

ENGLAND'S RURAL REALMS

LANDHOLDING AND THE
AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION

Edward Bujak

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Economics

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Revolution

EDWARD BUJAK

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INTRODUCTION

In writing about any of the titled and untitled owners of the great estates in eastern England and the communities on or near them in the Victorian period, one has to start thirty-nine years after Queen Victoria came to the throne. This is because, throughout the early years of her reign, no one actually knew for certain the size and extent of the great estates. The minimum acreage of a great estate, an estate that brought with it membership of what the Victorians called 'landed society', was 1,000 acres, but how many estates fell into this category? The existence of landed society was real enough; it could be seen in the imposing country seats of the aristocracy and the comfortable halls of the gentry and in the deference of the tenantry whose farms belonged to the occupants of these houses. One could thumb through the lists of Dukes, Marquesses, Earls, Viscounts, Lords and Baronets recorded in the *Royal Kalendar* and, having noted where their seats were, cross reference them with local directories such as *Kelly's Directory of Suffolk* or William White's *Gazetteer and Directory of Suffolk*. These local directories contained entries listing the largest landowners in each parish in the county and thus made it possible to piece together the approximate geographical size and extent of an estate from the number of times a particular family was cited. The problem was that no one really knew for sure how many acres the aristocracy actually owned and, as for the landed gentry, one could only guess.

All this uncertainty was finally dispelled in 1876 with the publication of the *Parliamentary Return of Owners of Land, (1872–3) for England and Wales*. With every acre now accounted for in what was, in effect, a new *Domesday Book*, it was at last possible to put together a true picture of English landed society. The landscape of great estates in Victorian Suffolk revealed by the *Return* reveals a blend of old and new money among the aristocracy and gentry in the county. The latter had, for generations, utilised the traditional

methods for accumulating land, discussed in the historiography of the 'rise of the great estates' namely, cash from high government office, arranged marriages and holding together their estates with the aid of legally binding family settlements. By contrast, new money had flowed into landed society, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from trade and industry as a succession of merchants and then industrialists ploughed their money into land. The fact they were able to do so indicates that far from being a 'closed shop', landed society was in fact open for business. What is also evident from this movement of new money into land is that despite arable agriculture's recurrent boom and bust character, in the nineteenth century, the attraction of owning a large landed estate in counties like Suffolk never diminished.

Suffolk was very susceptible to fluctuations in the price of wheat in the nineteenth century due to the widespread adoption of the system of farming 'high' which, in this county, was a system with deep roots. These roots stretched back to the development, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, of improved systems of mixed arable and livestock husbandry on the light sandy soils of north-west Suffolk, and the transference of a derivative of these systems to the heavier clay soils of central and eastern Suffolk following the end of the Napoleonic War. Subsequently, these localized developments were subsumed into the wider mid-Victorian obsession with trying to counteract the expected effects of free trade, after 1846, through farming 'high'; unfortunately, the belief shared by landowners and farmers in the efficacy of intensive systems of mixed arable and livestock husbandry, or 'high' farming, was no more than a pipe dream. Arable farmers in England were, however, for over a generation, shielded from the full implications of free trade by war and geography.

As Eric Hobsbawm stated, 'It took a generation of railroad and ship to create a sufficiently large agriculture in the virgin prairies of the temperate world: the American and Canadian Middle West, the pampas of the River Plate lands and the Russian Steppes.'¹ Once this generation had passed and this vast arable acreage came on-line, creating a global glut of wheat, the expensive farming systems in use in Suffolk up to the 1880s buckled and collapsed. As a result, Suffolk, as one of England's premier and longest established 'high' farming counties, suffered terribly in the ensuing agricultural depression of the late nineteenth century. When lower farm rents and the perennial problems of debt and running a country house are combined with the falling number of landowners in the House of Commons after 1884, and the rising popularity of land reform and tenant-right legislation in the Liberal party, the question has to be asked: what was the continuing attraction of owning or buying land?

The Earl of Derby famously listed the following five criteria underpinning the ownership of landed property:

one, political influence; two, social importance founded on territorial possession, the most visible and unmistakable form of wealth; three, power exercised over tenantry [and] the pleasure of managing, directing and improving an estate itself; four, residential enjoyment, including what is called sport; and five, the money return, or the rent.²

Working from this list, *England's Rural Realms* examines the continuing attractions of owning land up to the Great War. Given that owning and improving a landed estate, when coupled to the upkeep of the requisite great country house, produced a lower return than almost any other form of property, there was clearly more at work here than purely economic considerations. Buying land had not, was not, and would never be purely an economic investment to the Victorian businessman. Acquiring a country house and an attendant country estate signalled an intention to belong to landed society and to enjoy its benefits. There was the personal enjoyment to be had from indulging in country pursuits such as shooting, but there was also the enhanced social standing that came with owning land. In Victorian England no one stood higher than the English country gentleman running a large country estate and, by extension, the affairs of the county and perhaps the country. In a society still milling over industrialization and urbanization, owning a landed estate continued to count for far more than owning a factory, and so the route to the top of Victorian society remained in the countryside among the old landed oligarchy.

