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The Estates of County Wexford in the Nineteenth Century: An Analysis of Their Changing Financial Situation in the Decades Prior to the Land War

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THE ESTATES OF COUNTY WEXFORD IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY: AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR CHANGING
FINANCIAL SITUATION IN THE DECADES PRIOR TO THE LAND WAR.

by
Daniel Gahan

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

August

1979.

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VITA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

At the close of the nineteenth century an entire social class was liquidated in Ireland. The great landowners who had effectively ruled the island and dominated its cultural creations for close on two and one half centuries lost their extensive estates by a series of momentous acts of Parliament. This was a social transformation unequalled in any other era of Irish history.

How did this happen? Why did the entire upper class of a nation fade away without putting up a struggle?

Most scholars look for the answer to these questions in the awesome power of a mobilized and angry peasantry. Others seek the solution in the corridors of power and the efforts of a handful of inspired or crafty politicians. While each of these explanations is worthy of mention, another, landlord insolvency, cannot be ignored. In this work the economic fortunes of the landlord class will be examined for the century or so prior to their demise. Indeed, it is highly likely that the compensation the British Government offered these people in the 1890's was a very welcome relief to them, since they may have been in severe financial distress for a long time.

The key to these long-term financial difficulties probably lies with the inability of the landlords to force their will upon a recalcitrant tenantry. Unable to raise rents as they pleased and powerless to do anything about tenants who were unwilling to or incapable of paying them, landlords found themselves in a very difficult position. In such a situation it would not have been easy for even the most thrifty to preserve an aristocratic lifestyle while maintaining a balanced budget. Needless to say, the maintenance of such a lifestyle was a 'sine qua non' for the landed gentry, and, in such circumstances, wealth accumulation would have been obviously beyond the realms of possibility. In such a situation the patterns of landownership in the country at large would have reflected the declining position in which the gentry found themselves.

Due to limitations of time and space, it is impossible to conduct a rigorous examination of all Ireland's landed gentry and their finances. Instead, a small study-area has been selected. Conclusions based on evidence from that area will be formulated and these may then be tentatively applied to the entire island. It should be remembered at all times, however, that these conclusions, based, as they are, on evidence from only a dozen estates, are entirely tentative in nature and may well be overturned when more scientific and widespread research is conducted in the

future. So, even if many questions are unanswered, this work may give direction to future quests for a solution to this problem in Irish history.

The study-area which has been selected for this project is the County of Wexford, with special emphasis on its northern half. Within this area twelve estates have been selected for close investigation. These estates were chosen because of availability of source materials and not through any complex sampling procedure. Despite this the sample involved is quite representative of the state system in the northern half of the county. The dozen estates mentioned above accounted for about half the agricultural land in the locality and their proprietors would have made up a considerable proportion of the social elite.

Situated in the south-eastern corner of the island, this county comprises one of the richest agricultural areas in the entire country. Its climate is drier and warmer than that of the rest of Ireland, and, as a result, it has long been the leading region for cereal and fruit production. Barley, oats, and wheat have been grown on the undulating landscape for centuries, always combined with cattle and sheep raising.

Towns developed along the coasts and on the main rivers of County Wexford in the Middle Ages. In particular Wexford Town, Enniscorthy and New Ross became trading

MAP 1.
The Study Area



centres where the furs, skins, and timber of the interior were exchanged for the more sophisticated goods of the outside world. These settlements maintained their role as 'windows onto the world' until the early seventeenth century. Until then, the southern half of the county, in which the three above-mentioned towns are located, was under foreign, i.e., English domination. With the beginning of the 1600's, English influence was extended throughout the county, supplanting the Celtic clan system, which had long dominated in the 'north'. Soon hundreds of Protestant English settlers arrived, and the towns of Gorey, Bunclody, and Carnew were established. After these beginnings a complex urban system quickly spread across the countryside, as numerous villages grew up as sub-centres for commerce.

During most of the seventeenth century these English settlers were concerned with clearing what forest remained and defending themselves from their understandably irate Catholic Irish neighbors. They were not always entirely successful in the latter task. For example, in 1641 when the Catholics of the whole county rebelled, hundreds of the new settlers were killed or driven from their homes. Following the suppression of this rebellion, however, many of the settlers returned and were even joined by new 'pioneers', mostly ex-soldiers of the English army. These settlers now became firmly ensconced in their new possessions. Armed with

legal title to almost all lands in the area, they built fortress-like houses, employed the native Irish as laborers and tenants, and slowly established themselves as the new and undisputed ruling class.

The eighteenth century was a time of slower but no less important change. The sons and grandsons of the first English settlers in North Wexford, secure in their property and respected by their Catholic tenants, shed their 'pioneer' characteristics. Abandoning or levelling the old fort-like houses, they built huge, ornate mansions surrounded by elegant demesnes and lived the life of true aristocrats. Outside the estate walls lived the Catholic peasantry. Frequently resentful and always impoverished, this class was a source of wealth and fear for the landed gentry, at one and the same time. A bloody peasant revolt in 1798 was a gruesome reminder of the magnitude of this threat.

One should not see the class struggle that took place between landlord and tenant in the nineteenth century in isolation, however. Although undeniably exploited in their own way, tenant farmers in turn used and, indeed, abused the labor of a large and impoverished landless or cottier class. In many ways the conflict between tenant and laborer was even more significant than that between landlord and tenant, since it has lasted, albeit in altered

form, up to the present day.

To complicate matters further, there were numerous sub-divisions within each of the three classes mentioned above. For example, some landlords were true magnates, owning thousands of acres of land, while others possessed more modest amounts and lived their particular lifestyle accordingly and there also were immense differences between the social and economic standing of members of the tenant class. The 'large' or 'strong' tenant, holding a hundred acres or more, was not uncommon in Wexford, and undoubtedly provided a large part of the social and political leadership upon which his class relied. Beneath these strong tenants was the whole social spectrum that is known as the 'peasant' class. Such a range covers everything from moderately wealthy landholders, to the near-paupers who scratched a miserable existence from a few acres. And, beneath these again were the definitely impoverished landless laborers. Of course, not all laborers were in a similar situation. Some enjoyed near-permanent employment, and though six to ten pence a day was hardly a great reward, it was enough to keep a family alive under 'normal' circumstances. The less fortunate were only seasonally employed, or not at all. These unwanted wretches suffered the greatest distress during the famine, and practically disappeared from the countryside.

This discussion of nineteenth century Wexford would hardly be complete without special mention of the towns and their function.

While the port-towns of the south had long been inhabited by Catholic merchants, professionals, tradesmen and laborers, this was not so for the newer towns of the north. They had been established by Protestant English settlers, and for decades remained Protestant strongholds. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, large numbers of Catholics had joined the ranks of the urban middle classes, and many Catholic laborers had migrated from the countryside to these towns in search of work. It was this group that formed the core of the Catholic mobs which were such a source of worry to the forces of law and order in the 1800's.

Between these major towns villages grew up. For the most part, they were planned and built as small residential and service centres by local landlords. Following a rather stereotyped ground-plan and architectural style, such settlements usually contained two churches, one Protestant, one Catholic; a small military or police barracks; a few shops and/or pubs, which served local needs; and up to thirty or so cottages, all arranged in two parallel lines running the length of the only street. The inhabitants of such small centres were almost exclusively Catholic by the

mid-1800's.

Economically speaking, Wexford is and long has been one of the more prosperous counties in Ireland. When thousands were dying daily along the West coast in famine years Wexford escaped relatively lightly. Her agriculture produced large volumes of cereals which were sent by cart to Enniscorthy, New Ross and Wexford Town for export. Corn was also transported northward, to Dublin, and this flow increased enormously after the coming of the railroad in the 1850's. Not surprisingly, the corn merchant became an established member of high society in the towns, and in many instances, this profession gave ambitious Catholics the chance to accumulate considerable wealth and status.

A few industries actually grew directly out of corn production. For example, several breweries were established in the 1700's and a few flour mills were built to absorb some of the local wheat crop and exploit the local market. Also, widespread tillage required quite sophisticated equipment, even when the horse was the chief source of power. Several small iron foundries grew up to satisfy this need, as well as one very large one in Wexford Town. With a few other exceptions, however, these were the only manufacturing industries of note.

In many respects then, the towns continued to play the same role as the villages, writ-large. That is, they were

places of exchange, where the products of the soil were handed over, in return for goods and services which were necessary in the farming and laboring community. The "Fair", which was held at intervals during the year, was the most dramatic and colorful instance of this exchange. On "Fair Days" farmers brought their produce, including livestock, into the town where it was sold, usually to out-of-town buyers. The farmers were then persuaded to purchase the trinkets of hucksters, the clothes of drapers, and, of course, the beer of publicans, with the money they had made. It was all very colorful, highly ritualized, and, economically, quite primitive.

Presiding over this whole edifice were the only two groups that could claim to have the education and experience necessary for leadership, the landlords and the clergy.

The Roman Catholic priest was the only literate voice which the farming and laboring masses of that religion possessed, and, from the early 1800's onward, he rivalled the landlord in social and political power, if not in wealth. Oftentimes living in a parochial house that equalled, if it did not surpass, the splendour of many a landlord mansion, the priest guided the fortunes of his flock with one eye to Heaven and the other to Dublin Castle.

In short, he wanted a holy, law-abiding people, and the people needed a father-figure with as dextrous a tongue

and as lavish a "Big House" as any landlord.

Living in their mansions and dominating the political life of the county beyond all proportions to their numbers, the landlords were really a world onto their own. Raised in the romantic tradition, the more prosperous of them did make a genuine effort to create around them the romantic world of which they dreamed. Relics of the dream remain today. Shabby and faded, the "Big Houses" still stand arrogant and proud on their hilltop locations. Around them the blurred outlines of demesnes can still be seen. In these houses live farmers, often Catholics, who know little and care less about the society they have replaced. In a few instances the direct descendants of members of the landed gentry still live in their ancestral homes. Farmers now, they too, have chosen to foresake a dead past and adapt to the new scheme of things, in the new nation. In less than a century, a whole way of life has vanished.¹

The purpose of this work is to examine one of the major long-term causes of this amazing fall. Many contemporaries noted how unsuccessful landlords were as businessmen. Marie Edgeworth, one of their number, was aghast at the way in which landlords lived beyond their means and so ruined themselves beyond redemption.²

¹Maxwell, C. Country and Town in Ireland Under the Georges, Dundalk, 1949.

²Ibid.

Extravagant living and the conspicuous expenditure that went with it may well have led many a landowner into bankruptcy. Therefore, spending patterns during the nineteenth century are well worth examining. But, so too are the sources of income upon which the class relied. After all, if a landlord could exert a fair degree of control over his earning power, he might be able to keep in step with his outlays. From where did most landlords get their wealth? How reliable did these sources prove to be as the nineteenth century advanced? If they were inadequate, why could they not be improved? These are just some of the questions which must be answered if the economic condition of the Irish landed gentry is to be even partially understood.

If the landed class was in financial trouble long before the 1880's and 1890's, there is a strong possibility that changing landownership patterns would have reflected this. For example, it is possible to establish exactly who owned the land at several given dates in the nineteenth century. In particular, the years 1852 and 1876 are important in this context, due to the availability of certain reliable source materials. By comparing patterns on the above dates, it should be relatively easy to determine the degree of change which had taken place in the interim, and to relate this to conclusions already arrived at concerning

estate management and finance.

Very few projects of this kind and on this subject have been undertaken in the past. Although the Land Question itself has been examined in a general way by several scholars, few have concentrated their attention on a small area or indeed on the kind of source materials employed in this text. The works of Pomfret, Palmer, Solow, Lee and Cullen all deal with the Land Revolution, but, although their conclusions are adequate for their purposes, nobody has really explained the oft-cited landlord bankruptcy which facilitated the upheaval.³ Work by James Donnelley in 1975 did come close to achieving something in this area. He examined the development of rural society and agriculture in nineteenth century Cork, but his basic objective was to write a history of Cork agriculture, not to trace the decline of that county's landed gentry.⁴ In many ways, then, the work which follows is new in its objectives and methods.

Before getting involved in these questions and problems,

³ See John E. Pomfret, The Struggle for the Land in Ireland, 1800-1923, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930); Norman D. Palmer, The Irish Land League Crisis, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Barbara Solow, The Land Question and the Irish Economy, 1870-1903, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Joseph Lee, The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1973); Lewis M. Cullen, An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660, (London: Batsford, 1972).

⁴ James S. Donnelley, The Land and the People of Nineteenth Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

a brief outline should be given of the source materials used for this work and their treatment.

Chapters 2, 3 and 5 of the thesis deal with the finances of twelve different estates. Unfortunately, the quality and quantity of records varied greatly from estate to estate. In a few cases very detailed accounts of income and expenditure still survive. The most outstanding example of this is the Fitzwilliam Collection, which is detailed and very informative. For other estates, however, only very fragmentary documentation survives.

Wills, deeds, lists of tenants and rents are the only evidence of how business was conducted. For this reason, the number of examples which can be cited to reinforce several of the statements in the text is embarrassingly small. Information from all twelve estates will be used at some time or other during the work, but it is fully accepted that conclusions must be tentative at times, because of this shortcoming.

Graphs and tables have been constructed where possible. On some occasions it is possible that the volume of statistics alone will make the reader's task difficult, but every effort shall be made to ensure that all points are explained fully. The graphs and tables themselves have been put together from figures found among the various collections of estate papers. Strictly speaking, the reader should be

given a clear description of how each of these illustrations was created. Such a task, however, would involve considerable amounts of space in some cases. Therefore, it has been decided that in each particular instance a list of the manuscripts used shall be given rather than a detailed explanation of how they were treated.

The text itself falls into five chapters. These sections are all interconnected in some way but each one emphasizes a particular aspect of the problem.

An adequate income is basic to all economic prosperity. In chapters 2 and 3 a detailed description of the sources and changing reliability of landlord income will be given. This will include an examination of each income source to which members of the class resorted. Special attention shall be paid to the problems involved with the most important of these sources, agricultural rent. In chapter 3 a detailed investigation of the strengths and weaknesses of such rents will be conducted.

The spending patterns of the landed class will be examined in chapter 5. In this way important questions concerning the nature and extent of such spending can be answered. On what were landlords spending their money? Were these outlays increasing or diminishing with time? What was the income/expenditure balance on most estates? These are questions of great importance to the subject and can at

least be answered for the area under investigation.

In chapter 4 agrarian violence in the country is dealt with. Although not directly concerned with the problem of estate finances the activities of rural terrorist groups may have had a profound influence on landlord strategy.

Chapter 6 is concerned with landownership changes in the area. If the landlords were going broke long before the 1870's and 1880's the pattern of landownership would have reflected this. Estates or parts of them were constantly sold to clear debts. New social classes or religious groups may have crept into the landowning elite. In this way the composition of the landed class may have been changing dramatically long before the constitutional upheavals that led to its collective liquidation.

CHAPTER II

SOURCES OF INCOME

Nobody has ever figured out just how much the nineteenth century landowner depended on agricultural rents. Naturally, there were alternative sources of income. Below a brief look will be taken at some of the alternatives to which landlords in north Wexford resorted. For example, many of the towns and villages were owned by these people and rents were charged on them. Forests still survived on the hillsides and, while not all landlords possessed such woodlands, they might have been a valuable asset to those who did. Also, many landlords were farmers in their own right, in that they cultivated units of considerable size adjacent to their houses. Not all landowners engaged in this activity either, of course, but it would be worthwhile to examine the achievements of the few who did. Finally, a number of other small-scale enterprises must be mentioned. Among these are turf sales, slate-quarrying, and manufacturing industry.

A. Urban Rents

Almost twenty percent of the inhabitants of nineteenth

accruing from it could not have made a great difference to the finances of those who did.²

B. Lumbering

One of the most dramatic yet least documented developments in Irish history is the deforestation of the countryside. From the seventeenth century onwards huge tracts of land were cleared, and although Gaelic poets frequently lamented the loss of their familiar woodlands, these timbered areas were mostly replaced by pasture and tillage farms. It is difficult to estimate the value of cut-timber at any given period, but the landed gentry should have benefited considerably from the exploitation of this valuable resource and indeed from the extension of the agricultural frontier that went with it.

Not all landlords could have benefited from this process equally. As the woods were felled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the agricultural frontier advanced across the most arable lands first, and so the nineteenth century forests would have been confined to hilly and badly drained terrain. Thus, only landlords who were in possession of such marginal lands would have been in a position to make money from the lumbering business. Assuredly, trees were often planted in demesne lands, but such woods existed

²Grogan Papers, Ms. 11, 109.

for aesthetic rather than economic purposes. Young gentlemen and ladies raised in the romantic tradition could hardly see their way to desecrating such treasures.

Most of the marginal land in North Wexford is confined to the northern and western sections of the region. It is hardly surprising then, that the only two estates for which lumbering activities are recorded were located in those areas. The estates mentioned were owned by the Fitzwilliam and Hall-Dare families and both were relatively large, well-managed operations. The Fitzwilliam estate was especially well located for lumbering. Lying astride the Wexford, Wicklow and Carlow borderlands, it contained large expanses of hilly land which would have been the last to fall to the woodcutter's ax. Fortunately, a conscientious account of timber sales on this estate was kept and figures are available covering the years between 1782 and 1831. The Hall-Dare records are not nearly so copious or wide ranging, covering, as they do, only the 1860's. But, they, too, help one to estimate the directions the lumber business was taking in the 1800's and how significant a part it played in the financial fortunes of the landed gentry.

Revenue from timber sales fluctuated in the last two decades of the eighteenth century but for the most part it was quite significant, proportionate to other sources of income. The Fitzwilliam records attest to this fact, and

although they are the sole evidence in this respect, the estate was extensive enough to ensure that patterns established on it may well have been paralleled on others, which were in a similar situation.

The actual cash returns for the period between 1782 and 1800 give a good indication of how flexible and yet intense lumbering and timber selling were on the estate. These figures have been summarised in Graph 1, and from this several trends are quite clear.

