenth century. Her mother, Sarah, the daughter of Sir Thomas Cave (1737–80), the 6th Baronet, had succeeded to Stanford on the death of Sarah’s brother, Sir Thomas Cave (1766–92), the 7th Baronet.\(^{46}\)

- **Henry Wilson** (1797–1871), the 11th Baron Berners, owned property at Keythorpe and Allexton, which his father had inherited from his distant cousin, William Wilson, who died childless in 1796. He was succeeded to the property by his great nephew, Harry Tyrwhitt-Wilson (1854–91), whose mother, Emma Wilson (1835–1917), the wife of Sir Harry Tyrwhitt, became Baroness Berners.\(^{47}\)

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Finally, Henry Powys-Keck (1812–61), the fifth son of Thomas Powys (1775–1860), the 2nd Baron Lilford, came into the possession of Stoughton Grange on the death of his cousin, the childless Colonel George Legh-Keck (1774–1860). Henry was followed by his son, Henry Leycester Powys-Keck (1841–1912), whose first cousin was Thomas Powys (1833–96), the 4th Baron Lilford.48

Thus, 25,830 acres (5 per cent of the total land in the county), which at the close of the previous century belonged to ‘commoners’ of the gentry, had, by the 1870s, passed into peerage families. These transfers illustrate the great efforts made by landed families to ensure that in the event of the failure of a direct male line, their estates remained intact and were not put up for sale. Sons-in-law, grandsons or distant cousins were recruited, by gentry as well as peerage families, to ensure continuity, and it was not unusual to require a change of surname as a condition of the inheritance. Such devices, which often helped keep larger estates intact, also had the effect of limiting the amount of property available for potential newcomers.49

THE ‘GREATER’ GENTRY

The ‘greater’ gentry, who owned 3,000 acres or more in the county itself, displayed all the stability suggested by Thirsk. Eight of the 10 who made up the greater gentry in Leicestershire in 1873 had entered landed society, at a lower level, before 1700. Together, they held 47,279 acres (9.1 per cent of the county). The leading five members came from older gentry families: Ambrose de Lisle (1809–78) (formerly March Phillips) of Garendon; William Perry Herrick (1794–1876) of Beaumanor; William Pochin (1820–1901) of Barkby; Edward Hartopp MP (1809–84) of Dalby; and Sir Alexander Dixie (1851–1924) of Market Bosworth. With the exception of the late seventeenth-century entrant, the Phillipps, all had owned some land in Leicestershire since at least the sixteenth century. In contrast to what had been somewhat detached posture of many of the main gentry families at the end of the eighteenth century, seven of the 10 provided a member of parliament between 1832 and 1867. Their identity was rooted in Leicestershire: most held more than half their total amount of land in the county and had their main residence there. Three – Ambrose de Lisle, the largest single gentry landowner in the county with more than 7,000 acres (but deeply indebted), Edward Dawson (1836–) of Launde and Whatton, and Sir Henry Halford (1828–87) of Wistow – owned no land elsewhere. Just two had under half their property in the county: Edward Hartopp, who possessed estates from his mother’s family in Ireland; and William Herrick, who inherited property in the west midlands and Wales from his maternal grandfather, William Perry, a Staffordshire

industrialist. All but two of the 10 leading families had their main estates in the north of the county. To them can be added Hussey Packe (1846–1909) of Prestwold, who on succeeding to the family’s estates in 1874 enlarged them from 2,885 acres to 3,309 acres by 1883.\(^5\)

Two of these leading gentry families had entered the top tier in the past generation:

- Thomas Tertius Paget (1807–1882) of Humberstone, was the Liberal MP for South Leicestershire from 1867 to 1886. He was the grandson of Thomas Paget of Ibstock (1732–1813), a farmer and noted cattle breeder, who founded a Leicester bank in partnership with Thomas and John Pares, and the son of Thomas Paget MP (1778–1862), a Unitarian and the first Mayor of Leicester following municipal reform in 1836.\(^3\) Three generations of Pagets built up their property portfolio gradually, mainly in Leicestershire, with some in Northamptonshire.\(^5\)

- Nathaniel Curzon (1829–97) came from family which had owned land in Breedon from the late sixteenth century, and had added to its holdings slowly over the generations. A qualified barrister, his father and grandfather were lawyers, in Derby and Ashby-de-la-Zouch respectively, and he propelled the family into the greater gentry with the purchase of Lockington Hall in 1872.\(^5\) Through John Curzon (c. 1551–1632), they shared a common ancestry with the Earls Howe and the Lords Scarsdale and Curzon.\(^5\)