By the 1880s however, the old aristocracy began to feel the pinch as the income from their estates began to tumble, and their former disdain for business began to fade as they sought to garner well-paid company directorships. By extension, this also meant that simply having enough money could lead to an entry in *Burke's Peerage*. To the Edwardian plutocrat with a shiny new title, land need only be acquired for form's sake, in a nod to the past. Of course, land still had its pleasures: what could be better than entertaining your new aristocratic friends at a country retreat with plenty of pheasants for them to shoot? By the 1890s and early 1900s, land had become a plaything among the super-rich who wanted to play at being the country squire and for whom shooting was fun. Struggling neighbours within local landed society could now only look on and hope to lease their shooting rights and their ancestral seats for an exorbitant fee. Given this picture, it is then of interest to find that businessmen outside the ranks of the plutocracy, who

could easily afford to lease the shooting rights on a sporting estate, should also still want to buy it.

The answer to this conundrum lies in the fact that whilst the landowning aristocracy and gentry, with incomes tied to mixed arable and livestock farming, may have been in retreat economically they still dominated rural society in counties like Suffolk. In continuing to own and administer the English countryside, the great landowners were able to present themselves as the custodians of tradition and property with an old money hauteur and *gravitas* irresistible to new money. As evidence of this, even after 1884, even after the automatic link between landownership and a seat in the House of Commons was finally broken in the countryside, gaining a firm rooting in landed society continued to hold more of an attraction for new money than the pretence of appearing to belong to local landed society as pseudo-gentry, bolstering a beleaguered landowning class by leasing shooting rights and keeping someone else's ancestral seat aired. But by what mechanisms did the old order continue to run the countryside?

The answer to this question has its roots in the wider 'Land Question' and the political influence wielded by the aristocracy and gentry in the Victorian countryside. Whilst the great landowners, representing rural seats in Suffolk and elsewhere, were gradually winnowed out of the House of Commons after 1884, within the localities they were able to put their local influence as cottage builders, allotments providers and farm improvers to good use in bolstering the Conservative party vote. This in turn allowed them to dominate their local party associations and, in swing seats, make or break the Tory candidate. Moreover, the continued social influence that the great landowners could deploy on behalf of the Conservative party, in rural constituencies, explains the continuing animosity of the Liberal party toward the great landowners up to the Great War and their commitment to the land reform campaign outlined by Joseph Chamberlain in Ipswich in 1885. As regards the issues of land reform and tenant-right respectively, the attempt by the Liberal party to woo the labourer and the farmer away from the landlord could of course be thwarted by landlords who could offer tenants better compensation agreements and allotments or cottages with gardens to their labourers.

In other words, the social influence which the aristocracy and gentry continued to enjoy in the English countryside up to the Great War was rooted in the paternalism to be found on the great estates. In the 1820s and 1830s, landowners began to build new cottages and model villages, partly out of a sense of paternal obligation but, also increasingly after about 1837, in an attempt to attract and house hardworking, able-bodied workers to fulfil the new labour requirements of 'high' farming. In a somewhat clumsy

attempt at social engineering, the great landowners sought to create industrious, sober and thrifty or model communities on their estates. They did this by building good quality cottages, with gardens or allotments in the so-called 'close' parishes within the estate boundary, and by renting them to the labourer at very reasonable rents on condition the labourers were model citizens. The degree to which labourers conformed willingly or unwillingly to these conditional arrangements is unclear, but what is clear from the 'Lock Out' of 1874 in Suffolk is that the provision of good housing with a little bit of land attached did create a deferential bond between the labourer and the landlord.

In short, by becoming the largest providers of good affordable housing in the countryside prior to the erection of council housing, and providing the physical infrastructure required to farm more highly, the resident aristocracy and gentry progressively built up a reservoir of local goodwill. This goodwill is reflected in the prominence of landowners in local government even after the 1884 Reform Act bundled them out of the House of Commons by giving the vote to labourers in 'open' villages. In 'open' villages dominated by small owner-occupiers and tradesmen and where there was a large element of industrial workers, the social influence of the great rural landlords might indeed be slight as villages of this kind showed a spirit of independence which was often reflected in their politics and their religious nonconformity.³ By contrast, in the model or 'close' communities on or neighbouring the great estates on which a landed family had expended considerable largesse, voting patterns remained favourable to members of landed society in Parish, District, and County Council elections.

Once in the Council Chamber, nominations for the key posts also tended to go the way of the local landowner. In this regard, the continuing support of the rural middle class and the tenantry was also crucial. The quasi-feudalization of the rural middle class is a topic beyond the remit of this work, but the facts show that in Suffolk enough of the Victorian rural middle class was sufficiently happy to rub shoulders with the grandees of the old order to have a Lord presiding in the County Council Chamber. As regards the tenantry, the position of the tenant farmer in relation to the landlord was complicated by the fact the tenant farmer was responsible for the actual cultivation of the soil. This gave farmers considerably more leeway in dealing with their landlords than the labourers who lived and worked within the great estate system. Alongside this, however, the relationship between landlords and the larger, and thus more influential tenant farmers, had been strengthened by the willingness of landlords to provide the infrastructural investment needed to farm 'high'.