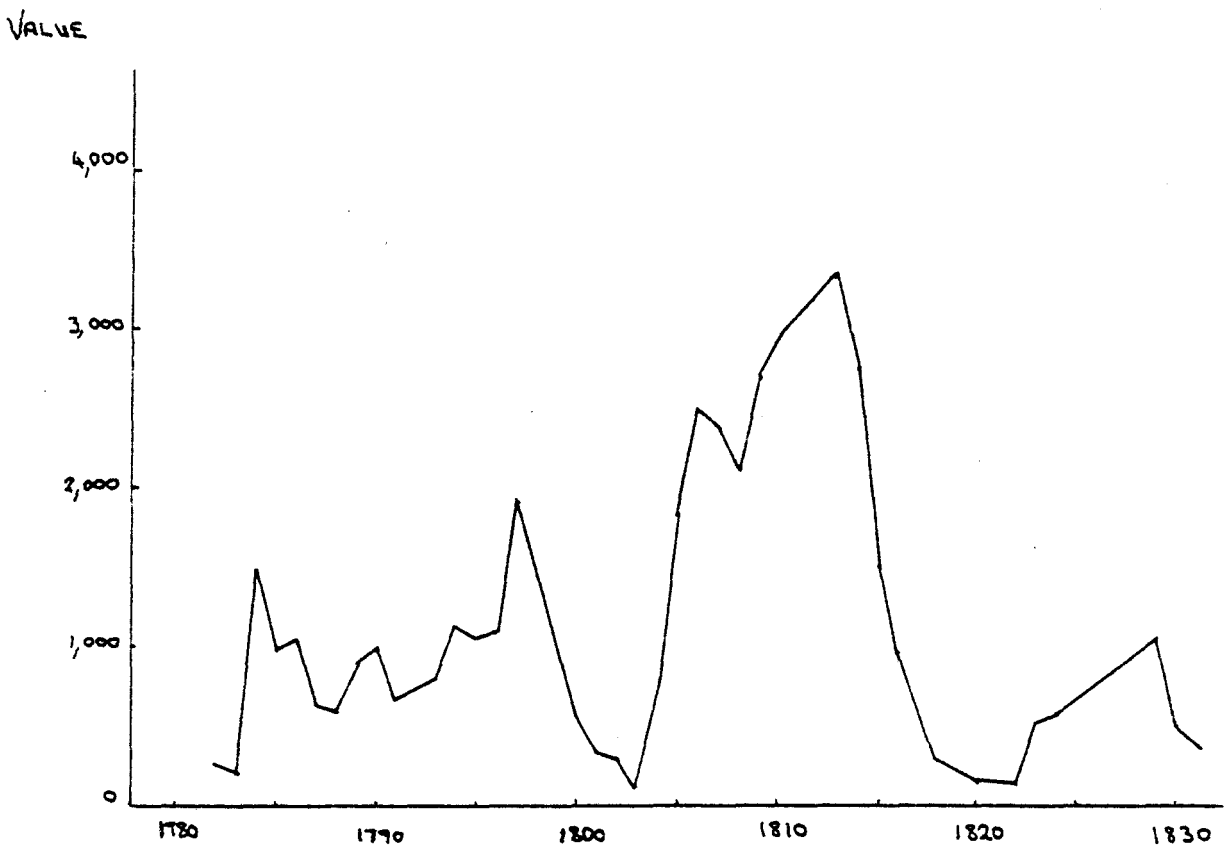
As the graph shows, returns did fluctuate quite a deal from year to year, but nonetheless, the overall trend through the last two decades of the eighteenth century was one of increased activity. In 1782 and 1783, the timber business only realised a few hundred pounds. Then, suddenly, in 1784 the figure leaped to over sixteen hundred pounds. This pace was maintained for the rest of the 1700's but with two short lived declines; one in the years 1788-9 and the second in 1792-4. However, it should be noted that on both these occasions, the revenue from timber sales remained at a level which was more than twice that of the years 1782 and 1783.³

In the nineteenth century the importance of timber-sales declined in the locality. Evidence available from both the

³Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6049.

GRAPH 1.

VALUE OF LUMBERING ON FITZWILLIAM ESTATE, 1782-1830



Hall-Dare and Fitzwilliam estates suggests this.

Graph 1 illustrates the changing absolute value of lumber sold on the Fitzwilliam lands between 1800 and 1830.⁴ For the first five years of the century, activity appears to have almost ceased with annual revenue reaching its nadir in 1803, at one hundred pounds. A recovery began in the following year, however, and for the ensuing decade, huge sums were made from sales of timber. Such activities must have created quite a deal of employment in felling trees and transporting logs, as well as in the ancillary activities that, of necessity, accompany the lumbering business.

Certainly, the forests were a boon to the finances of the estate. For example, in 1813 almost three and a half thousand pounds worth of timber was sold off. After that zenith, however, returns fell steeply, and although there was something of a revival in 1828, they never again reached the successively high figures that they attained between 1804 and 1814. Ironically, it was after the latter date that agricultural prices began to fall, and they remained discouragingly low for decades. Undoubtedly the Napoleonic Wars played a key role in both developments.

The extent to which lumber delined as a major financial asset after 1814 can be more fully appreciated when it is

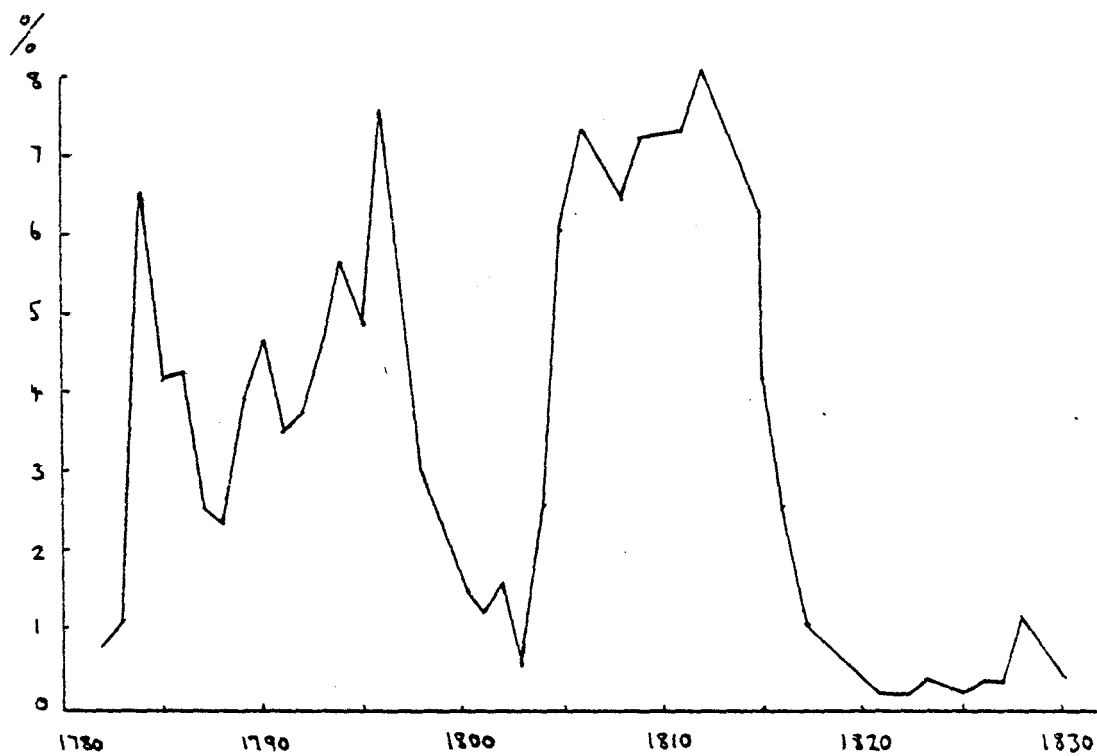
⁴Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6051

examined in conjunction with changes in the overall annual income of the estate. In Graph 2 returns from timber sales are compared directly with returns from all other enterprises for the period 1782 to 1830. Undoubtedly, wood was very important during that rather active decade from 1804 to 1814. In that time, it accounted for up to 8.4% of annual income and its share seldom fell below 5%. After that, however, timber sales shrank to insignificance, seldom even earning 1% of annual income.⁵

On the Hall-Dare estate woodlands were of little importance in the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, figures are only available for the years 1864-7. It would be impossible to gauge the overall trend from such a small period but it is noteworthy that in these years timber was of little financial significance, and, small as they were, returns from sales declined markedly over the four years in question. For example, in 1864, £96 were made from the estate's woods, but this only represented 1.8% of the total income for that year, which was £5,088. In the following year, returns from timber sales fell to £86, but total income dropped to £4,708, so the relative importance of lumbering remained the same. In 1866, however, there was a very definite absolute and relative decline in the importance of lumber, since it only

⁵Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6048

GRAPH 2.
TIMBER-BASED REVENUE AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
INCOME ON THE FITZWILLIAM ESTATE, 1782-1830



realised £32, or 0.6% of total income, and, by 1867, the activity had become financially insignificant. If figures for the decades prior to these years were available, it would be possible to put the above data in their proper context. However, the limited evidence that is to hand does show that the Hall-Dare forest lands had shrunk to insignificance, as money-earners, by the 1860's, and it is quite likely that this was just the culmination of a trend that had been in progress for a long time.⁶

There was one other source of timber besides forests in nineteenth century Wexford. Even today the practice of planting trees along hedgerows is widespread. This strategy helps to reinforce the fencing while, at the same time, providing firewood for the owner. It is interesting to note that a survey of a section of the Ram estate, conducted in 1820, recorded that over £1,000 worth of timber grew on this portion of the property, but was distributed among more than thirty farms.⁷

Obviously, it would have proven very difficult for any landlord to exploit these 'hedgerow woods', since operations would have been small-scaled and tenants did have rights to reserves, also.

⁶Hall-Dare Papers, Ms. 5507.

⁷Ram Papers, Old Ross Survey, 1818.

For timber to remain a viable source of revenue, re-planting would have been necessary. But, there was great demand for the creation of new agricultural lands throughout the entire century at this stage. In the very early years of the century, sub-division had satisfied the land hunger to some extent, but landlord opposition to such a palliative led to the extension of the agricultural frontier into bogs and up hillsides, as the definition of 'margin-ality' was adjusted to an increasingly lower level. The forests were disappearing and with them a valuable source of revenue for the landed class. Of course, farmland was replacing the beech and oak stands, but the new farmers were little better than spade cultivators who were only capable of providing a bare subsistence for themselves and their families. Therefore, it is unlikely that the landowners benefited financially from the transition.⁸

C. Demesne Farming

The ancestors of the nineteenth century landed gentry had mostly come to Ireland with the intention of being farmers, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that is what most of them became. As has been previously pointed out, many of these 'farmers' had risen to the status of true gentlemen by the eighteenth century. They had left

⁸Cullen, Economic History, p.78

the fort-like plantation houses that plantation policy required them to build, and now lived in much less arrogant structures. The natives were cowed and the interior of the island was rapidly opened up by the clearance of forests and building of roads. In many cases the 'demesne' was the farm originally occupied by the English settler, but when the great mansions were built in the eighteenth century, many demesnes were turned into extensive pleasure-grounds. In many instances landlords became much more dependant on agricultural rents for their income as a result of this development. Such rents may have seemed reliable in the eighteenth century, but an agricultural and demographic crisis in the 1800's was to make the strategy appear rather foolhardy.

A number of demesnes of course continued to be used for productive purposes. Livestock was often raised on them, and occasionally part of the demesne, or land adjacent to it, was given over to tillage of one kind or another. Obviously, the output from such enterprises was not always high, since the operation was not major priority in itself. It also appears that many landowners in the study area did not pay any attention to farming at all. Of the twelve estates whose records have been examined, only four have any reference to farming being done by the landlord in question. It seems, therefore, that many members of the landed class

were forced to rely almost exclusively on the efforts of other agriculturalists for their livelihood.

On those estates where land was cultivated directly by the owner, the landlord's farm was often looked upon as a kind of model operation, an experimental unit in which innovations were tested and thus introduced to the local peasants. In 1779, Arthur Young commented on the fact that the Earl of Courtown had turnips growing on his land, and that youths from the neighborhood were being employed to cultivate them by way of an education in the new methods.⁹

In the northwest of the study area, on the estate of Richard Symes, a similar, if more sophisticated plan was in effect during the nineteenth century. The Symes estate was not a particularly large property, but it appears that the owner devoted a considerable amount of energy to developing a scientific method of farming. A few examples of the documents relating to this effort may give an indication of how seriously Symes took his task. For example, an account of calf-births between 1860 and 1870 records the date of birth of each animal, as well as its sex, the names of its parents, and such details as its color and stature. All these facts are collected in a very clear and meticulous

⁹Arthur Young, A Tour in Ireland, 1776 - 1779, (London, 1780).

fashion. As well as all this, Symes kept a careful account of cattle and sheep sales and purchases for the period 1852-1875, along with a list of butter sales for the years 1858-1867. Obviously, this gentleman realised that farming was no longer just a way of life but a highly competitive business.¹⁰

How successful were landlords as farmers and what impact did their efforts have on their overall financial position?

Since most landlords did not apparently engage in large scale farming, only a few sets of evidence are available on this subject, the most extensive of these belonging to the Symes and Fitzwilliam estates. Symes derived his farm-based revenue from three products: cattle, sheep and butter. The hilly nature of the land on this estate, plus the repeal of the Corn laws may account for the fact that corn is not mentioned in these records. Graph 3a illustrates the changing output levels of the four chief products of the farm, according to their cash value. Not surprisingly, cattle were by far the most important commodity, earning over £400 per year on occasion, while sheep, butter and wool sales were usually worth about a quarter of that amount.¹¹

¹⁰Symes Papers, Ms. 19,000.

¹¹Symes Papers, Ms. 19,000: 15,542.

One of the most noteworthy features of this pattern, however, is its fluctuation and the fact that in the period for which records are available stagnation and even decline were the norm. As can be seen from Graph 3a, wool and butter revenues remained fairly constant, but there were considerable changes in income earned from cattle and sheep. As well as this, earnings from this entire farming operation did not appreciably increase over the period under examination. This is especially surprising when it is remembered that agricultural prices were slowly increasing throughout the 1850's and 1860's. There can be no question as to Symes' efficiency; the meticulous way in which his accounts were kept attest to this. Despite his best efforts, on the other hand, production volume was falling. In Graph 3b the volumetric output of the Symes' farm is plotted for the years 1852 to 1876. Butter output, after rising through the 1850's, declined steadily through the 1860's. The cattle and sheep population on the estate also declined, after a brief period of increase. Fluctuations were greater in the case of livestock, but during the 1860's and early 1870's, they, too, diminished in numbers: the sheep population falling from 195 head in 1870 to a mere 56 in 1872.¹²

It would be a mistake, however, to emphasise the theme

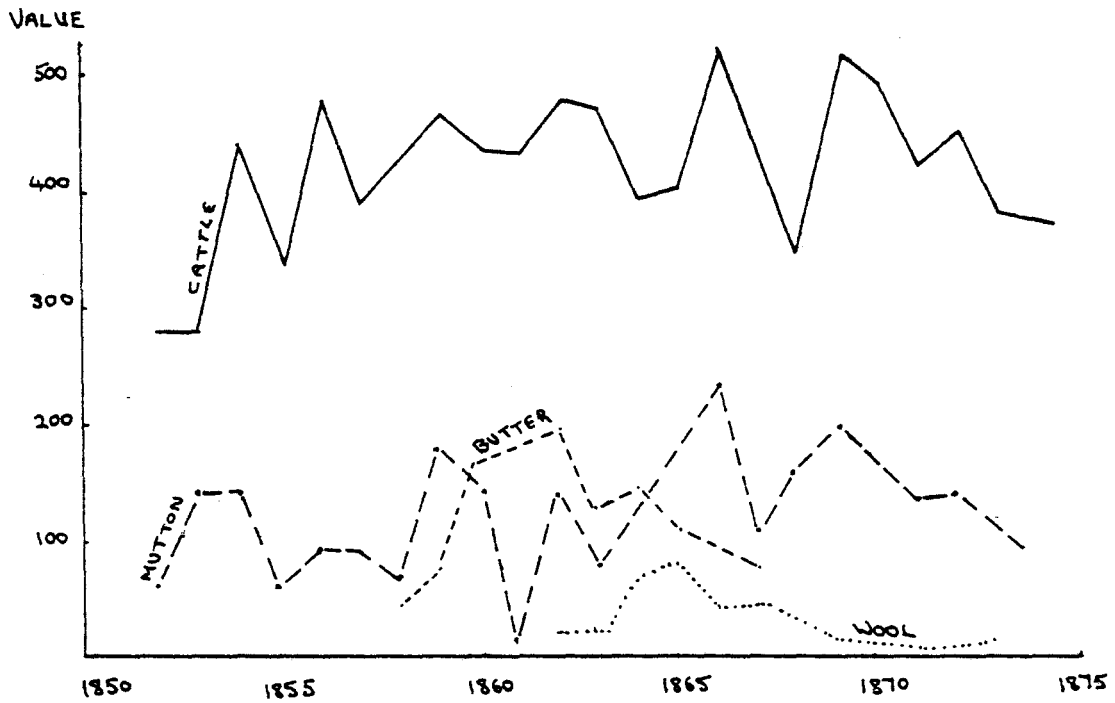
¹²Symes Papers, Ms. 19,000.

of contraction too much in this case. After all, the declines in output mentioned above may only have been temporary in nature. Also, after a noticeable falling off in farm-based income, the amount of money which Symes made from direct agriculture was relatively large at all times. The only reference to rent collected on this estate comes from the year 1848, when it was worth £1,400. Assuming that several tenants were unable to keep up with their rent payments and that rents did not rise very much between 1848 and 1852, the relative importance of demesne farming to the Symes estate can be fully appreciated. In the latter year, farming activities realised a profit of over 600, which would have accounted for at least one-third of the family income.¹³

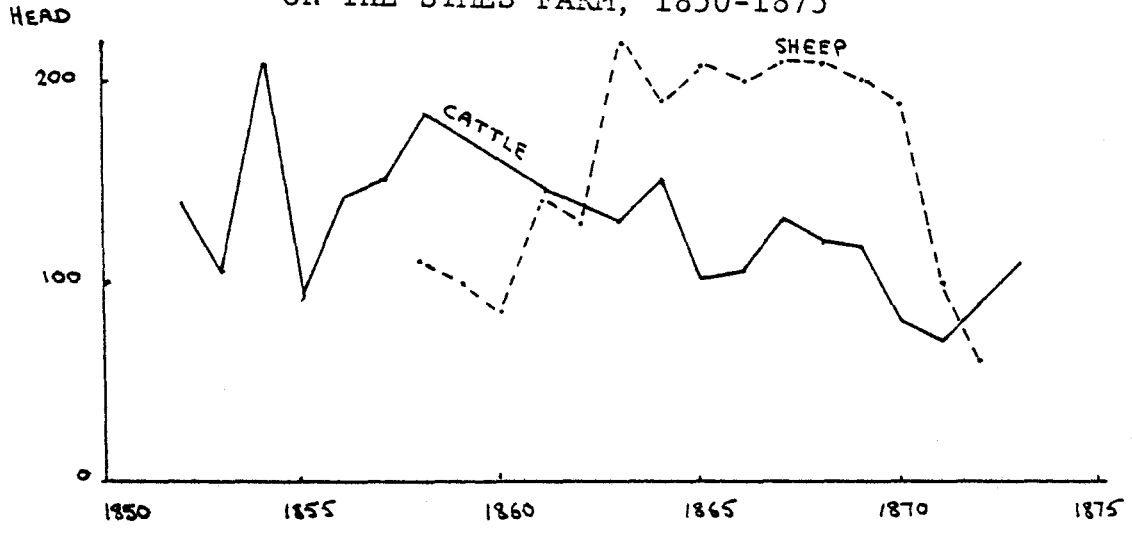
On the Fitzwilliam estate, too, farming became an important source of revenue during the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, the records which are available on this matter are fragmentary in nature, but general trends can be discerned, nonetheless. In Graph 4, the cash value of farming activities on this estate has been plotted for the years 1782-1854. The most remarkable feature of this pattern is the sudden leap in the importance of farming between 1831 and 1854. Indeed, it seems as if Fitzwilliam

¹³ Symes Papers, Ms. 15,542.