THE ‘MIDDLING’ AND ‘LESSER’ GENTRY

Change was more apparent in the ranks of the ‘middling’ gentry who owned 2–3,000 acres in the county, and the ‘lesser’ gentry with between 1,000 and 2,000 acres. Among the 14 people who made up the former group (including Hussey Packe), at least four were non-resident and had their main landholdings elsewhere. They owned 33,235 acres (6.4 per cent of the county). The wealth of two recent arrivals from outside Leicestershire had come from business:

- Charles Brook (1813–72), a second generation Yorkshire mill owner, purchased Enderby Hall in 1866 and owned all of his 2,236 acres in

\(^5\) Rol: Bateman, Landowners, p. 349.
\(^5\) Thomas Tertius Paget owned 3,950 acres in Leicestershire and 872 in Northamptonshire, together worth £10,884 annually (Bateman, Landowners, p. 350). Maps made in 1886–88 of the family properties showed they owned pockets of land in 26 villages in Leicestershire (ROLLR DE 365/387 and 388). They included Humberstone Hall, Evington Hall and more than 1,000 acres in or near Lubenham.
\(^5\) ROLLR 1536/119, Particulars of Sale, 1872; Joseph Foster, Men at the Bar (1885), p. 111.
\(^5\) Burke’s Landed Gentry (BLG) (1879), p. 410; Fletcher, Leicestershire Pedigrees, pp. 94 and 97–8.
Leicestershire. He rapidly established himself, in the words of the Leicester Journal, as a ‘highly respected’ and ‘excellent and valuable’ person who had become a stalwart of county society, as a magistrate, in Tory politics and as a generous benefactor.  

- Thomas Thwaites MP (1817–88) was a Lancashire brewer and Liberal member for Blackburn from 1875 to 1880. Although he had slightly more land in 1883 in Leicestershire (2,392 acres) than Lancashire (2,177 acres), he lived in London and in his native county at Woodfield Park.

The lesser gentry had been substantially re-constituted over the previous generation and its numbers had grown. Nine of the 22 families at this level in the early 1830s had either sold or died out, and three dropped to the fringe with under 1,000 acres by the 1870s. In that time, three had moved up to higher levels, while three had dropped down from the ‘middling’ or ‘greater’ tiers. There were 26 new entrants, to bring the total of the lesser gentry to 36 by 1873. Together they owned 50,404 acres (9.7 per cent of the county). Their land was more likely to be found in the south of the county, among the marketable smaller properties on the rich grazing pastures that had not historically been held by the nobility or older gentry landowners. Among the newcomers in the lesser gentry, 11 came from business or professional backgrounds, of whom five were manufacturers or industrialists:

- Henry Grieveson, a coal owner and merchant from Darlington, bought Holt in 1868, and sold it eight years later to the Cunard shipping family for £105,000. After 1877 it came into the possession of Sir Bache Cunard (1851–1925), one of whose first acts as owner was to become the sole benefactor for a £500 restoration of Nevill Holt church.

- Isaac Harrison, the nephew and heir of a market gardener who had exploited a medicinal spring at Newfoundpool. He owned 1,058 acres in 1873 with a gross annual value of £3,498, higher than might be expected from solely agricultural use, and in that year served as the county High Sheriff.

- Thomas Stokes (1784–1867), a hosiery manufacturer who bought land at New Parks in 1843; he was a radical who was the Mayor of Leicester in 1838 and 1841, and High Sheriff for the county in 1850.

- Edward Warner (1804–94), a Loughborough hosiery manufacturer who bought Quorn Hall from Sir Richard Sutton in the late 1850s. By 1883 he owned 2,014 acres in Leicestershire out of a total of 6,123 acres in three

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55 Leicester Journal, 12 and 19 July 1872. Brook was a magistrate, was active in Tory politics and a generous benefactor.
56 ROL; Bateman, Landowners, p. 441.
57 VCH Leics, vol. 5, p. 245. The ROL listed Nevill as the owner.
counties. His Leicestershire land had a gross annual value of £5,436 out of a total of £9,171.

- William Worwick JP (c. 1800–71), who owned Swannington colliery and bought Birstall Hall and Normanton Hall. He was succeeded by his son Richard Worsley Worwick (1835–1905), who owned 1,316 acres worth £2,843 a year in 1873 and served as a magistrate, was High Sheriff for the county in 1883, a member of the Junior Carlton Club in London, and was a Lieutenant Colonel of the Leicestershire Militia.