On the other hand, by the late nineteenth century, even with the now almost universal adoption of annual tenancies, the position of the tenant farmer in relation to a now economically weakened class of landowners was becoming ever more blurred especially as the Liberal party looked to loosen the ties binding the tenant to the landlord through legislation. If, as radical Liberal MPs argued, the farmer was the true leader of the agricultural interest, why should farmers continue to defer to landlords to lobby the government on their behalf? Landlords in counties like Suffolk, with big mixed arable and livestock farms to run, would clearly have had to work harder and harder to retain the loyalty of the farmer in the years immediately preceding the Great War, although they were helped by the Liberals' growing flirtation with land nationalization. If it came to a straight choice between the State as landlord or an old aristocratic landlord, a better deal was to be had voting Tory and squeezing concessions from a landlord with a house to keep up, school fees to pay, and burdened with death duties, who had absolutely no desire to take a farm 'in hand'.

What all this demonstrates is that in studying Suffolk, with its classic examples of 'high' farming and improving landlords, we can see both how English landowners sowed the seeds of their own economic decline, whilst at the same time building the social relationships, with the labourer and the farmer, which ensured that the Victorian landlord remained the central figure in the English landscape, for good or ill. This is why the issue of land reform rumbled on within the Liberal party up to the Great War. The aristocracy and gentry still owned the land, and if they chose to stay on their estates and continued to fulfil what they saw as their social obligations by working hard to improve the lot of both the labourer and the farmer and, in so doing, perpetuate their social influence, then they were still the figures who commanded most respect in the English countryside. It is, therefore, too easy to point to the agricultural depression in Victorian Britain's cereal-producing counties and to the subsequent sale of land therein, as indicators of an aristocracy in absolute decline. In Suffolk, as one of the counties to receive the full broadside of the agricultural depression in the late nineteenth century, there was a considerable unloading of land by the local aristocracy and gentry in the early twentieth century. These families were also fearful of holding onto an asset that the Liberals might nationalize and were simply worn out by the high overheads and low returns of owning an arable estate; especially after the introduction of death duties in 1894.

On the other hand, such sales should not be allowed to obscure a subtler picture of retrenchment and renewal. Many of these sales were of outlying portions or secondary estates and, where a member of the landed gentry did

dispose of an estate in its entirety, there was a buyer ready to become a country squire. What motivated the buyer before World War One was a combination of the sport to be had *and* the social position that still attached to the actual owners of an estate in the English countryside, which emanated from being a good landlord who built and kept in good repair all the farms and cottages thereon. Businessmen were buying into a landed society still filled by rural grandees and rural squires, imbued with a strong sense of family tradition and social duty. These were the landowners who had managed, by a variety of means, including marriage, sales and leases, to retrench, to try to keep hold of their estates in an age of global competition and who had also, successfully, adapted to the democratization of the English countryside in the years preceding the Great War.

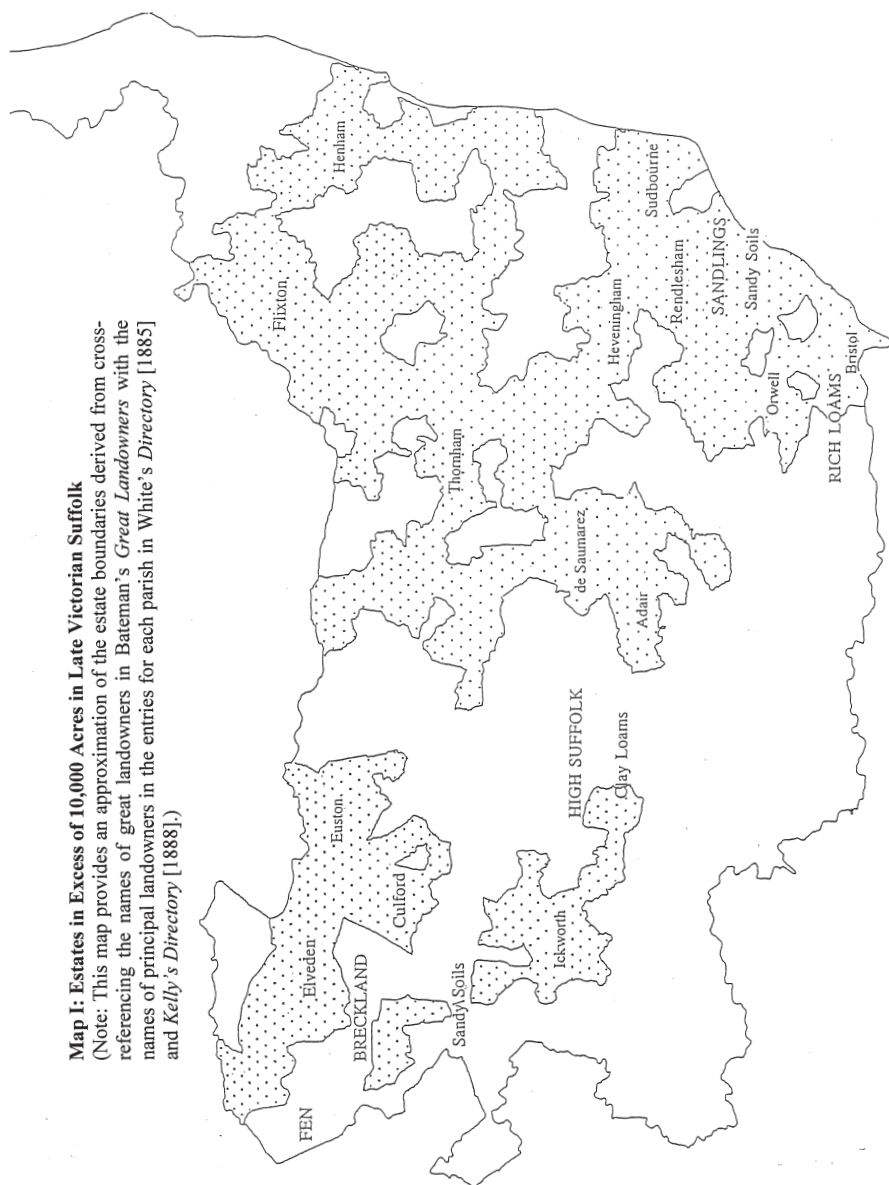
THE GREAT VICTORIAN ESTATES & THEIR OWNERS