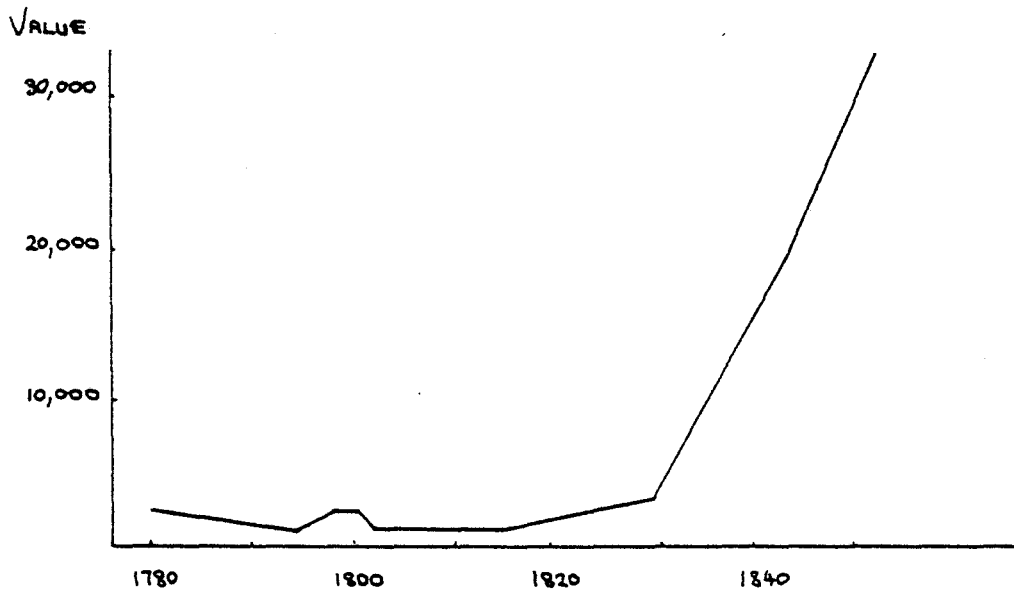
GRAPH 3a.
 VALUE OF SYMES' FARM PRODUCTS, 1852-1874



GRAPH 3b.
OUTPUT OF SHEEP, CATTLE AND BUTTER
ON THE SYMES FARM, 1850-1875



GRAPH 4.
REVENUE FROM AGRICULTURE ON
FITZWILLIAM ESTATE, 1782-1853



completely reoriented his property during this period, changing it from a tenant-held manor into an extensive commercial farm.¹⁴ It is well known that Fitzwilliam sponsored several very successful emigration schemes in the 1830's, sending hundreds of families to Canada. Clearly, he saw this as the only viable solution to the problem of overpopulation which had long beset the island.¹⁵ Indeed, it might be just to claim that Fitzwilliam accurately prejudged the plight of 'landlording' as a profession, and partially forsook it for large-scale farming. It is interesting to note that the Fitzwilliams were among the few 'landlord' families in the area to retain large amounts of property up to modern times, the farm eventually being sold in 1975.

Apart from these two examples, few landlords seem to have paid much attention to farming. On no other estate were records of farming kept, and although a few individuals may have farmed without keeping records, such enterprises were probably only small-scaled. For the most part, landowners in the area failed to transform themselves into large-scale farmers and pay for their extravagant lifestyles that

¹⁴Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6051.

¹⁵William F. Adams, Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World from 1815 to the Famine, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967).

way. Admittedly, the few who did turn to farming did an excellent job, but they were never more than a small minority.

D. Turf, Slates and Factories

Before discussing the income source upon which most landlords were forced to rely, i.e. agricultural rents, a few other enterprises deserve mention.

Turf bogs are uncommon in County Wexford, but, occasionally, blanket bogs are to be found on the higher hills, where rainfall is especially heavy. As with timber, the opportunity to exploit this natural resource depended on the location of one's estate. The only record of turf being sold comes from the Hall-Dare estate, which was also involved in some small-scale lumbering activities. However, the revenue accruing to the owner from turf sales was miniscule. For instance, in the years 1866 and 1867, turf sales were worth a mere £6 per annum, when the total income of the estate came to £5,713 and £5,083, respectively.¹⁶

Of slightly greater importance was a slate quarry on the same estate. Although this is the only record of such a quarry on all twelve estates investigated, slate of an inferior quality must have been relatively easy to come by in Wexford, since the prevalent bedrock is shale. But, the quarry on the Hall-Dare estate only realised small profits.

¹⁶Hall-Dare Papers, Ms. 5507.

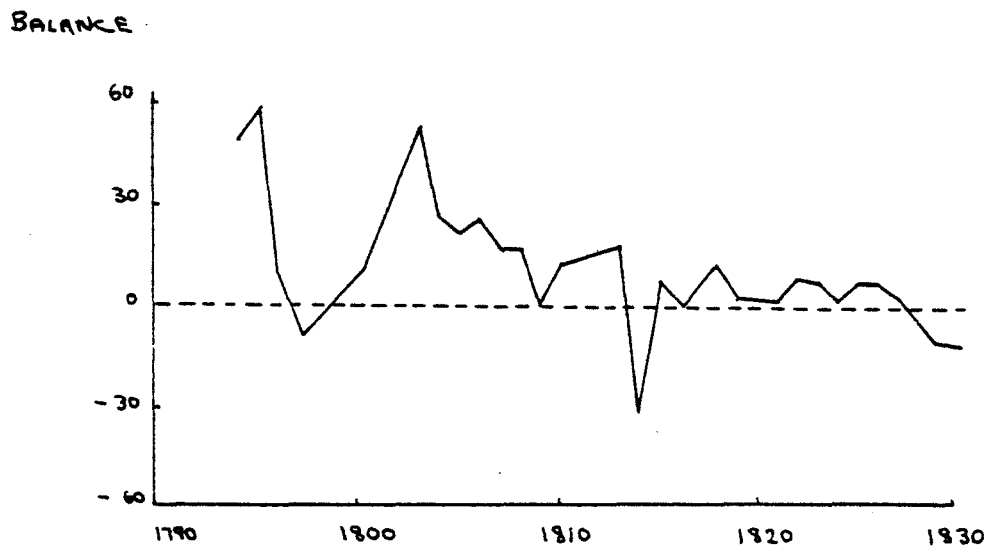
Furthermore, returns were diminishing during the period for which records are available, being at £77 in 1865, falling to £42 in the following year, and getting as low as £12 in 1867.¹⁷

Manufacturing industries were very rare on the estates of the landed gentry. Indeed, the only mention of a secondary economic activity of this kind comes from the Fitzwilliam records. In 1793, a flannel hall was built on that estate and it remained in operation until 1830. Few landlords, it seems, ever dared set up this kind of industry. Yet, they were the only people in the entire community who would have possessed the capital necessary for such an undertaking. Perhaps many of them realised the futility of trying to compete with British manufacturers even on the domestic market.

The fortunes of the one industry which was landlord-inspired, the Fitzwilliam flannel hall, were 'mixed' to say the least. Graph 5 shows how the hall's profits and losses fluctuated between its inception in 1793 and its disappearance from the account books in 1830. In the first three years of its existence, the hall did make money, but the returns were diminishing rather than increasing. From 1798 to 1802, the factory barely kept a balance, and in 1803,

¹⁷Ibid.

GRAPH 5.
CHANGING PROFIT LEVELS OF FITZWILLIAM
FLANNEL HALL, 1793-1830



substantial losses were incurred. Strangely, a good profit was made in 1804. Alas, revenue levels fell steadily after that date and never recovered, so that in the decade or more preceding the 'shut-down', almost no money was made from the enterprise at all.¹⁸

As with turf and slates then, the flannel hall was, relatively speaking, unimportant. In the first place, such small enterprises were attempted by very few landlords. Secondly, those who did try them could never make significant profits, and during the nineteenth century, the general trend in such minor operations was one of slow, but steady, decline. The same generalisations apply to other activities mentioned in this section. Urban property may have been a boon for the few who owned it, but the vast majority of landowners had unimportant settlements on their lands or else none at all. Lumbering, while it did help Fitzwilliam for a while, was really not very important in a general sense. Farming, of course, was a little different from other activities, in that it did provide substantial profits for those who engaged in it. The indications are, however, that only a handful of landlords would or, indeed, could see fit to turn their hands to this activity. Instead of becoming more diversified, then, the basis of wealth of Ireland's landed

¹⁸Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6014-6048.

gentry seems to have been narrowing in the nineteenth century. Dependence on a single source of income might have been excusable, or even advisable, if that source were reliable. But, as shall be seen in the following section reliance on agricultural rents had serious drawbacks which only intensified as the century advanced.

CHAPTER III

AGRICULTURAL RENTS

Up to this point, the discussion has centered upon sources of landlord income which, while being important in their own contexts, were by no means vital to the economic interests of the landed class. It is obvious from the number of instances cited, as well as the amounts of money involved, that lumbering, demesne farming, sales of turf and slates and industrial activities were really only of minor importance. Most landlords, it seems, were content to depend almost completely on agricultural rents for their livelihood. Had such dependence been justified by a corresponding dependability on the part of the rent-paying tenantry, the policy would doubtless have been a wise one. As time would demonstrate, however, it was anything but an intelligent strategy.

In the chapter which follows, the advantages and disadvantages of this source of revenue shall be examined. In doing so it will be necessary to establish exactly how dependent the average landlord was on rent for his livelihood and how reliable the income from this source proved to be.

More difficult to determine are the reasons for any

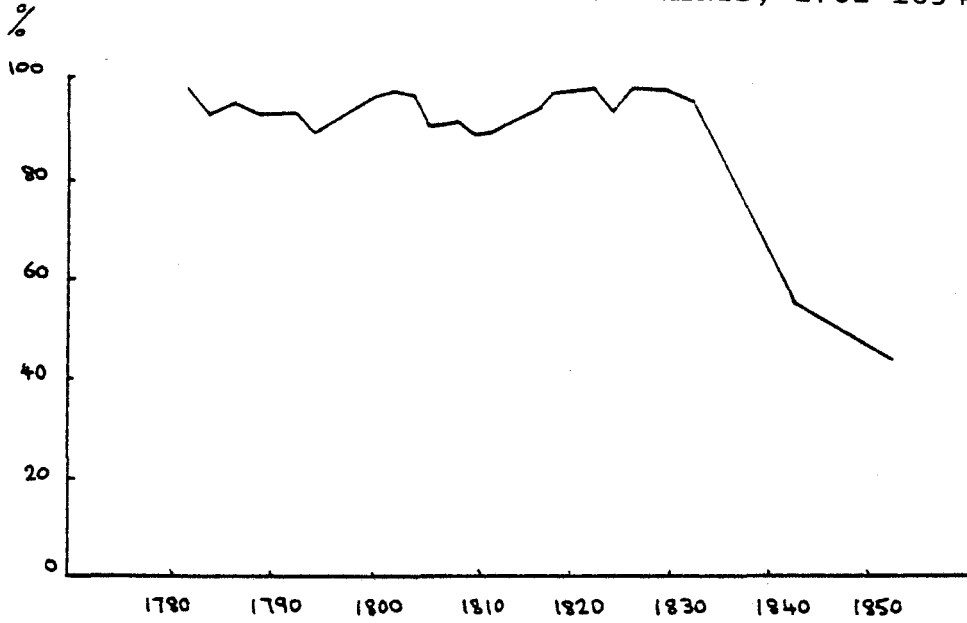
problems which were encountered in collecting rent. One way of answering the questions raised by this issue is to figure out what kind of tenants fell behind in their payments. If most debts were owed by small farmers, then one could claim that the solution to the problem lay in the area of farm consolidation and enlargement; or, by implication, that the origins of the crisis could be attributed to the inability of landlords to prevent fragmentation and subdivision of holdings. On the other hand, if it could be shown that tenants who were leaseholders were slower in paying their debts, then the blame could safely be placed on the practice of giving leases itself, a tradition which gave tenants a shield of immunity behind which they were safe from landlords, good and bad.

Reliance on agricultural rents for income seems to have been almost total in the area. Obviously, almost all landlords received finance from other sources, but these alternatives were insignificant when compared with the amount of wealth each landowning family received from its tenantry.

The fact that the Fitzwilliam estate was well above financial 'par' compared with other estates in the area can hardly be overstated. Its history up to recent years is adequate proof of this. Nevertheless, the Fitzwilliam family depended heavily on agricultural rents for decades. Graph 6 illustrates the extraordinary extent of this dependence. On

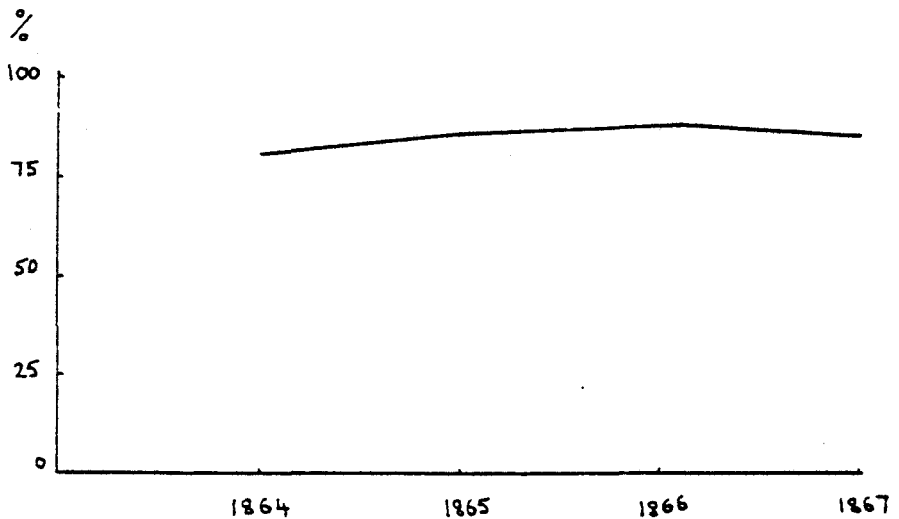
GRAPH 6.

PERCENTAGE OF FITZWILLIAM'S INCOME FROM RENTS, 1782-1854



GRAPH 7.

PERCENTAGE OF HALL-DARE'S INCOME COMING FROM AGRICULTURAL RENTS, 1864-1867



no occasion between 1782 and 1831 did rents account for less than 91% of the estate's annual income. Indeed, between 1801 and 1802 inclusive, the tenants were providing this very powerful landlord with just 100% of his annual earnings. From 1804 to 1814, timber sales ensured that the tenant farmer was relatively less important than he had previously been, but beginning in 1815, a near-total dependence on agricultural rents prevailed again. Apparently, it was only in the 1830's with the inception of emigration schemes and large-scale demesne farming that the family became partially 'self-sufficient'. By 1843, almost one-third of the property's revenue was coming from direct agriculture, and by 1853, that proportion had been further raised to 44%. This was a remarkable achievement.¹

Most estates were unable to bring about their own version of the 'Fitzwilliam miracle'. Very few references to commerce industry or direct agriculture are to be found in estate records, and clearly many landlords were not nearly as self-reliant as the Fitzwilliams became in the 1850's. For example, as Graph 7 shows, the Hall-Dare family depended almost totally on agricultural rents for its financial solvency, and as late as the 1860's, it received up to 88% of its yearly income from tenant farmers. Although these figures

¹Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6051.

cover a short time period, it appears that the extent of this reliance was increasing; this fully a decade after the Fitzwilliam establishment had cut its corresponding figure to 56%.²

Because of an unfortunate paucity of source materials, it is difficult to determine just how typical are each of the above examples. Undeniably, the Hall-Dare situation was the more common. The Fitzwilliams, unlike many other families in similar circumstances, realised the extent of the difficulties which landlordism faced and saw that only in farming was there any future.

Generally speaking rent assessments were on the increase for the early decades of the nineteenth century. It seems that many landlords found ways of increasing their demands up until 1820's. After that, annual increases were very small and in a few cases, the monetary value of the rent roll actually decreased. This indicates that for most of the century there were very basic and serious weaknesses in the system, for, it must be borne in mind, that rent assessed on an estate for any particular year is not the same as actual rent paid; the former being the amount the landlord deemed reasonable to demand, the latter being the sum the tenantry were willing or able to pay.

²Hall-Dare Papers, Ms. 5507.