Several members of the lesser gentry, who had previously owned land on a more modest scale, had a banking or legal background, which aided their rise through society, including:

- William Ward Tailby (1825–1914) came from a Leicestershire family with land in Welham and Humberstone. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge and was called to the Bar in 1850. He bought Skeffington Hall from Sir Richard Sutton in 1861 and by 1873 owned 1,661 acres worth £4,064 annual rental. A magistrate for Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, he was High Sheriff of Leicestershire in 1856. Tailby was a celebrated huntsman and was Master of the Billesdon Hunt from 1856 to 1878. He was also a member of the Carlton Club and Boodles in London.

- John Goodacre (1852–1920) of Ashby Parva came from a long-established landowning family, which owned a bank in Lutterworth from 1803 to 1839. He later engaged in missionary work among seamen in Honolulu and died in San Francisco. His father was High Sheriff in 1849, as was his great-grandfather, John Goodacre, in 1787.

- Henry Dent Hinrich (1832–83) was the son of Sir Henry Hinrich (d. 1847), a member of the Inner Temple and an officer of the Corps of Gentlemen, and Eliza Dent. His mother inherited Hallaton Hall from her brother, the Rev Thomas Dent, in 1865.

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67 A. H. Dyson, *Lutterworth* (1913), pp. 135–8; *VCH Leics* 3, p. 50. The bank was absorbed into Clarke & Phillips Bank, which collapsed in 1843. One of its partners, Richard Mitchell, had invested heavily in land and served as High Sheriff in 1841. His property was subsequently sold to buyers who included Thomas Paget (Patterson, *Radical Leicester*, pp. 373–4).

68 Venn, *Cantabrigienses* 3, p. 79.

• Henry Everett (b. 1806) was a barrister who worked as an equity draftsman and conveyancer, and owned Hothorpe Hall.\textsuperscript{70} He was also a member of Hampshire gentry family. Earlier generations of his family had included clothiers and bankers, and his grandfather, Thomas Everett (1740–1810), had bought Biddesden House, near Andover, towards the end of the eighteenth century when he was MP for Ludgershall.\textsuperscript{71} In 1883, Everett owned a total of 2,448 acres, of which approximately 1,000 was in Leicestershire.\textsuperscript{72}

Thus, of those 82 people who owned more than 1,000 acres in Leicestershire in 1873, a total of eight (9.6 per cent) were new landowners from a manufacturing or industrial background, including three whose family wealth was acquired in the previous generation. Another eight had professional interests or inherited wealth from fields such as law or banking, which enhanced their ability to invest significantly in land – in most cases to enlarge on existing possessions to take them above the 1,000 level for the first time, or to add to large existing estates elsewhere. None of these 16 people held 1,000 acres in the county before 1830. Although it is difficult to calculate precisely the extent to which those who previously owned land were dependent on professional income to extend their holdings, if they are all included as representatives of some ‘new money’ being invested in land, it brings the total to 16, or 19.5 per cent.

Some sharp contrasts are provided, however, if the figures are considered in terms of the social status achieved by new landowners. The peerage represented the pinnacle of the social elite and included many of the largest landowners in the country. Very few ‘self-made’ men – first-generation businessmen – could aspire to attain such heights in one leap. In Leicestershire just two out of 22 peers and members of peerage families who owned 1,000 acres or more in 1873 were the product of ‘new money,’ or 9 per cent. The proportion of new investors was markedly higher among the gentry: 20 per cent in the greater gentry, 14 per cent in the middling gentry and 30 per cent in the lower gentry. In total, seven out of 60 members of the gentry came from business or industry, and up to eight from the professions. Thus, 15 members of the gentry who owned more than 1,000 acres in Leicestershire in 1873, or 25 per cent, owed their status wholly or in part to wealth which had been created in the previous one or two generations from sources other than land. While these figures do not suggest that entry to the landed classes was closed, they do show that in Leicestershire at least only a small number could initially expect to penetrate beyond the lower levels of the gentry. Very few local industrialists had either the money or inclination to attempt it.

\textsuperscript{70} Walford, \textit{County Families} (1876 edition), p. 355; Foster, \textit{Men at Bar}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{72} Bateman, \textit{Landowners}, p. 156.
THE GENTRY ‘FRINGE’

For most of the nineteenth century an annual landed income of £1,000 represented the lower limit for a member of the gentry. By the 1870s, after several decades of high land values and increased rents, it was possible to have that amount of income in Leicestershire from 600 to 700, or even 500 acres. This made it possible for a clutch of smaller landowners to live something of the life of the country gentleman, on the fringes of the gentry. The Return recorded 63 people in this category, of whom three were peers.