By combining the available evidence, namely the definitive parliamentary *Return of Owners of Land* of 1873 for Suffolk, with John Bateman's encyclopaedic 1883 work, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 123 great estates of over 1,000 acres, spreading across half the county, can be identified in Suffolk in the 1870s and 1880s (see Appendix). Working from this list, it is readily apparent that these estates included a combination of both large ancestral heartlands and secondary or subsidiary properties. With regard to the latter, these subsidiary estates of between 1,000 and 3,000 acres were also equal in size to the smaller ancestral estates of the resident squirearchy. Fortunately, it is possible to distinguish between these two classes of estate. In total, 62 of the estates surveyed of between 1,000 and 3,000 acres represented total acreages belonging to members of the Suffolk squirearchy. The remaining 51 estates totalling over 1,000 acres belonged to the larger titled and untitled landowners, whose total acreages far exceeded 3,000 acres. Estates in this category included both subsidiary estates and several large ancestral heartlands. Of the remaining 11 largest or magnate estates in the county with acreages in excess of 10,000 acres, their gravitational centres could be either on the poor sandy soils of the Brecklands or on the poorer clays of High Suffolk.¹

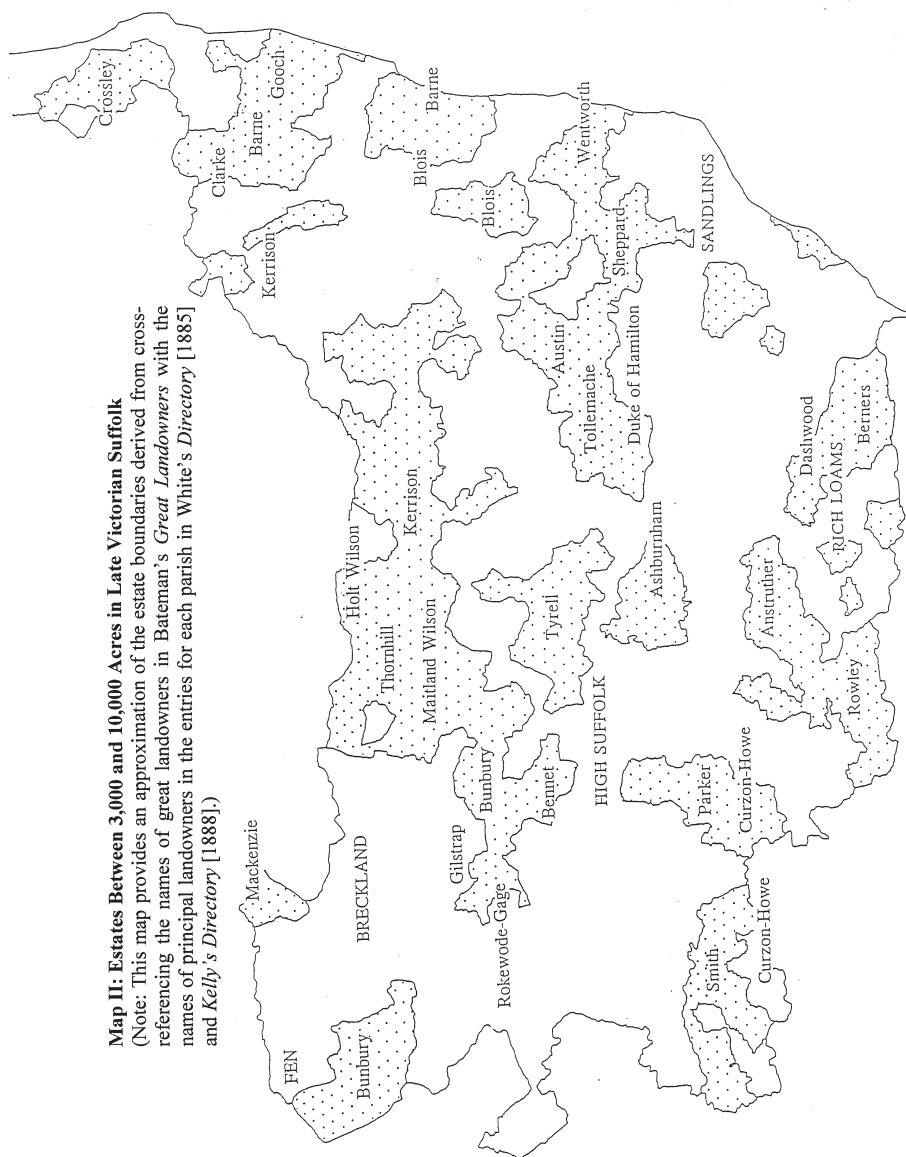
The great estates of Victorian Suffolk were owned by a wide variety of families, ranging from aristocrats proud of their old titles and ancient lineages to equally ancient members of the gentry, as well as lawyers, merchants, brewers and industrialists, all of whom owned over 1,000 acres, consisting of farms, parkland and a rural seat. As the sales particulars of the Icklingham Hall estate boasted in 1898, the lucky purchaser of this property would find himself 'surrounded by the estates of the Duke of Grafton, Earl Cadogan, the Marquess of Bristol, Lord de Saumarez, Lord Iveagh, Sir Robert