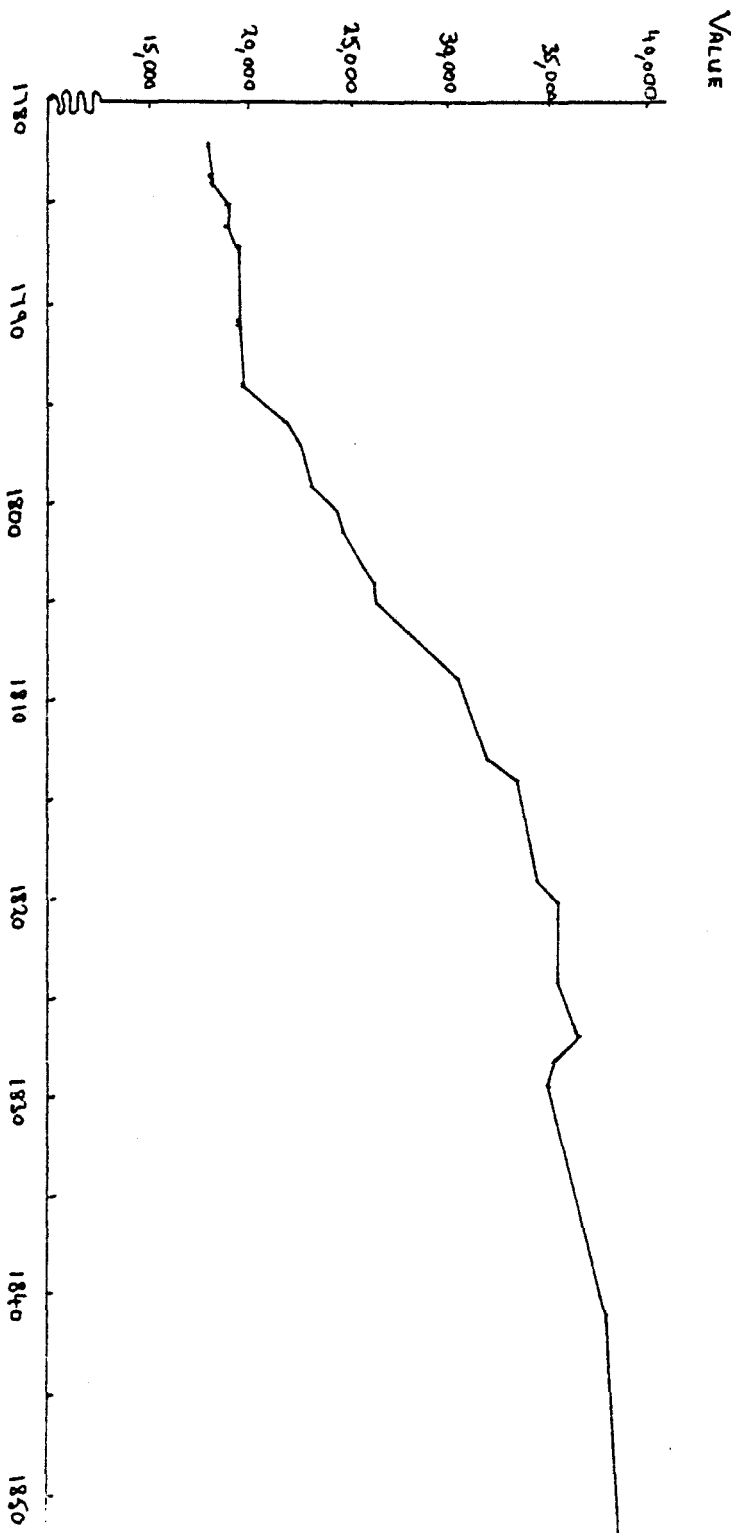
Graph 8, which is based on data in the Fitzwilliam records, throws some light on the situation. In the seventy-three years between 1782 and 1853, the rent assessed on this estate more than doubled, from £17,900 to £36,000 per annum. The increase did not take place steadily over the period, however. Most of it came in the prosperous decades between 1782 and 1821. For example, the annual rent-roll grew from £17,900 in 1782, to just £20,000 in 1800, a substantial expansion. But between 1800 and 1821, the figure rose to over £34,000, an increase of over 70% in twenty-one years. The 1820's, of course, were depression years. After a decade or more of war-time prices, a potato famine shook the economy to its foundations. The yearly rent assessments on the Fitzwilliam estate show the impact of the newly arrived 'bad-times'. In the thirty-two years between 1821 and 1853, the assessments rose a mere £2,000 to £36,000 per year. This was virtual zero-growth compared with the phenomenal increases of the previous three decades.

Some estates were in much worse financial situations. In 1832, a section of the Ram lands near Gorey town was assessed for £998 in rents. Four years later, the landlord had lowered this figure to £965.⁴

³Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6051.

⁴Ram Papers, 1832, 1836.

GRAPH 8.
VALUE OF RENT ASSESSMENTS ON
FITZWILLIAM ESTATE, 1782-1854



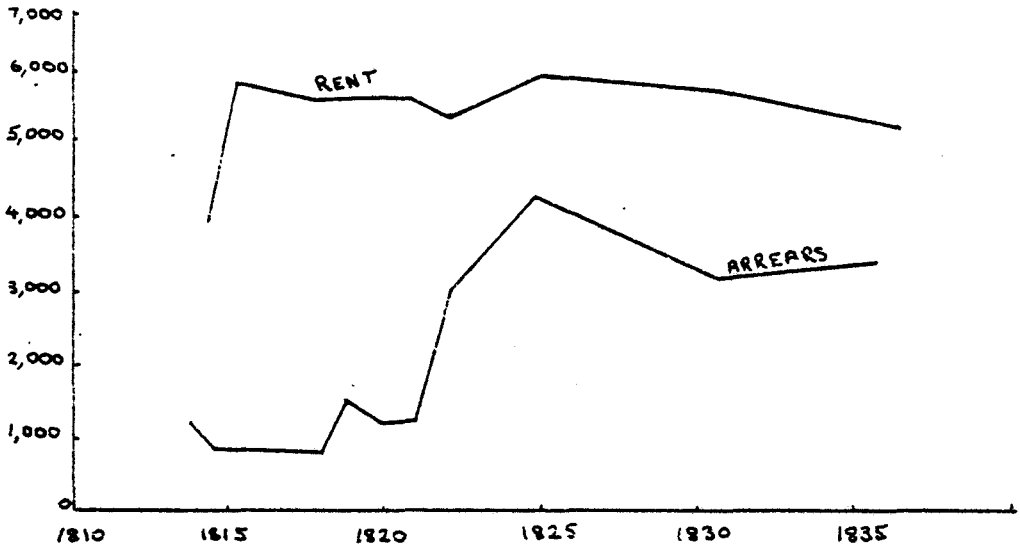
In the case of other estates, data exist dealing with much longer periods than this. For example, Graph 9 shows the change in annual rent assessments for the Tighe estate during the years 1815-1837. The pattern is one of steep but short-lived increase followed by slow and steady decline. The rise from £3,800 in 1815 to £5,800 in the following year is certainly worthy of note. Of course, some artificial factor may have been involved in this sharp change. New lands may have been purchased or new tenants added, or perhaps a whole new set of leases was issued. On the other hand, the years following 1816 witnessed stagnation and even decline. A slight improvement occurred between 1821 and 1824, but it was only temporary in nature. By 1836, a rent-roll that had been worth £6,000 twenty-one years earlier was valued at less than £5,000.⁵

The final example of declining rent assessments comes from the Hall-Dare estate. Information on rent levels on this property is plotted on Graph 10. Rent assessments rose steadily between 1780 and 1800, but the amount of money involved at this stage was rather small. Between 1800 and 1820, on the other hand, a huge increase took place. As Graph 10 shows this growth was paralleled by a rapid expansion in the tenant population, probably due to the purchase

⁵Tighe Papers, Ms. 871-873.

GRAPH 9.
VALUE OF RENT ASSESSMENTS

ON THE TIGHE ESTATE, 1814-1836



GRAPH 10.
VALUE OF RENT ASSESSMENTS

ON HALL-DARE ESTATE, 1780-1870



of new lands. This 'expansion' did little to continually increase the financial reserves of the family, however. From 1820 to 1870, rent assessments declined steadily, while the number of tenants actually rose. For instance, in 1820, assessments stood at £2,700 per half-year, and fully five decades later they had slipped to £2,000.⁶

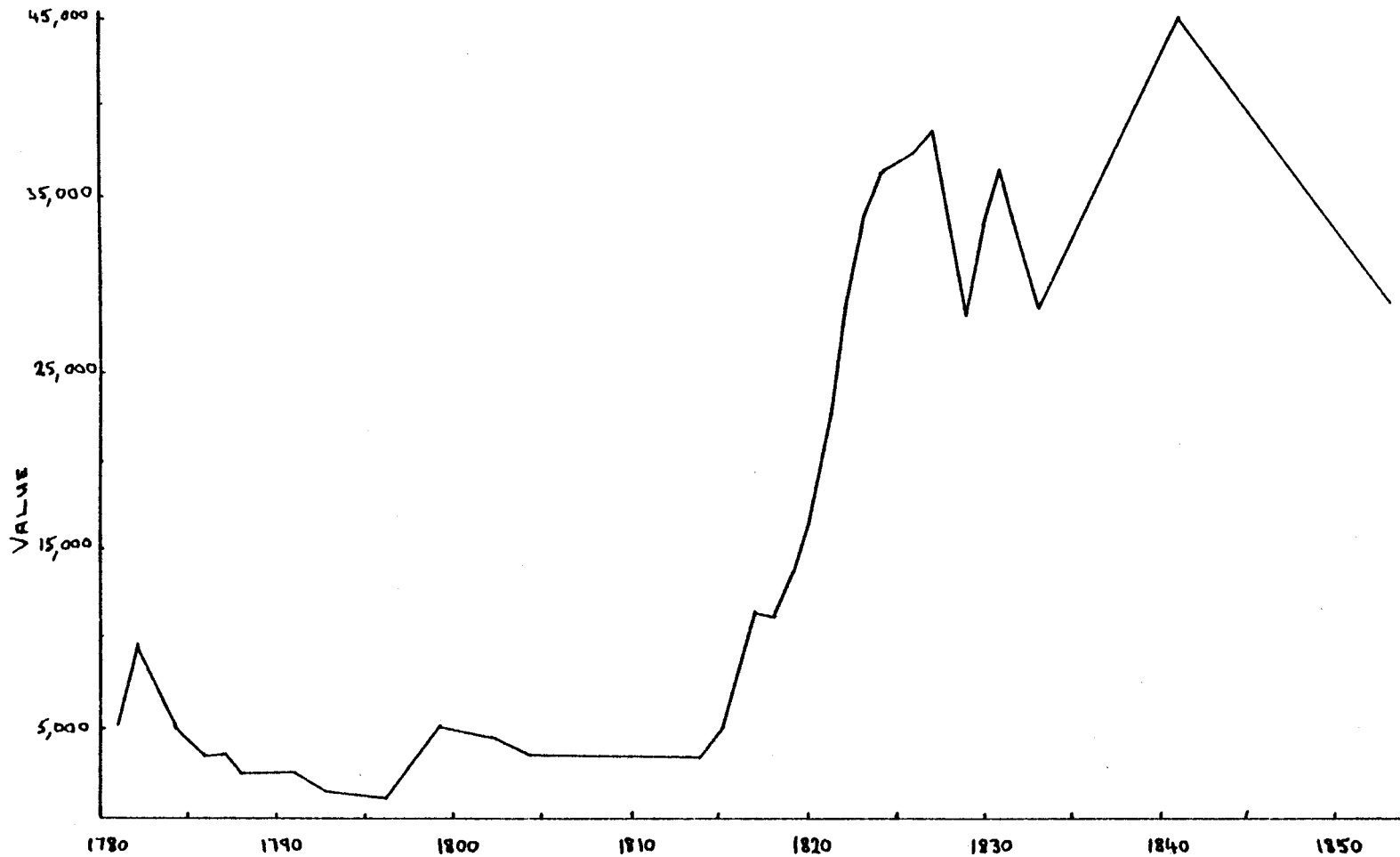
The four estates discussed above are the only properties for which data of this kind is available, and the pattern is similar for all of them. Up until the 1820's, landlords were able to increase their demands on the tenantry. Then, from the 'twenties' onward, rent assessments either decreased or increased very slowly, and this trend, it appears, continued until the final decades of the century.

In many ways, the pattern for rent arrears corresponds with that of rent assessments. 1820 again was a turning point. Before that, most tenants were able to pay the sums demanded of them, and arrears remained at a low level. After that date cumulative arrears grew at a frightening pace, reaching their peak in the middle of the century and, in all probability, never again regaining the low level at which they stood at the beginning of the 1800's.

Graph 11 illustrates the changing size of rent arrears on the Fitzwilliam estate. It should be pointed out that

⁶Hall-Dare Papers, Ms. 5504-5506, Ms. 3135.

GRAPH 11.
VALUE OF RENT ARREARS ON FITZWILLIAM ESTATE, 1782-1854



the figures given for any particular year refer to the cumulative debt owed by the tenantry at that point in time, and does not simply refer to debts incurred in that year. On this estate, the debt owed to the 'lord' fell promisingly in the prosperous 1780's and 1790's. A small increase was registered around the time of the 1798 rebellion, but it was only temporary, and from 1800 to 1815, the debt never rose above £400. Since the arrears were not appreciably increasing, Fitzwilliam's tenants were obviously quite capable of keeping in step with the rapidly mounting rent demands of these years (See Graph 10). After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, on the other hand, the situation changed dramatically. In 1815, the estate's rent-roll was worth £34,000 and the landlord was owed a mere £500 by his tenants. Twelve years later the rent-roll was worth approximately the same amount, while no less than £38,000 remained uncollected from previous years. For a brief period following this, the debt was slightly reduced. The deficit grew again in 1830, and reached a new peak in 1842, when Fitzwilliam's peasantry owed him the massive sum of £44,000. Meanwhile, the rent assessment had hardly changed from its level of 1815! In the twelve years between 1842 and 1854, the debt was reduced considerably, but it still stood at the enormous figure of £31,000 on the latter date. Thus, for at least thirty years, and probably longer, the tenants of one

of the best-managed estates in the entire study area owed their landlord the equivalent of a whole year's rent!⁷

Developments on the Tighe estate, though not quite as dramatic, were no less revealing. The tenants on this estate were well able to sustain the 1815-16 rent increases, shown in Graph 9. On the other hand, as Graph 9 shows, arrears almost doubled between 1818 and 1820, while rent assessments fell slightly (it may be recalled that rent assessments were still rising on the Fitzwilliam estate at this stage). During the first half of the 1820's, the level of arrears rose even further, going from £1,200 in 1821, to £4,100 in 1825. Although there was some decline between the latter date and 1836, the debt remained uncomfortably close to the level of annual rent assessments during the entire period.⁸

Poor though this performance may seem, the figures quoted above are actually very conservative examples of the extent of the arrears problem, because many landlords, contrary to popular opinion, gave tenants rent allowances. In other words, landlords were not averse to writing off certain rents, if a year proved to be especially bad, and thus, the arrears total would have been reduced for a particular year,

⁷Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6051

⁸Tighe Papers, Ms. 871-873.

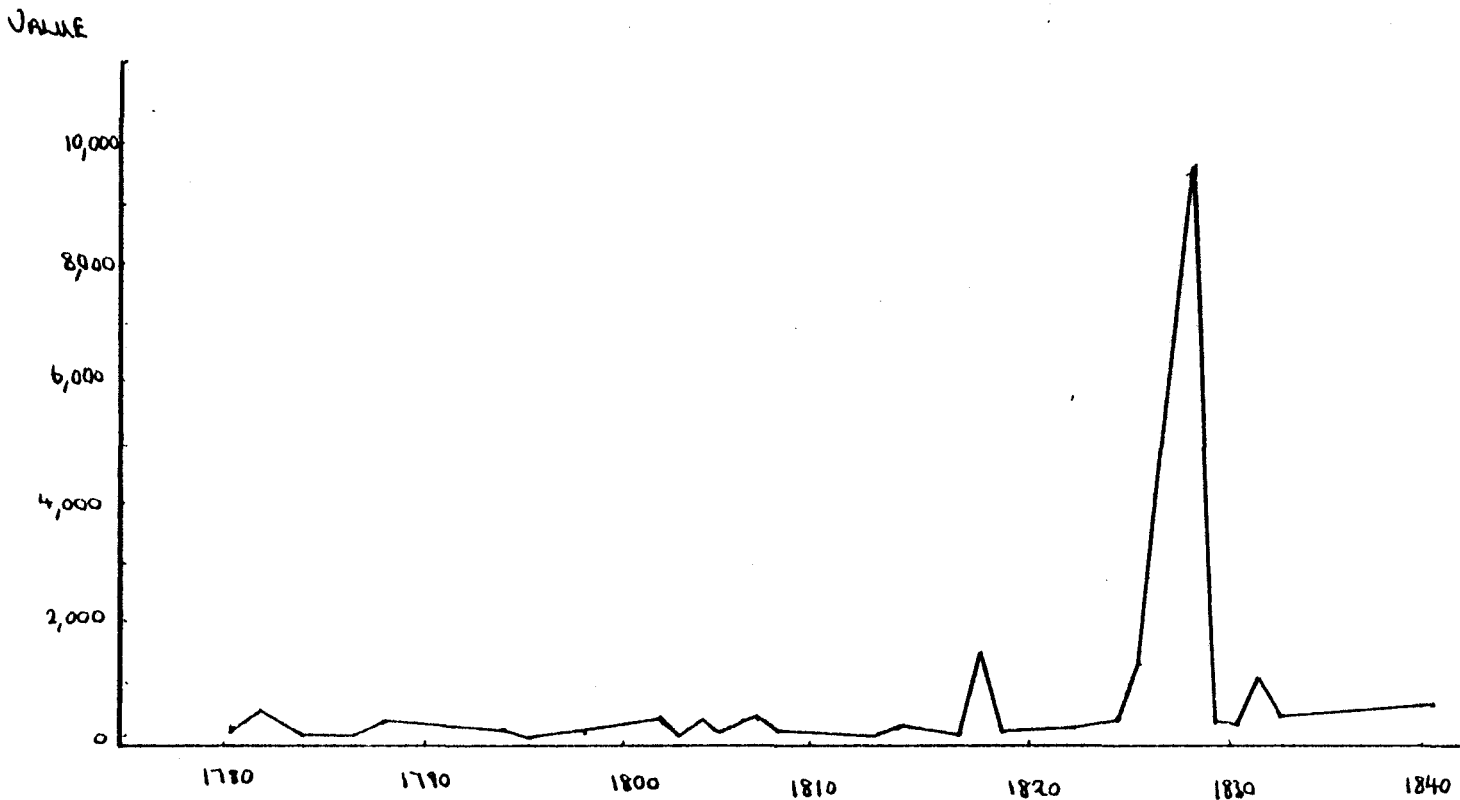
but at the expense of the landlord, not of the tenants. At the end of 1815, £2,567 were uncollected from the tenants on the Tighe estate. For one reason or another the landlord decided to cancel £120 of this debt. After the three year period 1816-18, £2,405 were unpaid on the estate and no less than £1,100 of this sum was cancelled. On two other occasions Tighe waived his right to rents. In 1882 and 1825, he made abatements to the tune of £322 and £237 respectively. When the small size of Tighe's income in these years is taken into account (see Graph 9), it will be realised just how significant these 'losses' were.⁹

As Graph 12 shows, however, even greater sums were written off on the Fitzwilliam estate. In the mid-1780's, large sums were cancelled, with the 1784 total of £509 being the biggest by far. From 1786 until 1817, however, allowances seldom reached £100 per year, in spite of the fact that arrears were fairly substantial at that time. In 1818, with arrears growing steadily, Fitzwilliam slashed £1,533 off the collective debt; apparently, in an effort to restore confidence among the tenantry. The ploy was doomed to failure. Although arrears continued to grow at an alarming pace, abatements fell back to the low level at which they had stood for decades, and it was not until 1823 that they

⁹Tighe Papers, Ms. 871-873.

GRAPH 12

VALUE OF ALLOWANCES ON FITZWILLIAM ESTATE, 1782-1841



rose above the £100 mark again. However, between 1826 and 1828 abatements were to reach unprecedented levels. For example, the 1828 figure was a staggering £9,776, or just a quarter of the rent assessments for the entire estate in that year. Up until 1841, when records of abatements unfortunately ceased, sums allowed tenants remained fairly high with a noticeable peak again in 1831.¹⁰

The arrears phenomenon, then, proved to be a real problem for landlord and tenant alike. Obviously, tenants who were unable to keep rent-payments up to date must have felt desperately insecure, since their leases were immediately invalidated by even a temporary default of this kind. Of course, numbers did give protection. It would have required huge numbers of tenants to build up the kinds of collective debts that have been revealed in the preceding section. If most of the tenants on an estate fell behind in their payments, it would have been difficult for any landlord to retrieve his money by any kind of forceful measures. Indeed, in two ways the landowners seem to have made a tacit admission that rent levels were a little too high after 1820 anyway. For one thing, rent assessments themselves began to decline or, at best, remain unchanged. While, at the same time the abatements which have just been

¹⁰Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6050.