Together, the 60 non-peers on the gentry fringe owned 39,684 acres (7.7 per cent of the county) in amounts between 182 and 991 acres; only 19 of them were in possession of more than 750 acres. Some 25 of the total came from local families who had previously owned land in Leicestershire, either as members of the lower levels of the gentry or the junior branches of gentry families, or were earlier smaller landowners or yeoman farmers. Ten were members of landowning families from other counties, including three who had been lesser landowners in Leicestershire of long-standing. Sixteen of the total were clergymen (including six of the existing Leicestershire landowners). The high number of clergymen was remarked upon by Bateman. He calculated that in Leicestershire, Rutland and Northamptonshire, around one in five of landowners among what he called the ‘yeomen’, with between 100 and 1,000 acres, were clergy, twice the national average. This can be explained in Leicestershire by a strong association between the gentry and the church, including a tradition for the sons of gentry to enter the church and a high level of gentry patronage of some of the more lucrative livings, together with the effects of enclosure and tithe commutation in increasing the clergy’s holdings.

Just seven of the total of the fringe gentry are known to have backgrounds in the lay professions or business, and the origins of 10 have not been identified. It is likely that among the latter were some whose wealth was also newly made in commercial or professional spheres, or had risen from the ‘yeoman’ level. Of those from business and the professions, four were barristers, two were from mainly banking families, one was a former Poor Law Inspector and only one was a local industrialist. He was Joseph Whetstone (1799–1868), who owned two spinning mills, two coal mines and a brick works, and followed Thomas Stokes as Mayor of Leicester in 1839.

Although only 14 per cent of those whose history is to some extent known (seven out of 50) represented what could be defined as ‘new money’, only 12 of the members of the fringe gentry stood at comparable level or higher in 1830. Some

73 Thompson, Landed Society, p. 112.
74 Bateman, Landowners, p. 527.
76 His 402 acres in 1873 were worth £1,207 annual rental (ROL); Hartopp, Mayors, pp. 196–7.
48 of the overall total (80 per cent) of the fringe therefore reflected in different ways aspects of rising wealth. Such individuals did not automatically become part of landed society. Some, like Richard Worswick, did succeed in acquiring the trappings and style of a ‘country gentleman’, with a suitable house, appointment as a magistrate and becoming a senior officer in the militia, and emulated new ‘middling’ gentry such as Charles Brook in contributing to county society. Others, such as the Goodacres, already had a tradition of involvement in county affairs. In all, at least 16 members of the gentry fringe served as Justices at some point between 1863 and 1877, and seven of their families provided High Sheriffs between 1849 and 1885.77

CONCLUSION

At the highest levels of landed society in the 1870s, among the peers and the ‘greater gentry’ who owned more than 3,000 acres, the numbers who owed their status to wealth acquired since 1830 were very few. For those in the lesser gentry, with estates of between 1,000 and 2,000 acres, they were, at 30 per cent, a significant minority. Many of those had owned some land before 1830, which had been measured in hundreds rather than thousands of acres. They had built up their property gradually or, with the help of earnings from professional or business activity, were able to add to their holdings with a major purchase that elevated their status. Rising rents and a market in small estates contributed to a growth in the middle years of the century of the ‘squirearchy’, people who were not great magnates but could afford to live as minor country gentlemen. It is at these lower levels that mobility and changes of composition in landed society can be detected. They put themselves forward for roles such as Sheriff and magistrate, offers which were readily accepted by large landowners who had their main estates in another county or lived elsewhere.

The involvement locally of members of the lesser and fringe gentry helped fortify the social and political role of the landed classes in the mid-Victorian period. In the course of the nineteenth century, the position of the landed classes as the country’s social and political elite underwent gradual but significant change. The golden age of aristocracy, in which the ownership of land was the key to power, wealth and status, was slowly fading. New social forces were emerging, in a prosperous middle class, and through industrialisation and a fast growing, and increasingly urban, population. They represented interests and values which were opposed to those of a hereditary, landowning ruling class. These notions were reflected nationally in successive phases of reform, of parliament, local government, and of national institutions including the church, the army and education, and locally in the political and cultural dominance by non-conformist radicals of the rapidly growing borough of Leicester. The mid-Victorian period

77 Calculated from lists in William White, History, Gazetteer and Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland (Sheffield, 1863 and 1877 editions) and Harrod & Co’s. Postal and Commercial Directory of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Rutland and Staffordshire (1870).
represented a late summer of the landed classes’ supremacy. Agricultural depression and falling land prices from the later 1870s began a series of property sales which was to last until after the First World War, while new parliamentary and county government reforms in the 1880s further curtailed (but did not eliminate) their political powers.