Map I: Estates in Excess of 10,000 Acres in Late Victorian Suffolk

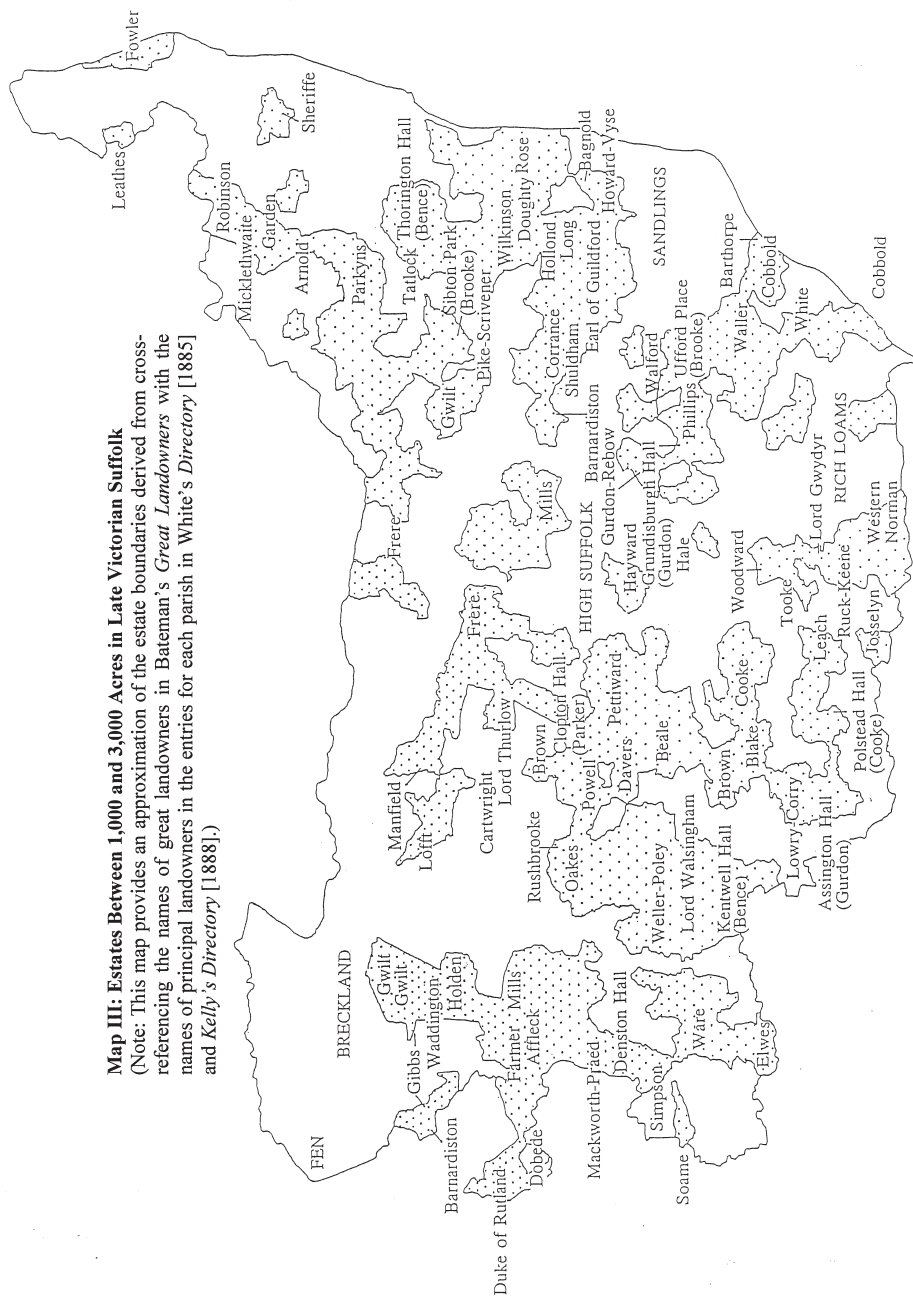
(Note: This map provides an approximation of the estate boundaries derived from cross-referencing the names of great landowners in Bateman's *Great Landowners* with the names of principal landowners in the entries for each parish in White's *Directory* [1885] and Kelly's *Directory* [1888].)



Map II: Estates Between 3,000 and 10,000 Acres in Late Victorian Suffolk
 (Note: This map provides an approximation of the estate boundaries derived from cross-referencing the names of great landowners in Bateman's *Great Landowners* with the names of principal landowners in the entries for each parish in White's *Directory* [1885] and Kelly's *Directory* [1888].)