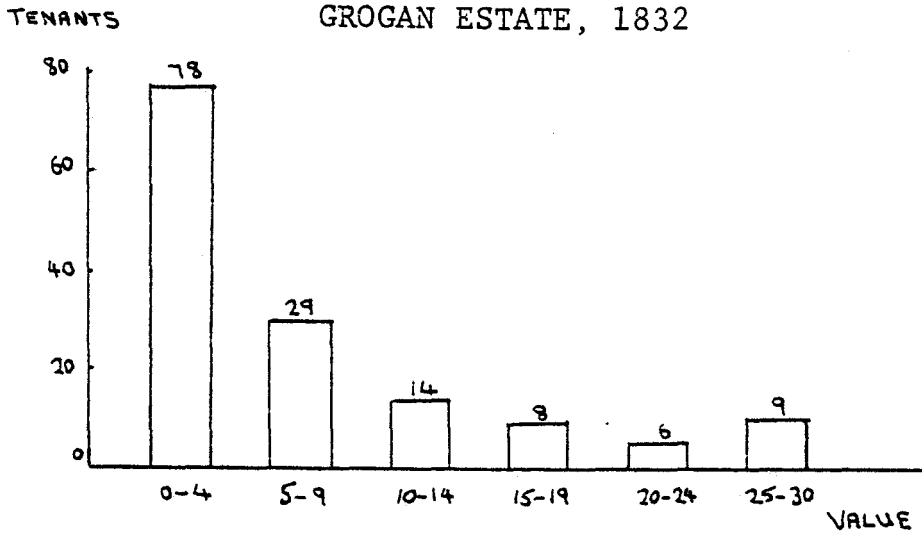
discussed lessened the burden of rent demands on the tenantry. No doubt, beneath these patterns and behind these panaceas were real and dangerous weaknesses in the land system.

The essential problem, then, is the inability of tenants to keep up with rent demands in the first place. Clearly, the role of price declines after 1815 cannot be ignored, but it is not unlikely that factors inherent in the system itself were to blame too. Perhaps landlords should have exercised the power they had to eliminate small farms from their estates. By creating larger and more economic units they might have ensured that the rural economy could become more commercialised and efficient than it had ever been. Or maybe they ought to have abandoned the practice of giving leases at some stage in the eighteenth century.

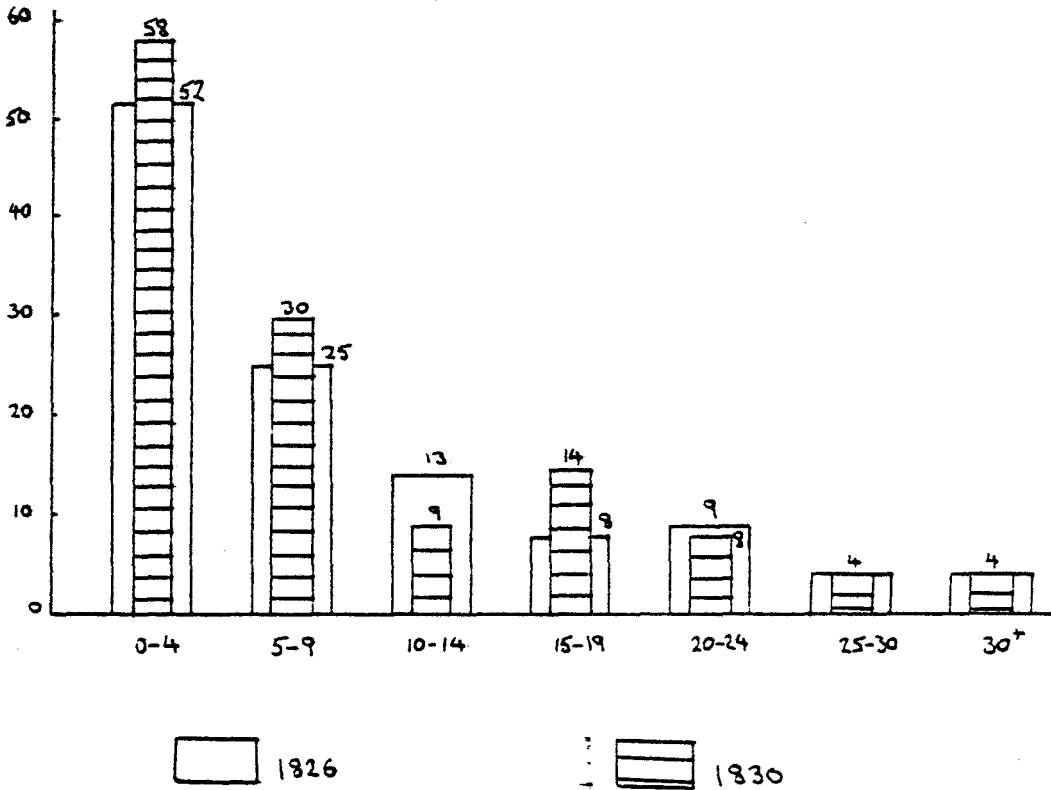
Before getting involved in an analysis of tenant indebtedness on a deeper level, a brief look at actual arrears would be in order. Surprisingly, most individual arrears were quite small, but in all probability the bulk of the money owed to any particular landlord was owed by a handful of tenants each of whom had incurred personal debts of a considerable size.

In 1832, 78 out of 140 indebted tenants on the estate of Colonel Knox Grogan owed less than £5 each. Graph 13, which is based on data taken from a rental of that estate, shows how uncommon large individual debts were on this property.

GRAPH 13.
 SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF ARREARS ON
 GROGAN ESTATE, 1832



GRAPH 14.
 SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF ARREARS ON
 MAXWELL EXTATE, 1826 AND 1830



Of course, the few tenants who owed sums in excess of 30 were important, since their share of the overall debt was out of all proportion to their numbers.¹¹

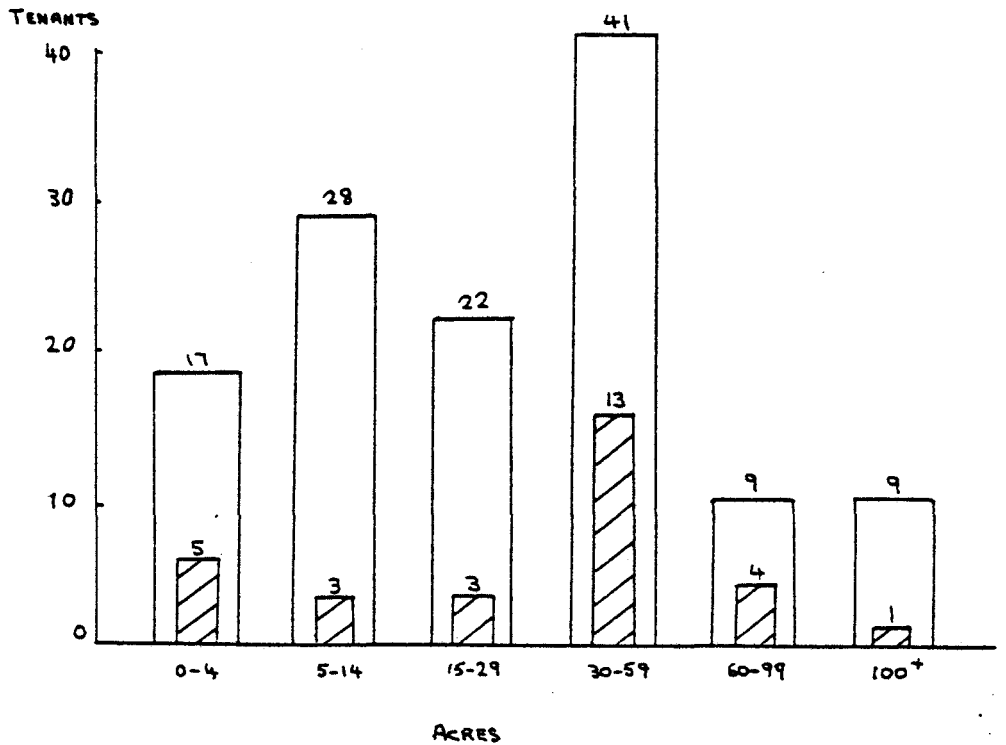
A similar situation prevailed on the Maxwell estate. Graph 14 deals with the size distribution of the individual arrears on that estate for the years 1826 and 1830. As with the Grogan estate, a large number of tenants owed rather small amounts of money. Indeed, a change is even observable between the above-mentioned dates, with the number of small debts increasing and the larger ones decreasing, but, of course, this alteration is too slight to be the basis of any important conclusion. Once again, tenants owing more than thirty pounds were responsible for a share of the debt out of all proportion to their numbers. In 1825, fourteen such tenants owed £952 or 32% of a total arrear amounting to £2,892. The corresponding figures in 1830 were £604 or 33% out of £1,826.¹²


In the Grogan and Maxwell cases, the role of the small debtors should not be overlooked, however. After all, small arrears, i.e., less than £30, did account for about two-thirds of the collective debt on both properties. Furthermore, in both instances a few individuals owed well over one hundred

¹¹Grogan Papers, Ms. 11,109.

¹²Maxwell Papers, Ms. 3133.

GRAPH 15.
 SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL RENTS COMPARED
 WITH SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF RENTS OF THOSE
 TENANTS OWING ARREARS ON THE HALL-DARE ESTATE, 1830



 ARREARS
 OWED.

pounds and these extraordinarily dissolute persons made the total sum owed by 'large' debtors seem bigger than the number of people contributing to it would warrant. The key to the problem, then, lay with tenants who fell slightly behind their payments, yet apparently were unable to clear off these small sums. These findings lead to the conclusion that most debtors held only small amounts of land and so found even these tiny debts to be too much for the resources they had at their disposal.

Despite traditional beliefs and, indeed, the merits of logic, small farmers were not any more likely to fall into debt than 'larger' ones. Evidence from several estates in the study area demonstrates this and serves to further confuse the search for the basic problem confronting the landlord of a hundred or more years ago.

In Graph 15 the size distribution of individual arrears is plotted against the size distribution of individual rents on the Hall-Dare estate for the year 1830. If anything, the tenants with higher rent assessments and so larger farms, were more prone to indebtedness than those with smaller rents and smaller farms. For instance, a clear majority of the tenants with half-yearly rents of £21-25 and over £30 owed arrears, whereas only twenty out of forty-six tenants paying less than £10 per half-year owed money. The figures involved are rather small, of course, and conclusions of this nature may

not always stand up to criticism. Nevertheless, on this estate, the small farmers, as a group, were as well able to meet their financial obligations as were their larger colleagues.¹³

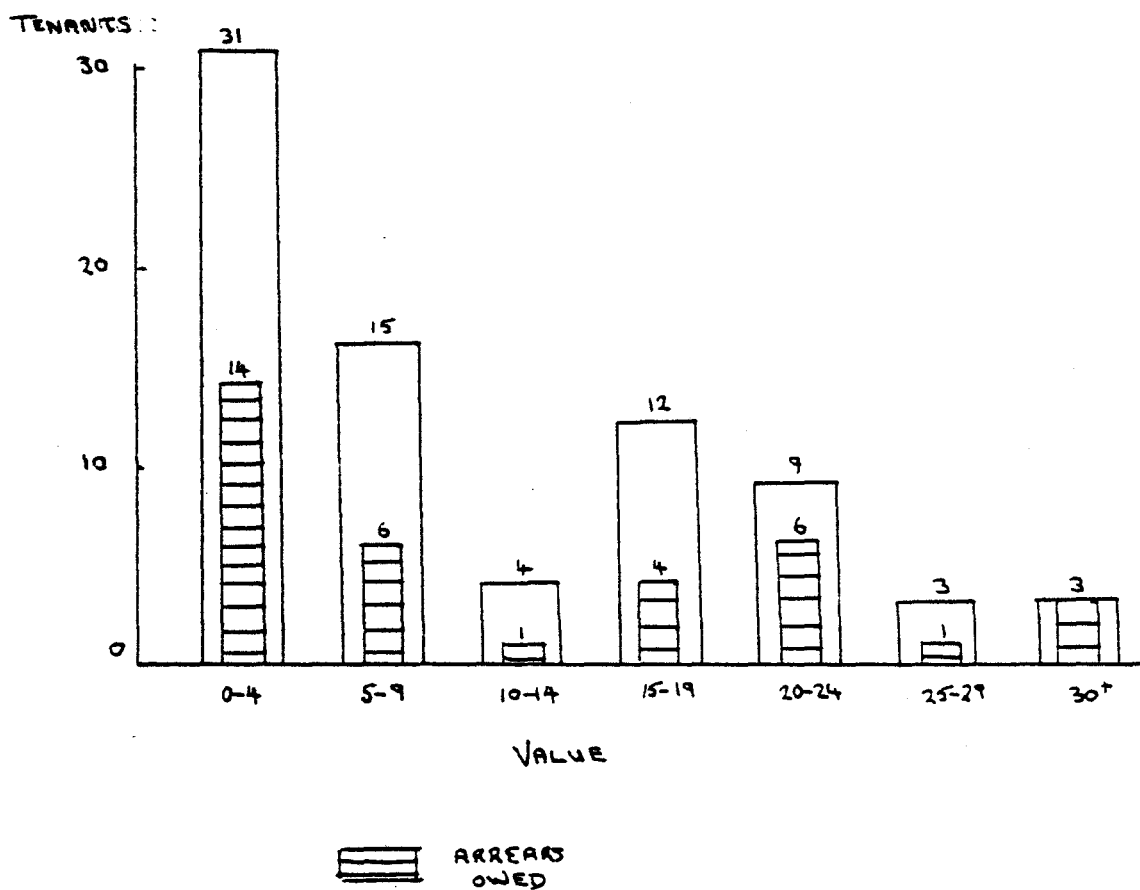
The pattern was very similar on the Fitzwilliam lands. Graph 16 is based on data taken from the 1840-1 rental. Again, figures are regrettably small, but there is a striking similarity between the size distribution of all farms and the distribution, by acreage, of farms belonging to tenants who owed arrears.¹⁴ Therefore, tenants on the Fitzwilliam estate were not more likely to fall into debt if their farms were smaller than average. In fact, farm size bore no relation to the arrears problem on either of these two estates.

This evidence, then, indicates that there was little or no relationship between farm size and tenant indebtedness. The tenantry, however, constituting, as they did, a very large social class, was subdivided according to other criteria besides the extent of their land holding. For instance, the legal status of individual tenants could differ enormously. In the eighteenth century, most farmers held their lands by lease. This gave them certain inviolable rights as long as they paid their rents on time. It has also been

¹³Hall-Dare Papers, Ms. 3135.

¹⁴Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6051.

GRAPH 16.
 SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF ALL FARMS COMPARED WITH SIZE
 DISTRIBUTION OF FARMS OWING ARREARS ON
 FITZWILLIAM ESTATE, 1841



suggested that such leaseholds were numerous in the early nineteenth century, preventing landowners from raising rents and so making it impossible for them to turn the wartime boom to their own advantage. After this experience, it is held most landlords began letting land without leases to so-called 'tenants-at-will'.¹⁵ To determine the importance of this development in the study area, it is necessary to answer the following questions:

- (1) Exactly how common were tenants-at-will?
- (2) Were tenants-at-will paying more rent per acre than leaseholders?
- (3) Were tenants-at-will more prone to indebtedness than leaseholders?
- (4) Were the sums of money owed by tenants-at-will on any particular estate greater than those owed by leaseholders?

The distribution of tenancy-at-will was quite uneven in North Wexford. On some estate a very large proportion of tenants held their land without a lease, while on others the opposite was true. Thus, the situation probably depended on the personal opinion and social strength of the landlord in question.

Records relevant to this issue are available for seven

¹⁵Cullen, Economic History, p.80.

estates in the area and cover the period 1800 to 1870. Of these seven estates, only two had more tenants-at-will than leaseholders. In 1820, on a section of the Ram estate near Gorey, 21 tenants held their farms at the whim of the landlord, while only 15 had leases of any kind.¹⁶ An even more amazing situation prevailed on the Bruen estate in the same year. There, 6 tenants held leases while no less than 118 held their farms 'at-will' or from year to year.¹⁷ The figures involved in the Ram example are regrettably small, but the predominance of tenants-at-will over leaseholders on the Bruen estate is very surprising.

Against this, there are five examples of estates on which leaseholders were in the majority. A rental for part of the Esmonde establishment in the year 1880 lists 11 tenants, all of whom had leases.¹⁸ A 1775 rental from the Grogan lands shows 13 tenants to have had leases and 5 to have been present 'at-will'. The same estate in 1830 had 289 leaseholders and 205 tenants-at-will.¹⁹ As well as this, a random sample of 126 tenants on the Fitzwilliam lands in 1840-1 reveals that 86 had leaseholds while 40 did not.²⁰

¹⁶Ram Papers, 1820.

¹⁷Bruen Papers, Ms. 5425.

¹⁸Esmonde Papers, Ms. 8519.

¹⁹Grogan Papers, Ms. 11,109.

²⁰Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 3986.

Finally, a Landed Estates Court rental for the Goff estate, compiled in 1870, lists 37 tenants, 26 of whom had leases.²¹

It is difficult to gauge the overall significance of these examples. If they are all taken together, 836 tenants on a total of 7 estates are dealt with. Of these tenants, 436 or 54% were leaseholders, while 400 or 46% were tenants-at-will. Therefore, a substantial minority of all tenants held their lands-at-will. It remains to be seen whether or not these legally vulnerable peasants were more liable to fall into debt than their leaseholding colleagues, so sabotaging the financial solvency of their social and cultural superiors, the landlords.

Undeniably, tenants-at-will were paying much more per acre for their land than leaseholders. It is possible to compute an index of rent demands as related to land held (which from here on will be called Average Rent Per Acre or ARPA) by correlating acreage and rent per acre with type of tenancy. The process is long and laborious but is nonetheless fruitful.

Compiled from the rentals of five of the seven estates used by way of illustration in the preceding discussion Table 1 compares the ARPA's of leaseholders with those of tenants-at-will on these estates. In every single case, the ARPA of

²¹Goff Papers, Ms. 1183.

TABLE 1
AVERAGE RENT PER ACRE OF LEASEHOLDERS
AND TENANTS-AT-WILL ON FIVE ESTATES IN £ 'S.

<u>ESTATES</u>	<u>LEASEHOLDERS</u>	<u>TENANTS-AT-WILL</u>
Fitzwilliam	0.57	0.81
Ram	1.18	1.40
Goff	0.44	1.10
Bruen	0.38	0.63
Grogan	0.71	1.70

the tenants-at-will was higher than that of the leaseholder. On the Fitzwilliam and Ram estates the latter was asked for four-fifths of the rate demanded of the farmer, while on the estates belonging to Goff, Bruen, and Grogan, the difference was much greater; tenants-at-will paying more than twice the leaseholders' rate. It would appear that landlords were using tenancy-at-will as a means of raising their rent-based income in years of prosperity. All this must have placed the tenants-at-will in a difficult financial position, and no doubt they had difficulties paying the high rents demanded of them.²²

Were tenants-at-will more prone to indebtedness than leaseholders?

Unfortunately, suitable material with which to answer this question exists for only two estates, those of Ram and Fitzwilliam. Furthermore, the situation on each estate was different. On the Ram estate, or rather that section of it for which there are records, 7 out of 15 leaseholders owed arrears in 1820, whereas only 2 out of 21 tenants-at-will were behind in their payments.²³ A completely different situation prevailed on that section of the Fitzwilliam estate

²²Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 3986; Ram Papers, 1820; Goff Papers, Ms. 1183; Bruen Papers, Ms. 5425; Grogan Papers, Ms. 11,109.

²³Ram Papers, 1820.

which was sampled. There, 13 or 15% of the 86 leaseholders owed money to the landlord, but 16 or 35% of the 40 tenants-at-will did.²⁴ Obviously, the Fitzwilliam example is the more dependable of the two, but it is difficult to estimate how widespread this situation was. Therefore, tenants-at-will may have been a little more likely to fall into debt, but this does not necessarily imply that they were chiefly responsible for the financial ills of the landed gentry. Actually, other evidence suggests that if anyone was to blame it was the leaseholders.

It is quite possible that over the entire study area tenants-at-will were more often in debt to the landlord than leaseholders, but it seems that despite this the leaseholders were a greater source of financial problems and the amount of money they owed to any particular landlord far exceeded the collective debt of the tenants-at-will. Furthermore, a third group, which shall be called 'ex-tenants', was responsible for even greater proportions of arrears than either of the two groups mentioned above.

Once again evidence comes from the Fitzwilliam and Ram estates. Calculations based on a sample of the 1840-1 Fitzwilliam rental reveal that a total of £4,073 was owed by 126 tenants. Of that debt, tenants-at-will owed a mere £353 or

²⁴Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 3986.

8.7% with an average individual debt of £8.8 per tenant. Leaseholders, on the other hand, were responsible for £1,374 or 33.7% with an average debt per tenant of £15.9. Obviously then, the leaseholders presented a greater problem than tenants-at-will, since as a group, they owed much more money and each individual had fallen much further behind in his payments than the average indebted tenant-at-will. Even more surprising is the fact that the remaining £2,347 of the 1840-1 debt was owed by ex-tenants who had either been evicted or who had simply abandoned their farms. These people owed an average debt of £138 each! Clearly the landlord allowed individual tenants to build up huge debts before attempting to do anything to remedy the situation. This is especially surprising since theoretically the lease was invalid once a debt of this kind was incurred.²⁵

Although ex-tenants are not dealt with in the Ram rental of 1820, a situation analogous to that on the Fitzwilliam estate prevailed on the Ram property. In short, 7 leaseholders owed £210 or an average of £30 each, while two tenants-at-will owed a combined sum of only £6. Unfortunately, these figures are rather small, but it is significant that they came from an estate which went bankrupt later in the century, and yet exhibited the same features as the more

²⁵Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 3986.

tenuous Fitzwilliam estate at this time.²⁶

Despite having higher rents to pay, therefore, tenants-at-will usually kept themselves fairly close to solvency. But leaseholders were allowed to build up much bigger debts with apparent impunity. The lease seems to have been a veritable shield behind which many of them took refuge. Furthermore, even though many tenants broke their part of the contract by failing to pay their rents on time, it is unlikely that the landlord was able to break his part of the bargain and raise the rent-levels themselves. The fact that the ARPA of leaseholders was much lower than that of tenants-at-will attests to this. Also, overall rent levels were not very high compared to what some contemporaries claimed they were. For example, several travellers stated that rents of up to £2 per acre were quite common in Wexford.²⁷ It is true that some tenants on estates that have been mentioned paid £2 per acre and more. But average rents were not nearly as high as this. Table 2 gives some indication of the rent levels on North Wexford estates. There obviously was little uniformity in the setting of rates. Not only did average rents vary greatly from estate to estate, but they bore absolutely no relationship to time. For example, the rent

²⁶Ram Papers, 1820.

²⁷Young, Tour in Ireland, p.126.

TABLE 2
AVERAGE RENT PER ACRE ON SEVEN ESTATES

<u>ESTATE</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>RENT ()</u>
Esmonde	1800	1.09
Bolton	1811	1.53
Ram	1820	1.58
Fitzwilliam	1840	0.82
Carew	1848	0.52
Bruen	1866	0.61
Goff	1870	0.86

of £1.58 per acre on the Ram lands in 1820 was almost double that of £0.86 on the Goff estate in 1870! In fact, no less than five out of seven estates here-mentioned had averages that were below £1 per acre and the Ram figure was the highest by far.²⁸

After viewing this evidence, is it possible to pinpoint the source of the financial problem which landlords faced in the nineteenth century? Clearly, they were heavily dependent on agricultural rents for their incomes, and, up until the 1820's, they demanded steadily increasing sums from their tenantry. From all appearances, they got what they asked for. After that, however, huge arrears mounted up and, despite the granting of abatements and an end to rent increases, the phenomenon of rent arrears remained throughout the rest of the century. This does not answer the question posed, of course. Arrears were not distributed equally among the tenantry. Certain types of peasants were more vulnerable to indebtedness than others. Farm size did not determine the degree of this vulnerability, but the possession of a lease did. It would be temptingly easy to declare that leases were 'umbrellas' of a sort under which the tenant could make as much profit as he liked and treat the landlord with cold

²⁸Bruen Papers, Ms. 5425; Carew Papers; Esmonde Papers, Ms. 8519; Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 3986; Goff Papers, Ms. 11,109; Ram Papers, 1820.

indifference if he so wished. However, this should not have been so. As already stated, the lease was theoretically invalidated as soon as a tenant fell behind in his rent payments. Therefore, most of the 'leaseholders' who were in debt to the landlord were legally-speaking only tenants-at-will. Yet, they were allowed to build up large debts with impunity. Why was this so? After all, it was possible to farm with considerable success at this time. For example, the 'real' tenants-at-will could do it and many leaseholders did not fall behind in their payments at all. The real reason for the tolerance with which debtor tenants were treated may not lie in the realm of finance or economics but rather in another and much more sinister area. There is the distinct possibility that landlords were simply afraid to improve the system. Lease or no lease, most tenants could neither be persuaded to pay their debts nor forced to vacate their holdings because behind them was a power which, through unified effort and naked terror, held peasant and lord alike in its grip. Underground terrorist groups were an integral part of rural life in the last century. These organizations may have played a very important role in the long term impoverishment of the landed gentry. In the next chapter a brief look will be taken at their activities in the study area.

CHAPTER IV

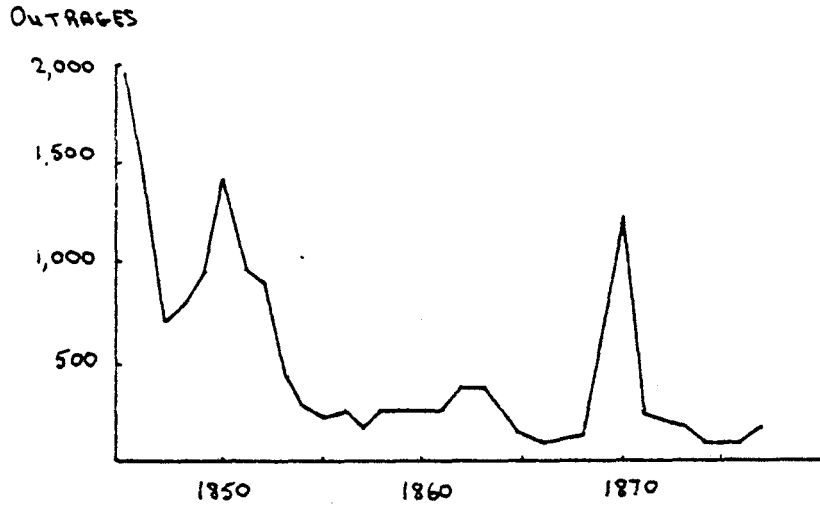
AGRARIAN VIOLENCE

It is interesting to note that only 15 evictions were recorded in the records of all 12 estates which were investigated in this study. Also, these evictions took place on only 3 estates altogether.¹ This situation prevailed because the tenantry held the landed gentry in a grip of terror amounting to blackmail of a most frightening kind. Landowners were afraid to evict tenants and other tenants were reluctant to take the vacated property of an evictee for similar reasons. Organized and unorganized violence accounted for this state of affairs. Although it is not a central concern of this project, it would be worthwhile to take a brief look at such violence in North Wexford.

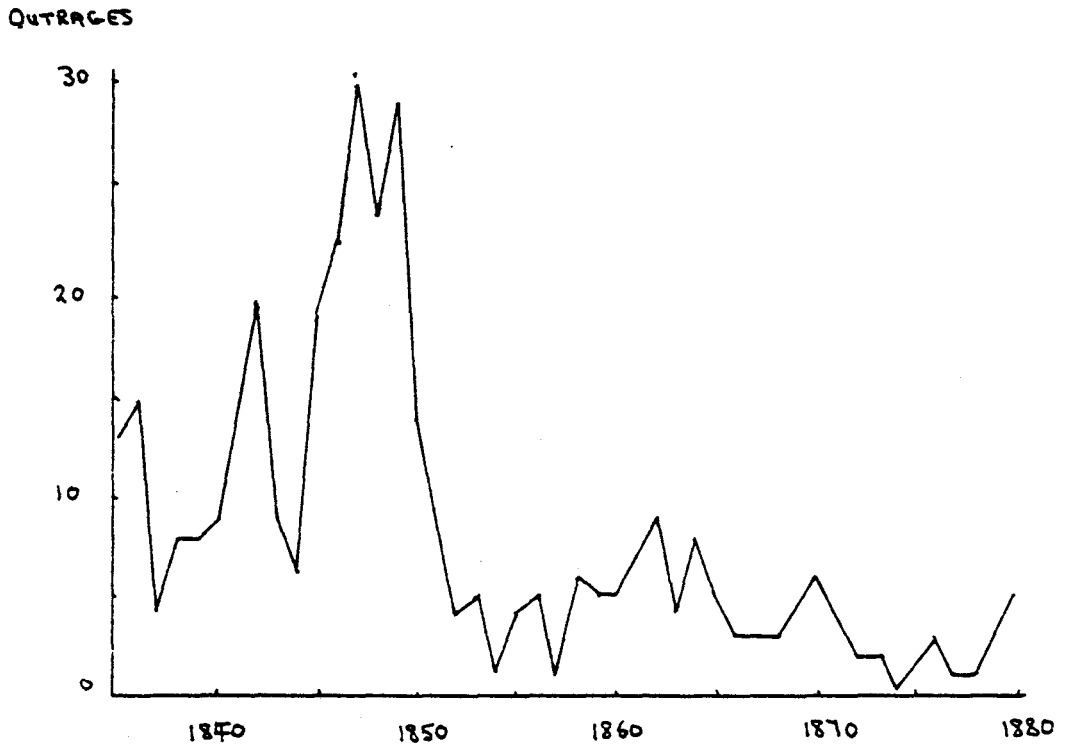
To keep the situation in its proper perspective, agrarian violence should be studied with an eye to developments at the national level. Graph 17 shows the annual incidence of agrarian crime in Ireland for the years 1845 to 1878. Outrages were very numerous up to 1852, and declined markedly after that date. Apart from a sudden but short-lived outburst in 1869-70, the figures remained low for the rest of

¹On the Maxwell, Hall-Dare and Bruen estates.

GRAPH 17.
FREQUENCY OF OUTRAGES IN IRELAND, 1845-1878



GRAPH 18.
FREQUENCY OF OUTRAGES IN WEXFORD, 1835-1878



the period. Obviously, famine conditions and the distress that came with them may explain the numerous crimes in the 1840's and early 1850's, but Tenant League agitation probably played a prominent role too. The fall in the frequency of incidents after 1852 may not necessarily mean that the terrorists were unsuccessful. It more likely indicates surrender on the part of the landowners themselves. Unable to improve their incomes by revamping the system, they probably decided to let events run their course.²

The annual frequency of outrages in North Wexford is broadly similar to the national pattern. Graph 18 shows that, despite some fluctuations, violence was at its worst in the 1830's, 1840's and 1850's.³ There was no renewed activity around 1870, but, as on the national level, the landed classes may have made such an outburst unnecessary. Few of them dared change the system that was destroying them. In fact, the only landlord who managed to clear his estate was Fitzwilliam, and he did so by means of an expensive emigration scheme, sending hundreds of families to new lands in Canada.⁴ Some examples of crimes committed against landlords

²Based on data in Irish Crimes Records, 1848-1878, Vol. 1, Part VIII B.

³Based on data in Constabulary (Outrage) Reports, County Wexford.

⁴Cited in Chapter III.

will illustrate the unenviable position that class was in.

Oddly enough, only two landlords lost their lives through violence during the entire period. William Bolton of Oulart was killed while relaxing by the fire of his sitting room on an autumn evening in 1843. His murderer, who was never apprehended, crept up to the window and shot him from there.⁵ In the summer of the following year, William Butler-Bryan was shot by a concealed assassin while he was supervising workmen landscaping the demesne on his Ferns estate. Apparently, his 'romantic' scheme required the eviction of several tenants. This, the police believed, was the motive for the assassination.⁶

The small number of murders may be partially explained by the fact that most landlords took great precautions against the possibility of being killed. One Samuel Willis who owned an estate near Camolin was frequently in danger. According to the constabulary, Willis had evicted several tenants for non-payment of rent, and as a result, no less than twelve attacks were made on his property between 1835 and 1837. The police reported that:

Mr. Willis does not venture out at night without being armed and accompanied by one or two men.⁷

⁵Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, October 1843.

⁶Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, July 1844.

⁷Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, 1835-1837.

An even more spectacular episode involved the Stephens family of Effernogue, near Ferns. In 1843, a shot was fired at John Stephens, aged 23, as he crossed his own farmyard at dusk. The bullet missed him, but a week later another unsuccessful attempt was made on his life. The local police pleaded with Dublin Castle for permission to give the family special protection:

If prompt action is not taken soon, this may turn out to be a bad business. Local protestants long agitated, will assume the character of a party and this fine and peaceful county may be disturbed.⁸

The 'prompt action' did not deter one more attempt on young Stephens' life, but once again he escaped injury; his assailant's blunderbuss failing to discharge.⁹

In 1849, a landlord called Napp had a narrow escape when a fusilade of shots were fired through his window, but without hitting anyone. As with the cases mentioned previously, no one was apprehended.¹⁰

On a few occasions assassination conspiracies were broken up before coming to fruition. In 1846, the authorities arrested two men for plotting the murder of Christopher Nero. The constabulary hastened to point out that one of these

⁸Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, March 1843.

⁹Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, April 1843.

¹⁰Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, November 1849.

suspects was due for eviction because of non-payment of rent.¹¹ In 1848, a murder plot against Lord Carew was discovered and in March of the following year, the out-buildings belonging to one of his bailiffs were maliciously burned by what the police called "unhappy tenants".¹²

Naturally, such intimidation would not have succeeded if an adequate protective system was available to landlords. The constabulary was doubtless a help, but it had only been established in the 1830's, and its records of arrests was not impressive. In 1844, J. H. Kohl stated that while one-third of all criminals went unpunished in Britain, the corresponding proportion in Ireland was two-thirds!¹³

Agrarian violence was not always aimed directly at the landlords. Just as early trade union violence was often most intense when used against 'scabs', so agrarian outrages were most commonly committed against the 'scabs' of the countryside, i.e., land grabbers. In the long term this hurt the landlord's interests severely. After all, land grabbers filled a vacuum after evictions had been carried out and so were indispensable to estate improvement. Between 1835 and 1845, a total of 33 violent incidents occurred

¹¹Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, April 1846.

¹²Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, December 1848; March 1849.

¹³J. G. Kohl, Ireland, (London, 1844), p. 129.

which were aimed directly at the persons or the property of landowners. Yet in those same years, no less than 75 outrages were committed against tenants who had transgressed the unwritten codes of these rural terrorist groups.¹⁴

The pattern of anti-tenant crime was a little different from that directed against landlords. First of all, murders and attempted murders were relatively less numerous. In fact, between 1835 and 1878, only two tenants were actually killed in agrarian attacks. Personal injury of a minor kind was almost as rare. Property burnings and animal maimings, however, were very common. Dwelling houses, out-offices, haystacks and even whole fields of corn were set afire with astonishing frequency. Almost invariably, the police reports cite land-grabbing as the motive for such crimes and with equal consistency the culprits went unpunished.

Oftentimes, physical violence was not even necessary. Warning notices were frequently posted in public places, advising ambitious farmers not to touch the land of a certain tenant who was to be evicted. Such threats often used very explicit language. For example, the following notice greeted the pious of Gorey upon their reaching the church door on the morning of December 6, 1835:

We advise the bright boy of Aske not to

¹⁴Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, 1835-1845.

busy himself so much about Michael Haden's land or his head will be placed on top of a pole on Aske Hill as a standing example.¹⁵

Thankfully, there is no evidence that this particular threat was ever carried out. No doubt such direct language had the desired effect.

Who was behind this campaign of terror? Were the police dealing with isolated incidents perpetrated by free-lance individuals or were they faced with a sophisticated and highly regimented underground organization? There are a number of reasons for believing that agrarian terrorism was as well organized and powerful in North Wexford as it was elsewhere.

Writing in 1776, Arthur Young claimed that secret societies were not present on a large scale in the area.¹⁶ However, the 1798 Rebellion would surely have given the peasantry a precedent for organization and a sense of 'brotherhood-in-defeat' to reinforce it.

There is also evidence that 'agents' travelled about the area, coordinating the campaign, for on several occasions, police reports mention strangers being arrested on suspicion. In many cases such people were from outside the the county. Oftentimes they were trying to foment a

¹⁵Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, December 1935.

¹⁶Arthur Young, Tour in Ireland, p. 212.

political and nationalist uprising rather than encourage class struggle. In a few cases, however, such strangers were obviously encouraging agrarian rather than political strife. In 1842, a strange man arrived in the village of Camolin. He stayed a few days, visited local shops, praised recent raids in the locality and threatened more. The constable describing him wrote:

The man was a complete stranger and walked about the town quite unconcerned. He threatened even more punishment on Symes of Ferns if he took any more land, saying his life or his haggard will be next. This person has not been sighted for several days and nobody knows where he is gone.¹⁷

Some of the accomplishments of agrarian violence in themselves indicate how well-organized it was. In 1838, a huge earthen mound was erected in Annagh as a protest against a proposed eviction on the Powerscourt estate. Such an achievement was brought about by a well-organized band and not by a handful of 'desperados'.¹⁸

Other accomplishments were even more amazing and made a lot more practical sense. On the night of September 7, 1846, fully six acres of barley was cut and carried off from a farm on the Derenzy estate near Clohamon; the object of the exercise being to defraud the landlord out

¹⁷Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, June 1842.