Map III: Estates Between 1,000 and 3,000 Acres in Late Victorian Suffolk



Affleck, Sir Charles Bunbury, Sir William Gilstrap, Prince Victor Duleep Singh, Mr Harry McCalmont, Mr Spencer Waddington, Mr William Angerstein, the Rev J. S. Holden and many others'.² Within just this short list, we have three ancient aristocratic landowners, a Sikh prince and two brewers, one with a new baronetcy and another with a shiny new Earl's coronet. Across the county, the largest estates in the 1870s and 1880s, those between 3,000 and 20,000 acres, belonged to either newly landed families who had converted the vast wealth of the commercial and industrial revolutions into land in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or to more ancient titled and untitled families. The latter, having benefited from the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the sixteenth century, spent the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sidestepping the extinction of their male lines, developing new legal mechanisms to keep their estates together after inheritance and courting and marrying wealthy heiresses. During the same period, this combination of factors, coupled to the financial rewards that came with owning enough land to become an MP and then a Minister of the Crown, gifted to the more durable landed families the wherewithal to continue buying up the small farms and the estates of lesser landed families that bordered their ancestral estates and those acquired through marriage.

Thanks to the redistribution of monastic lands under Henry VIII, the lands owned by the Tollemache family around Helmingham Hall were already substantial by 1700: hence, their elevation to the Baronetage under the early Stuarts. Subsequently, during the Restoration, the Tollemaches successfully courted a series of heiresses. In 1675, Sir Lionel Tollemache married Elizabeth, the heiress of Lord Stanhope, and added an estate in Northamptonshire to the existing possessions of the Tollemache family. Their son further added the magnificent Ham House in Surrey to these by marrying Elizabeth Murray, the heiress of William Murray. During the English Civil War, Charles I had elevated William Murray to the peerage as Earl of Dysart and Lord Huntingtower but, with the King's execution in 1649, these titles were never confirmed. After William's death, the campaign to have them confirmed was pursued by his daughter, the aforementioned Elizabeth Murray, who finally succeeded in securing the necessary Letters Patent from Charles II in 1670. The grandson of Sir Lionel Tollemache now assumed the courtesy title of Lord Huntingtower and with an Earl's coronet to come instead of a Baronetcy, he won the hand of Grace Wilbraham, the heiress of Sir Thomas Wilbraham, and thereby added another large estate, this time in Cheshire, to those in Suffolk, Surrey and Northamptonshire already attached to his future Earldom.³

With by now considerable agricultural rents at their disposal, successive Earls of Dysart would have been able to spend the eighteenth century pondering ways to finance the acquisition of neighbouring farms belonging to yeoman freeholders or the estates belonging to the lesser gentry. The latter could include a good-sized house and a paddock with perhaps one or more farms yielding an overall sum of between £250 and £1,000 a year. This process of agglomeration would have been greatly assisted, if we accept H. J. Habakkuk's model, by an extremely buoyant land market in the sixty years between 1680 and 1740. During this period, the 'general drift of property was in favour of the large estate and the great lord'⁴ as a burdensome land tax wore down the incomes of the lesser gentry and yeomanry and encouraged them to put their estates and farms up for sale at a time when the greater gentry and aristocracy monopolized the best-paid posts in the government.

This model has, of course, been subjected to critical re-examination on the grounds that the aristocracy also sold land to reduce accumulated debt. In 1791, Sir John Rous, (created Lord Rous in 1796 and Earl of Stradbroke in 1821) who belonged to another of Suffolk's pre-Reformation landed families and owned the Henham estate in east Suffolk, arranged for the sale of land in Norfolk to reduce his debts.⁵ Nonetheless, the broad trend was toward the agglomeration of land into great estates, thanks in part to the local purchasing power enjoyed by aristocrats to whom the cost of buying land was counterbalanced by the political benefits that came with ownership of large acreages, namely a seat in the House of Commons and access to highly paid posts in the government that thereby came their way. Landlords could also of course, sell land in one county to enhance their holdings in another. The Rev Sir William Bunbury, for example, who inherited estates in Cheshire and Suffolk in 1746, sold the bulk of the former in the mid-eighteenth century, in order to raise the money needed to purchase more property in the parishes of Great Barton and Mildenhall.

Given the size of the great aristocratic estates by the nineteenth century we have to look on the whole of the eighteenth century as a period of expansion by larger landowners at the expense of their smaller neighbours. During the eighteenth century however, the great landed families were experiencing a demographic crisis caused by high rates of mortality and low fertility, as Linda Colley states:

From the later seventeenth century to the 1770s, the landed establishment of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland [was] caught up in a major demographic crisis. For reasons that are still unclear, many

landowners did not marry, and many who did marry failed to produce male heirs . . . As families died out, because of their inability to produce male heirs, their estates passed to other landowners: through indirect inheritance to distant male cousins, or through the female line or through sale. Altogether, about one third of all landed estates seemed to have changed hands this way in this period.⁶

With regard to indirect inheritance, the inability of large landowners to produce male heirs up to the 1770s and the consequent transfer of landed property to collateral male relatives also meant that, as a secondary result, land continued coming onto the market, facilitating the continued expansion of already large estates. Indirect inheritance of this sort 'was much the most important single factor in bringing land onto the market'.⁷ If a landowner had no direct heirs, why bother to reduce the encumbrances charged to his estate for the benefit of a distant nephew or a unknown cousin? Under this scenario, the eventual heir would put any land inherited through an indirect line up for sale because it came encumbered with unpaid debts. Land inherited in this demographic lottery could also be a considerable journey from the heir's own seat and not large enough to justify engaging an agent to run it. In these circumstances, the new owner would again be better advised to put the property up for sale in either a single or in several lots and reinvest the proceeds closer to home by buying some of the neighbouring farms and small estates that were regularly coming onto the market.