¹⁸Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, March 1838.

of rent.¹⁹ A field of potatoes was subjected to similar treatment in the following month near Enniscarthy²⁰ and in July 1850, nine acres of oats were harvested in a single night near Monart.²¹ Doubtless, such episodes would be perfect material for comedy, but those who were involved must have been superbly drilled and led.

The landlords of the area must surely have felt themselves to be threatened by a hydra-headed monster. In retrospect, their frequent if ill-found claims that yet another peasant revolt was threatening was entirely understandable.

¹⁹ Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, September 1846.

²⁰ Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, October 1846.

²¹ Constabulary Reports, County Wexford, July 1850.

CHAPTER V

LANDLORD SPENDING PATTERNS

Under normal circumstances, a well-exercised thrift can overcome all but the greatest dearth of revenue. Obviously, the landlords which have been mentioned in previous chapters continued to make considerable sums of money; the figures for gross rent-based income alone give evidence of this. So, even if this source of wealth was not as reliable as before, the landed gentry might have weathered the 'storm' by adjusting the level of their outlay accordingly. In the chapter which follows, landlord spending habits shall be examined. This will be done with a view to determining whether or not there is a basis for believing that outlays were too great for the steady, or declining, income to which most landowners had access.

Of course, there are many aspects to this problem. A brief look at the lifestyle of the landed gentry will help to give some personality to the subjects which up to this point have been mere names and numbers. How indeed did they live? Were their houses really as ornate as is often claimed? What kind of people were these landowners who appeared as such cold, aloof individuals in history books?

The answers to these questions can only be tentative and, in themselves, cannot hope to solve the many and more searching problems of determining the financial position of the entire class.

In this respect, it is important to establish how much of their annual income landlords were spending; on what were they spending it; and, generally speaking, what state their balances were normally in.

A. Big Houses and the 'Good Life'

Of this extensive and beautiful demesne I speak, conscious of how inadequate are my powers of description to do anything but justice to a place so abundantly blessed by nature and so enriched... by artistic taste and skill.¹

So wrote Thomas Lacy upon viewing Castleboro House, the seat of Lord Carew, one of the most extensive landowners in the county. Lacy went on to say:

Now that the external grandeur of the splendid mansion is, if possible, exceeded by the magnificent furniture and decorations of its ample salons and noble chambers I shall perhaps by a judicious forbearance, preserve the slender reputation I have acquired as a descriptive tourist.²

Although many other mansions impressed Lacy, they did not leave him lost for words, so that many vivid descriptions

¹Thomas Lacy, Sights and Scenes in Our Fatherland, (London, 1863), p. 475.

²Ibid., p. 476.

of a world now past have been left for posterity.

According to observers of the day, greater landowners did indeed live in very beautiful mansions. Most of these buildings were very carefully and expensively decorated, both outside and within, and the surrounding demesnes were so landscaped as to form an intermediate step between the lavishness of the mansion and the tamed wildness of the countryside around. David Large hypothesised that most of the landed gentry never really recovered from the massive outlays that were necessary to create these islands of high civilisation amid the 'barbarism' of the impoverished native peasantry.³ The truth of this surmise cannot at present be determined but the glowing descriptions of these residences which have been bequeathed to the modern age help, in some way, to bring the magnificence of this long-lost lifestyle into perspective.

Lacy did not find the residence of Sir James Power on the Slaney to be at all too magnificent for his powers of description. Nonetheless, the mansion and demesne in question were sufficient to intoxicate this man of the Romantic Age. He pointed out that huge sums of money were spent beautifying the demesne, redecorating the house and adding wings to provide for a library; studies for the young

³David Large, "The Wealth of Greater Irish Landowners", Irish Historical Studies, 1966.

gentlemen; a billiard room and a domestic chapel. The interior of the house was adorned with richly decorated ceilings, doric columns and huge expanses of glass roofing.

The grounds attracted the traveller's attention even more, especially as the Slaney River was used to such great advantage. For example, an island in the river was incorporated into the demesne and of this Lacy says:

this island is approached by neat and fanciful bridges, one at the end of each of the capacious walks. Here also are handsome flower-beds, intersected with nice walks and in the centre is a beautiful statue of Ceres.⁴

Of course, these were not the only residences which pleased Lacy. Indeed, with that gracious courtesy which so characterised the Romantic Age, he showers praise on the abode of almost every gentleman with which he was acquainted. He described Henry Alcock's Wilton Castle as:

a new and beautiful castle and rich surrounding velvet lawns which are dotted and beautified by some of the most vigorous and healthful trees to be seen.⁵

He noted that William Harvey's Kyle House was a

highly impressive mansion with its elegant parterres and splendid conservatory... while its admirable situation on an elevation immediately above the bank of the river enables the visitor to obtain some

⁴Lacy, Sights and Scenes, p. 478.

⁵Ibid., p. 479.

of the most picturesque and charming views which the River Slaney offers.⁶

and that Anthony Cliffe's 'Bellvue' "affords ample accommodation to the large establishment which is maintained by its proprietor."⁷ Macmine Castle, the seat of John Richards was referred to as a "specimen of an unique English baronial castle"⁸, and, upon observing Paul Walker's 'Killowen Cottage', Lacy wrote:

it lies embosomed in a sequestered dell and may be seen peering beneath and between the most luxuriant foliage and presenting precisely such a picture as would make a desirable subject for the pen of the most distinguished pastoral writer of the day. In the calm and peaceful summer morning the wreathing smoke overhanging the cottage and the vale, call up ideas of rural simplicity and comfort of the most pleasing kind.⁹

Lacy was not the only traveller to be impressed by the district's 'seats'. In 1825, J. N. Brewer visited Newtonbarry (now Bunclody) and declared, "The beauty of nature is finely seconded by a liberal taste and the charms of this place can never be obliterated from the mind of the visitor."¹⁰ Other mansions received similar plaudits; architecture being especially noted, although the lay-out of most demesnes also caught Brewer's attention.

⁷Ibid., p. 468.

⁸Ibid., p. 471.

⁹Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁰J.N. Brewer, The Beauties of Ireland, (London, 1825), p. 382.

When reading these descriptions, bear in mind that writers of this age, if not prone to actual exaggeration, were at least inclined to smooth over the unpleasant aspects of their particular subject. The picture of upper-class Wexford which emerges from such writings is attractive in the extreme. It seems as if no other world existed save that of the gentry and their mansions. In some ways, of course, this was probably true.

Employing agents to deal directly with their peasantry, many landlords may have moved only within their own social class. Their mansions were islands in a vast sea of poverty but these islands were all interlinked and in a few places the gentry even tended to cluster together. The picturesque Slaney Valley between Enniscorthy and Wexford Town was especially popular in this respect, being dotted with several fine houses. For example, when writing of Kilgibbon House, Lacy states that "it adjoins the lands of Macmine, and keeps up the continuous chain of park and woodland scenery for which the banks of the Slaney are so proverbial."¹¹ Even demesnes far to the East or West of this Valley were part of this self-contained and idyllic world.

The members of the landowning class probably made light of the barrier of distance and frequently congregated

¹¹Lacy, Sights and Scenes, p. 472.

together for social occasions. Richard Lawlor Sheil recalled the pleasure of sailing along this stretch of the river one summer's evening and hearing a young lady in a boat-full of gentry singing one of Moore's melodies. Not surprisingly, the scene inspired him to write a poem.¹²

Peace, plenty, and utter happiness were what travellers saw in the lifestyles of the gentry. Obviously, this is not how it really was for the individual members of the class who faced many of the personal problems of rich people everywhere. For one thing, the physical world that was seen as ideal by these people was a very expensive, albeit beautiful, one. If smaller landowners could not hope to build a Castleboro House or a Macmine Castle, these were nonetheless the models after which their own plans for gracious living were drawn. Then, as now, the instinct to keep abreast of ones social peers was overwhelming and economically fatal.

B. Spending Patterns

There were other ways of spending money besides building lavish residences and gardens. Indeed, evidence shows that the spending patterns of most landowning families were quite varied.

The Fitzwilliams were a typical case of this. Table 3

¹²Ibid., pp. 236-7.

TABLE 3
TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON THE FITZWILLIAM ESTATE,
1782-1841

<u>ITEMS</u>	<u>CASH OUTLAY</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Crown Rent	3,277	0.3	1.5
Annuities	1,222	0.1	0.6
Poor	4,713	0.4	2.2
Buildings	77,767	6.0	36.0
Salaries	46,994	3.7	21.7
Servants	1,993	0.2	1.0
Travel	6,381	0.5	3.0
Famine Relief	1,715	0.1	0.8
Mixed	69,392	5.4	32.1
Legal	109	---	0.1
Interest	498	---	0.2
Demesne	527	---	0.2
Cash Lost	832	---	0.3
Rent Lost	869	---	0.3
Remittances	1,070,080	83.2	100.0
	<u>1,286,369</u>	<u>100.0</u>	

summarizes all expenditures made by that family between 1782 and 1841. These figures were obtained by totalling the annual expenditure for each year between and including these dates. Since a gap exists in the Fitzwilliam records for the years 1833 to 1840, this Table really only serves to illustrate the proportion of revenue being spent on each item listed.

Despite this limitation, the table is quite revealing. Its most obvious feature is the huge sum which is accounted for by the title 'Remittances.' Essentially, this term refers to sums which were requested by Fitzwilliam himself at various times during the year and duly forwarded to him by his accountant and/or agent. Such monies were presumably spent by the lord on his personal schemes and pleasures. Since this sum accounts for a huge 83% of all spending, it is important to deal with other spending separately from this. Column 3 has been constructed with this purpose in mind.

Of the £216,289 which were spent on the estate, almost 90% comes under the headings 'building repairs', 'salaries' and 'mixed'. Unfortunately, the 32% of estate expenditure entitled 'mixed' probably refers to numerous small-scaled outlays on trivial items.

The cost of building repairs was surprisingly high, accounting for over one-third of all estate spending.

Furthermore, the records indicate that this was not all lavished on the 'Big House.' Indeed, much of it was given to tenants to enable them to improve their dwellings and out-offices. It seems that for Fitzwilliam, at least, it was just as important that the appearance of the peasant-inhabited landscape be kept up as that the demesne and mansion house remain resplendent.

Salaries for overseers, agents, etc., consumed a large amount of cash. This is especially surprising when it is realised that servants' wages came to less than one-twentieth of the total paid to management level employees. Although the agent as a 'type' has long been part of Irish tradition, it is seldom pointed out that these people were members of a rather large and influential social class, particularly in areas where landlord absenteeism was common.

The remaining 10% of expenditures was divided among several items. Although at a fixed yearly rate, Quit and Crown Rents accounted for a significant 1.5% of estate spending. Travel expenses were even more important, being worth over six thousand pounds, or 3% of expenditure. Most of this sum was probably made up by expenses charged by agents, or overseers, who had to cover considerable distances on estate business. The most surprising feature of all this is the 3% of estate expenses which went to 'the poor.' Apparently Fitzwilliam was under no obligation to

give this money but he did so, nonetheless.

Some other items deserve mention if only because of their relative insignificance. For example, annuities were not a major burden on this property, costing a mere twelve hundred pounds in almost sixty years. Servants' wages, interest on loans and legal costs were likewise surprisingly unimportant, especially since the last two items have often been blamed for landlord insolvency. In the case of Fitzwilliam at least they were negligible.¹³

Where then, was Fitzwilliam spending his money? A mere 17% of the £1,250,000 he spent went on the estate. So, he was not really reinvesting his money in the land. What then of the million-odd pounds which have been conveniently labelled 'remittances'? Regrettably, accountants seldom record what such money was spent on; indeed, they may not have even known. 'Remittances' were apparently spent on the ordinary costs incurred in leading the life of an aristocrat.

It is noteworthy, though, that after 1830 Fitzwilliam reduced the level of this personal spending drastically. Graph 19 traces this change throughout the period. After reaching a dizzying peak in the early 1820's, Fitzwilliam's private outlay declined steadily until in 1841 it amounted to a mere five thousand pounds. This was certainly a

¹³Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6051.

remarkable turn-about and may have marked a change in this landowner's financial policies which other members of his class were unable to execute. Indeed, the 1830's witnessed many drastic alterations on this estate, what with emigration schemes, increasing direct agriculture and now, a new and very strictly applied thrift.¹⁴

The situation on the Tighe estate was quite different from this. Unfortunately, no data are available to allow an analysis of Tighe spending over an extended time-period, but a list of expenditures for the year 1826/7 (from which Table 4 has been composed) is quite informative. A number of expenses normally incurred in running an estate are not listed. Therefore, it is likely that so-called 'remittances' to the landlord have not been included in this list. Direct comparisons with the Fitzwilliam pattern are consequently dangerous.

As Table 4 illustrates, tradesmen's bills absorbed a very large proportion of Tighe's outlay. Tradesmen were obviously needed to perform tasks about the mansion and grounds if they were to be kept in repair. Farriers, carpenters, glaziers and masons are frequently mentioned in these records. So also are drapers, hatters, silversmiths and other purveyors of luxury goods of the day. These

¹⁴Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6050.

GRAPH 19.
'PERSONAL' SPENDING ON THE FITZWILLIAM
ESTATE, 1782-1841

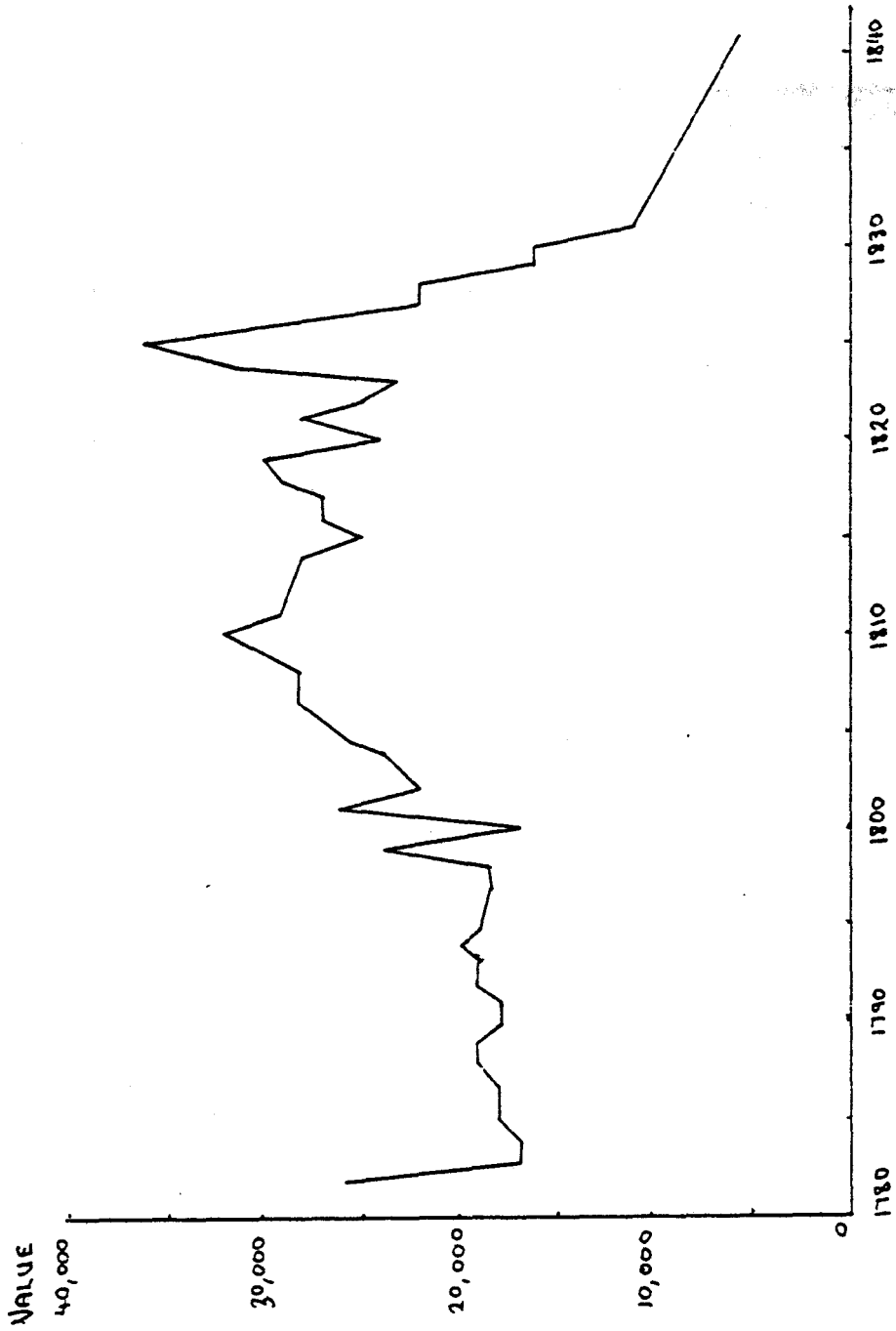


TABLE 4
EXPENDITURE ON THE TIGHE ESTATE, 1826/7

<u>ITEMS</u>	<u>CASH</u>	<u>%</u>
Lady Louisa	371	5.1
Annuities	1,134	16.5
Coursing Club	3	---
Legacies	34	0.5
Interest	2,044	28.0
Tradesmen	3,132	43.0
Salaries	60	1.0
Survey	15	0.2
Rent	468	6.4
Wages	10	0.1
Postage	25	0.4
	<u>7,228</u>	<u>100.0</u>

people were indispensable to the maintenance of a genteel lifestyle and all of its trappings.

Even more significant is the fact that 28% of the listed expenditure went to pay interest on loans. This large interest proportion contrasts markedly with the tiny amount of similar payments required on the Fitzwilliam lands.

Annuities also accounted for a large sum and probably were more important than the 16%, listed in Table 4, would suggest. Payments to 'Lady Louisa' which accounted for 5% of expenditure may have been annuities of a kind.¹⁵

Apart from accounts with tradesmen, plus interest on loans and annuities, most items consumed very little money on the Tighe estate. A rent-charge on some land that had been leased somewhere or other was the biggest expense. It is, of course, surprising that a landlord with such vast acreages should ever wish to rent land from anyone else. It may be that many members of the landed gentry found this to be the only way they could get into farming! In other words, they were forced into the position of becoming tenants themselves and competing with the peasantry on their terms.

Expenditure patterns on the Maxwell estate were different from both examples outlined about. Here legal fees

¹⁵Tighe Papers, Ms. 871-873.

were especially burdensome. Regrettably, figures are only available for a single year, 1880, but unrepresentative though it may be, such an example does show the impact a court case can have on the finances of an estate. (It seems that litigation of some kind was engaged in by Maxwell at this time.)