By contrast, a large estate could support a considerable weight of debt (although the burden of aristocratic debt would rise considerably after 1770) as well as justify engaging the services of an agent to administer it. The possession of a large estate also conferred considerable social and electoral advantages upon its owner within a particular locality. Under these conditions, larger estates would have been less frequently broken up into lots and sold. To summarise, then, whilst the direct effects of marriage and inheritance are apparent in all groups in landed society, the tendency toward the retention of grander properties suggests that, of the vast quantity of land changing hands as a result of indirect inheritance, a larger proportion of small units than of large came onto the market. In other words, up to the 1770s, sales arising from the working of this factor would have been 'eroding the holdings of the lesser gentry and freeholders faster than those of the greater landlords'.⁸

With regard to marriage and the demographic crisis, if many great aggregations of land were being broken up, despite the development of the strict family settlement, then this also means that whole estates were being

transferred between families to make new landed jigsaws. The propensity for landed families to die out in the male line prior to 1770s and the consequent passage of estates from one family to another through the marriage of an heiress explains the prominence of marriage and inheritance in the rise of so many landowning families in England.⁹ The Hervey family of Ickworth Park in the west of Suffolk, like the Tollemache family in the east of the county, were likewise beneficiaries of the bloom of heiresses that appeared between 1680 and 1770. Sir John Hervey catapulted his family from among the county gentry into the ranks of the Whig aristocracy through his shrewd support for the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and, subsequently, the Hanoverian Succession. In 1713, Sir John, having made sure he was at Greenwich to welcome George of Hanover to England, was created Earl of Bristol. He was equally busy adding to his estates by marrying firstly Isabella Carr, the heiress of Sir Robert Carr, in 1688 and latterly, in 1695, Elizabeth Felton the daughter of Sir Thomas Felton. These marriages added an estate near Sleaford in Lincolnshire and an estate at Playford in Suffolk to the lands belonging to the Herveys in the west of the county. Subsequently, in 1752, the fourth Earl, by marrying Elizabeth Davers, also obtained the Rushbrooke Hall estate in Suffolk. In the eighteenth century, therefore, successive Earls of Bristol would, in theory, have been able to add to the Ickworth Park estate by buying up neighbouring small properties and by mortgaging farms on these subsidiary estates to increase their local purchasing power. To quote Habakkuk's famous phrase, the aristocracy were able to raise themselves up by their own bootstraps.

Overall, the majority of the greatest concentrations of landed property in existence in 1873 had come together through marriage, especially in the eighteenth century, although further instances can also be found well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰ For example, in 1882, Lord de Saumarez, by marrying Jane Broke, the eldest daughter and heiress of Captain Charles Broke, acquired the 2,700 acre Livermere Park estate. In so doing, he also came into the 9,500 acre Shrubland Park estate and the 1,300 acre Broke Hall estate, which passed to his wife via her uncle Admiral Sir George Nathaniel Broke-Middleton under the will of Sir William Middleton.¹¹ This is, of course, only a vestige of what was a far more commonplace phenomenon during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One could examine how, in addition to the string of successful alliances made by the Tollemache and Hervey families, the FitzRoys also established themselves in the county through marriage.

The Euston Hall estate had belonged to the Bennett family but they died out in the male line and, in 1682, Lady Isabella Bennett, the daughter and

heiress of Henry Bennett, Earl of Arlington, married (at the instigation of King Charles II) Henry FitzRoy, the first Duke of Grafton and Earl of Euston. The young Duke was the second son of the King by his mistress Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland. But a Duke needs a country seat with an estate appropriate to his title. Henry's marriage to Isabella completed the jigsaw by transforming what would otherwise have been a paper Dukedom into a territorial reality centred on Euston Hall. A second successful marriage followed in the eighteenth century when George FitzRoy, the second Duke, married Dorothy Boyle, the daughter of the Earl of Cork and the heiress to a £40,000 fortune. Sadly, the marriage was so unhappy that, when Dorothy succumbed to smallpox, she was said to have been 'delivered from misery', leaving Horace Walpole to lament 'do you not pity the poor girl of the softest temper, vast beauty, birth and fortune, to be so sacrificed?'¹² The ambition of the Earl of Cork to buy a Dukedom for a grandson was equalled by that of the Duke of Grafton who recognized that, alongside the agglomerative effects of marriage in bringing together landed property, marriage also provided the means of extending the boundaries of an ancestral estate in the form of generous marriage portions.

Significantly, the great estates in Suffolk 'flourished in areas where the land was relatively cheap', as on the edge of the sandy Breckland.¹³ In 1820, the Euston estate was said to have a circumference of forty miles, encompassing six parishes and parts of several others. Significantly, much of this expansion was the work of the abovementioned second Duke, whose coffers had been filled by the Earl of Cork, and by the third Duke, who enjoyed the fruits of a career in government, culminating in his appointment as Prime Minister. Unsurprisingly, the combination of a huge dowry and of posts in the government enabled both Dukes to successively and:

assiduously acquire land around Euston. In some cases they embarked on a policy of purchasing individual holdings within a manor and finally bought out the Lord himself. When the land was bought under control, it could be re-organized and improved by re-allotting the parson's glebe, extinguishing commons, enclosing open fields and marling.¹⁴

Of course, the real dynamic in bringing together land, houses, and money remained marriage as it enabled landowners to buy up neighbouring farms, either by mortgaging the farms that had formerly belonged to their wives' families or by utilising the lump sums transferred between families in the form of dowries.

The importance of these cash transfers is evidenced in a letter of 1796 sent by the fourth Earl of Bristol to his son Frederick (created Earl Jermyn of Horningsheath and Marquess of Bristol in 1826). The fourth Earl had himself married a local Suffolk heiress back in 1752 and so pleaded with Frederick to reconsider marrying Elizabeth Upton, the daughter of the impoverished Lord Templeton. This was, in his father's opinion, nothing more than a 'love match' while by contrast, the Countess de la Marche, the illegitimate daughter of the King of Prussia, was 'one of the prettiest, sweetest, most accomplished women' in Europe with '£100,000 down' as a dowry and the reversion of a landed property in Germany. To try and drive home the sheer folly, as he saw it, of choosing Elizabeth Upton over the Countess, the Earl drew up a comparison of Elizabeth and Frederick's respective prospects:

On my side

£5,000 a year down
 £5,000 a year in reversion
 An English Dukedom which the
 King pledges to obtain
 Royal connexion: Princess of Wales
 and Duchess of York¹⁵

On his side

No fortune
 Wife and children beggars for
 want of settlement
 No connexion
 A love match

While Frederick went ahead and married Elizabeth in 1798, in general, love matches were thwarted as fathers could bring immense financial pressure to bear on a wayward heir by cutting their allowances. In this way, the marriage of an heir or heiress was carefully regulated to bring greater wealth, land, or influence to a family. Of the 102 marriages arranged in the eighteenth century for the heirs to an English Dukedom, 53 were with the daughters of fellow peers (including 12 with the daughters of other Dukes), while 49 were with commoners of whom only five lacked a gentle background. The question this poses is, given that financial considerations were obviously a key determinant in deciding a family's marital priorities, were marriage portions automatically applied to the purchase of landed property? According to J.V. Beckett:

Heiresses were regarded as particularly good catches for relieving financial troubles . . . [between] 1700–60 . . . twenty per cent of in-marriages among the peerage were to heiresses. But there were never enough heiresses therefore . . . eldest sons marrying outside the [landed elite] compensated for social difference by seeking financial wealth.¹⁶

Landowners prepared to refill their family's coffers by marrying the daughter of a wealthy merchant could offer the latter the much sought-after *entrée* to polite society in exchange for the substantial dowry such a bride would bring. Conversely, the merchant could augment his social standing and connections without having to divert his capital into purchasing a landed estate and a country seat. In 1788, when Anne, the only daughter of the London merchant Sir John Henniker (created Lord Henniker in 1800), married the Earl of Aldborough, she brought with her a dowry of £50,000.¹⁷ In this case, the marriage was made slightly more acceptable to the Earl's family by the fact that Sir John, having inherited his father-in-law's estates in Suffolk in 1781, was himself a great landowner.

Marriage portions or dowries were transferred from one family to another under a marriage settlement. On the marriage in 1830 of Isabella Manners to William, Earl Jermyn, Isabella's father, the fifth Duke of Rutland, agreed to provide her with a portion of £10,000 'to be raised by way of mortgage in the lifetime of John fifth Duke of Rutland'. The size of the bride's jointure was related to the size of the fortune she brought to the marriage; the usual proportion was ten per cent of the fortune. Thus, a bride with a dowry of £10,000 would, as a widow, receive a jointure of £1,000 a year for as long as she lived but, during her married life, her husband had use of the £10,000. This conforms to the Habakkuk model, which sees the ability of landed families to derive a 'substantial accession of wealth . . . through an heiress or from collateral relatives'¹⁸ as integral to the gradual aggregation of landed property in the hands of the landed elite – but was Habakkuk right?

Any financial gains enjoyed by those landowners who married well were counterbalanced by the fact that they, in turn, had to provide marriage portions for their own daughters. In essence, 'the greater the importance attached to wealth as an object of marriage, the more necessary would it be for a landowner who wished to secure for his daughters good marriages to the eldest sons of landowning families to provide them with large portions'.¹⁹ The financial burden that this imposed on families could, however, be ameliorated by taking out a mortgage or by placing an interest bearing charge on the estate, rather than through the sale of land. As a result, in Habbakkuk's opinion, the giving and receiving of marriage portions could frequently lead to the extension of estates by purchase but only rarely to their diminution by sale. Of course, this presupposes that portions were used to purchase land. The role of marriage portions in extending the boundaries of the great estates has perhaps been exaggerated, particularly as 'we cannot positively say to what use portions were put'.²⁰ The Restoration diarist John Evelyn records that the dowry of £12,000 received by Lord Cornwallis, the