As Table 5 indicates, 65% of all expenses went on legal costs. Obviously this was a very expensive pastime. Spending on the upkeep of the mansion-house was significant on the Maxwell estate, as were agents fees, game-keeping expenses, charity and seed for tenants. It is interesting to note, however, that in this particular case annuities were of no consequence.¹⁶

On the Thomas Quinn estate annuities were also unimportant. Table 6 is really a list of debts bequeathed by Quinn upon his demise in 1841. Legal fees accounted for a huge proportion of them, but given the intricacies of inheritance law, this is hardly surprising. Interest repayments were also significant, as were agents fees and the wage bills of tradesmen and laborers. Perhaps it is unfair to judge any man on his debts alone, but the £68 Quinn owed to the local brewery is certainly indicative of a non-puritanical, if not downright licentious, lifestyle. Indeed, some of the loans

¹⁶ Maxwell Papers, Ms. 8527.

TABLE 5
EXPENDITURE ON THE MAXWELL ESTATE, 1880

<u>ITEMS</u>	<u>CASH</u>	<u>%</u>
Charity	28	0.7
Estate Upkeep	866	22.5
Saw Mill	16	0.4
Game	76	2.0
Slate Quarry	5	---
Woods	4	---
Sundries	62	1.6
Seeds for Tenants	171	4.4
H. Bothemly	2,500	65.0
W. M. Vesey	130	3.4
	<u>3,854</u>	<u>100.0</u>

TABLE 6

DEBTS OWED BY REVEREND THOMAS QUINN UPON HIS DEATH IN 1841

<u>DEBTS</u>	<u>VALUE</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
Legal Costs	689	44
Agency Costs	270	17
George Symoore	85	6
Brewery	68	4
Clothier	55	4
Grocer	50	3
Butcher	46	3
Straw	34	2
Sadlier	32	2
Hotel Bills	28	2
Baker	27	2
Apothecary	23	2
Waxhandler	15	1
Hardware	11	1
Hatter	5	-
Other	112	7
	<u>1,550</u>	<u>100</u>

which Mr. Quinn took at one time or other indicate a very pressing need of cash.¹⁷ These loans included £8,000 from a Hugh Lyle; £3,230 from Reverend W. Jones; £1,000 from the agent, Sydenham Symes; along with three other small debts of £400. The entire sum amounted to £13,705, a huge debt for what was a relatively small estate. Such a burden could ruin almost any operation, no matter how large.¹⁸

Other estates suffered from 'mill-stones' of other kinds, of course. While it was tradesmen's bills on the Tighe lands, legal fees on the Maxwell property and unrestrained borrowing on Thomas Quinn's part, Robert Bruen, who owned land near Oulart, was severely handicapped by annuity payments.

A brief outline of the variety of expenditures which were exacted from the estate will illustrate the seriousness of the problem. In 1795, Henry Bruen, the owner of the estate, died, leaving his property to his three-year-old heir, Francis. It seems that litigation was necessary in several instances to establish exactly who was owed what from the estate. In the late 1830's, Francis Bruen felt the effect of a few adverse decisions. For example, in 1850 the Court of Exchequer judged that Henry Bruen had owed one

¹⁷ Symes Papers, Ms. 15,452.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Patrick Curran the sum of £4,238 and that Francis was now heir to his debt. Four years later the same court awarded Martin Keane fully £6,000 from the Bruen estate. 1837 seems to have been a particularly bad year. A judgement of the Court of Queen's Bench charged the estate with a perpetual annuity of £475 to James Parke as trustee for John Anderson and Charlotte Neyle, with £10,000 to be exacted immediately as security for such payments. The same court, in the same year, charged the estate with another £30,000 as security to Rev. Elias Webb for a £1,458 annuity, to which he was apparently entitled. Even then, Bruen's troubles were far from over. In the following year, William Johnson was awarded an annuity of £354 with £6,000 as security. A further £357 was given to John H. Furse, with £3,000 as security and the Court of Exchequer awarded Charles Weller £6,000 from the estate, by way of repayment of debt. Thus, during the years in question the estate was charged with the massive sum of £105,238. It is not surprising that Francis Bruen sold off most of the estate in the 1840's. Obviously, this was the only way to get the cash needed to pay the above-mentioned securities.¹⁹

From the beginning, then, young Bruen was faced with an impossible situation. Inheriting an estate that was already

¹⁹Bruen Papers, Ms. 5425.

saddled with huge debts, he could do little but alienate large portions of his inheritance in order to stay solvent.

The passing of lands from one generation to the next was the time when greatest efforts were made to get estate finances in order, even if it was necessary to sell off some property to do this. In the 1820's, a piece of the Gowan estate near Gorey had to be sold to pay off the debts of the recently deceased John Hunter Gowan. In his will John Hunter left his lands to two sons and bequeathed no less than seventeen sums of money ranging between £50 and £500 to relatives and friends. Much of this money was to be provided by land sales.²⁰

It is difficult, in the light of the above discussion, to pin-point any single item which caused heavy outlays to be made by landlords generally. On the Fitzwilliam estate personal spending by the landlord himself, along with agents' salaries and building costs, accounted for most of the expenditures. Of course, several of the estates mentioned were burdened with tradesmen's bills, often related to building of various kinds. The Tighe and Maxwell establishments were both examples of this.

Borrowing was one way to pay off such cash demands, and on the Tighe, Quinn and Bruen estates, this alternative was

²⁰Gowan Papers, Ms. 5584.

resorted to rather heavily, with the added burden of interest payments then beleaguering the estate.

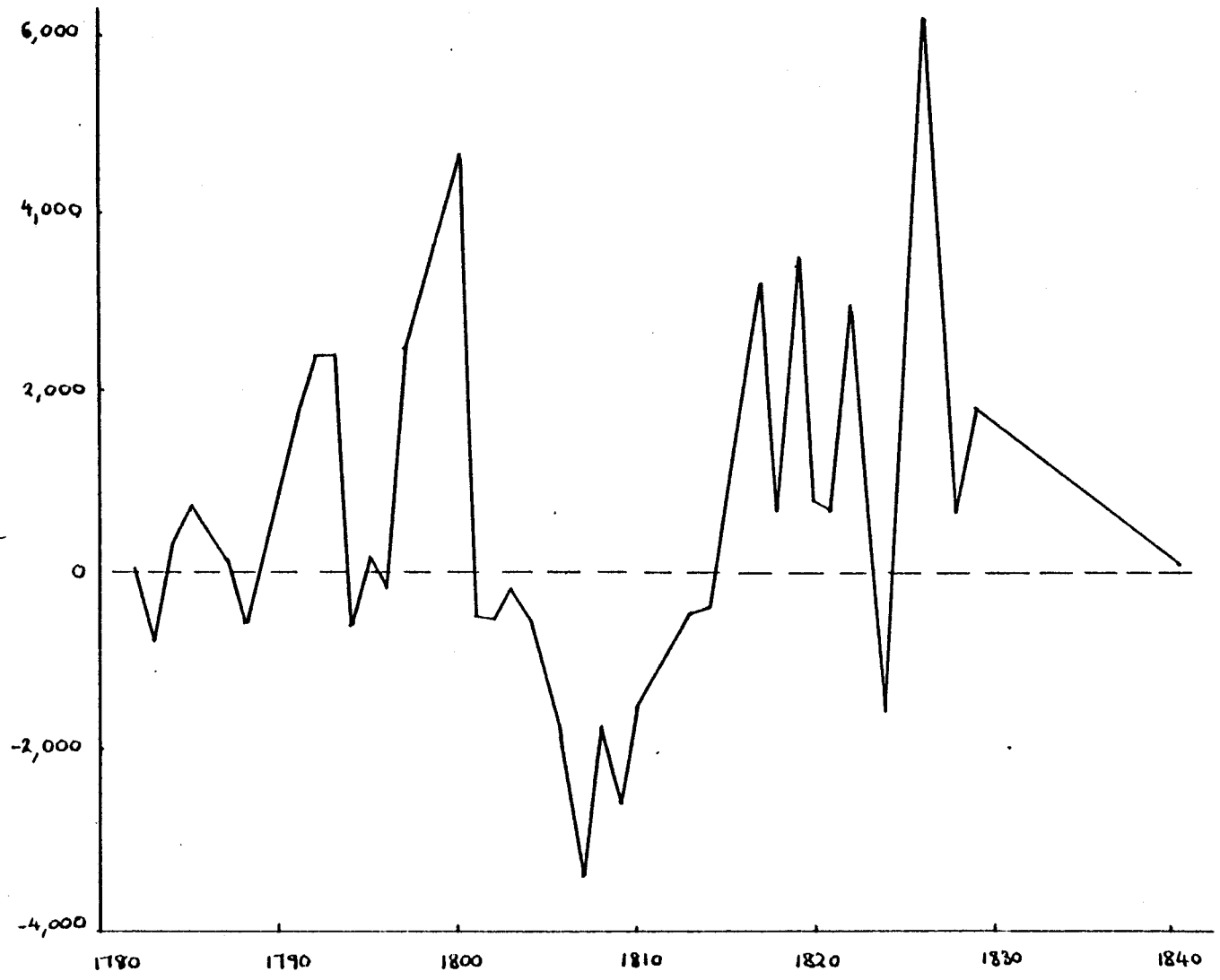
Legal costs and annuities also weighed heavily on the shoulders of many a landed gentleman. Such annuities were often willed to family members upon the passing of one head of the household and subsequent generations were expected to keep up payments. Often such annuities were also willed to the heirs of certain recipients, thus increasing the number of beneficiaries with the passing of each generation.

C. Profits and Losses

How did these spending patterns affect the balance of income as against expenditure?

Figures are difficult to obtain on this question and, where data are available, they are of a fragmentary nature. Nevertheless, some information is at hand for five of the estates in the study area; the most complete being those dealing with the Fitzwilliam finances. In Graph 20 the cumulative balance of these finances is plotted for the years 1752 and 1841. The term 'cumulative balance', it should be pointed out, does not refer to the amount of money made or lost in a particular year, but rather to the state of the account at designated dates. Thus, a profit may have been made in a certain year but this will only be registered in the Graph as an improvement in the balance.

BALANCE



GRAPH 20.
BALANCE OF FINANCES IN FITZWILLIAM
ESTATE, 1782-1841

The financial state of this estate exhibited some very surprising features over the period in question. For one thing, Fitzwilliam was losing money when one would have expected him to be making it, and ironically, he began to make consistent profits in the 1820's and 1830's, when the Irish economy was going through a very bad phase.

As Graph 20 shows, the last two decades of the eighteenth century were good times for Fitzwilliam. Except for short-lived deteriorations in 1782, 1788/9, 1794 and 1796, the estate was run in a profitable way. Capital, that all-important life-blood of prosperity, accumulated to a significant extent; the accounts being in the 'black' to the tune of £2,400 in 1793. This accumulation was fitful, however, and it appears that the gains of several good years were often wiped out in a single bad one. For example, the sudden drop in the balance in 1794 is a typical case of such incurred losses.

Despite a good beginning, the first decade of the nineteenth century was nothing short of disastrous for this estate. Expenditure almost invariably exceeded income, with 1807 being the worst year. In twelve months, the operation fell £3,432 into debt and, despite some improvements in subsequent years, it was not until 1815 that a positive balance was again registered in the estate accounts. After that date, the Fitzwilliam books were balanced and remained so

for decades, until, in 1841 all previous savings were again dissipated.²¹

Clearly then, Fitzwilliam was not 'making' much money. In other words, he was not accumulating capital on an ongoing basis, even though he had cut his personal spending drastically during the 1830's and 1840's. For instance, in 1841 the account was exactly balanced, despite the fact that in that year, only £11,821 was listed under 'remittances'. Therefore, despite considerable thrift, Fitzwilliam's income was barely able to cover his expenditures. If this was happening to a well-managed enterprise, what was to become of those properties whose owners were less frugal than Fitzwilliam?

Some at least made a good attempt to balance their accounts. Others failed miserably. In 1798, expenditures on the Grogan estate amounted to £4,514, while income balanced that figure at £4,516.²² Like Fitzwilliam, Grogan was not making money, as such, in 1798. He was merely matching expenditure with income. Furthermore, it is doubtful if this healthy balance was maintained for, in the 1830's, a court declared that Hamilton Knox Grogan owed no less than £2,853 to the estate's creditors.²³

²¹Fitzwilliam Papers, Ms. 6001-6050.

²²Grogan Papers, Ms. 11,109.

²³Ibid.

On the Tighe and Maxwell estates things were little better. In 1818, the Tighe properties generated an income of £43,990, while the expenditure for that year was £45,135; a deficit of £1,145. In 1826, the only other year for which figures are available, the deficit stood at £1,542. If losses of this magnitude were incurred frequently, then it must have been easy for huge debts to mount up.²⁴ In 1880, the Maxwell estate suffered a loss of £339. Unfortunately, this is the only year for which figures are available from that property, but it is significant that the prevailing theme is one of financial loss.²⁵

As badly off as some of these estates were, the Ram property, located in and around Gorey, was in a much worse situation. Apparently, members of this family allowed huge debts to build up during the eighteenth century. By the second decade of the nineteenth century alienation, on a massive scale, was seen as the only solution to the problem. A financial statement of 1812 reads like a page from tragedy. According to this document, the 'Cheshire' estate was sold in 1807 for £1,800, £160 of which was to be spent on repairs. However, the incumbrances on that piece of property alone amounted to £24,685. Thus, a deficit of £12,885 remained to

²⁴Tighe Papers, Ms. 871-873.

²⁵Maxwell Papers, Ms. 8527.

be dealt with, and immediate payment of the personal debts of the Ram family increased this deficit some more. Furthermore, most of the £11,800 raised by the sale of these lands went toward the repayment of "interest and principals" with a mere £3,700 reverting to the Ram family proper, which resided in Gorey. Therefore, to make good some of the deficit which was still standing, lands in County Wexford were sold to two local landowners, Beauman and Morgan, for £11,400 (Irish). About £6,500 of this fund was sent to Cheshire to relieve debts extant there and the remainder was used to pay off sums owed in Ireland.

In 1810, the Ram family went on another 'selling-spreed' in a gallant, but unsuccessful, effort to satisfy their creditors. In that year, the property which the family owned in Dublin was sold for £3,000, of which £1,000 was used on English debts. Later, in 1810, the Gorey estate was partitioned between the two heirs of the family, probably in an effort to create two viable units which might be able to clear themselves. Also, a 'Kerry' estate was sold for £9,500 of which £7,000 was sent to England. After all this frantic activity, £4,500 still remained to be paid off on the Cheshire estate and debts on Irish lands, along with 'personal' debts amounted to £8,000. The statement concludes on the rather ominous note that if these sums were to be paid off, the entire property of the Ram family would

have to be sold.²⁶

The Rams made one final, desperate attempt to save themselves from extinction as a landowning family. In 1821, Abel John Ram wrote and sealed a letter to his trustees, promising to make every effort to see to it that all his creditors were satisfied. And, he declared:

lest I should appear deficient in honour and gratitude to you, I hold it necessary to bind myself, in the most solemn manner, to adhere implicitly to the rule of conduct and the limits of the sum laid down for me, as well as by my own as by your wishes. Namely, not to exceed by borrowing, or in any other way whatever, the sum of one hundred pounds a year for the term of five years at least and for a further term if it be found necessary, to extricate me from these difficulties.²⁷

Undoubtedly, Abel John Ram meant every word of what he said, but it is not known if he kept his promise or if indeed it was sufficient to extricate him from his immediate financial troubles. Certainly, in the long-term, the policy was a failure. What little remained of the property was sold in the Landed Estates Court in the 1850's.²⁸

Conclusion

The number of estates from which information has been

²⁶Ram Papers, 1812.

²⁷Ibid., 1821.

²⁸Ram Papers, 1858.

used in the preceding chapter is, regrettably, small. Nonetheless, certain patterns are discernible. Clearly, many members of the landed class were living well beyond their means. The pathetic saga of the Ram family is only the most conspicuous example. Indeed, but for a very dramatic reduction in spending, the Fitzwilliam establishment might have found itself in trouble.

Where were the landlords spending their money?

Obviously, the cost of maintaining mansions and demesnes was immense; not to mention the expense involved in erecting such palaces in the first place. The cost of keeping agents as estate managers was also considerable. Few landlords, it seems, were willing to undertake the toil of supervision themselves. Legal expenses, too, were very significant although hardly any more burdensome than the tradition of granting annuities to younger children and their heirs. Of course, borrowing, the panacea to which many landowners resorted, was the greatest danger of all. As debts piled up, interest repayments become just another facet of a problem that had clearly got out of hand.

CHAPTER VI

LANDOWNERSHIP CHANGES, 1852-1876

If the financial position of most estates was as desperate as the preceding chapter indicates, then there was great pressure for change in the system. Of course, land sales was one panacea which could provide temporary relief. Bankrupt landlords did have the option of selling part, or all, of their property to more solvent colleagues without actually endangering the system itself. After all, ownership under such transformations might change from person to person but not necessarily from class to class or power interest to power interest.

Essentially, the aim of this chapter is to examine changes in the landowning class which reinforce conclusions reached in earlier sections. If, as now seems certain, many estates were in severe financial difficulties and many landlords were prepared to resort to land sales as a solution to their dilemma, then the social composition of the landed class would have changed drastically.

An examination of such changes helps to explain even further the reasons for the crisis in the landed class. For instance, a comparison of estate-size distribution for the

two dates in question might indicate that estates of one particular size were more prone to liquidation than others. Also, where possible, it is interesting to discover who was buying the estates which were being offered. Catholic tenants, especially the more prosperous ones, would surely have been tempted by such opportunities, not to mention the entrepreneurial classes of the towns and cities who had the capital to invest in farmland.

Before proceeding, a brief comment about the two major sources consulted for this chapter is in order. With regard to the data on 1876 landowners, this information is readily available in a Parliamentary Paper of that year. For each county, landowners are listed by name, address, and acreage owned. Unfortunately, the 1852 data are less accessible. An index of landowners in North Wexford was compiled from the Primary Valuation. In this document landlords are listed alphabetically by name but this is done parish by parish. The task of compilation was laborious, therefore, but the index of landowners' names and the extent of their properties can be reliably compared with the 1876 list, even if the latter covers the entire county.¹

Table 7 has been compiled from Primary Valuation data

¹See Primary Valuation of Ireland, County of Wexford, (London, 1852); Parliamentary Papers, 1876, LXXX, Summary of the Returns of Owners of Land in Ireland, County of Wexford.

TABLE 7
 SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF ESTATES IN
 NORTH WEXFORD, 1852

ACRES	0-100	100-300	300-1000	1000-3000	3000-10,000	10,000+
NO.	292	128	113	53	12	3
%	48.6	21.3	18.3	8.8	2.0	0.5

and shows some rather surprising features. In spite of the popular image, the majority of landowners were hardly pseudo-aristocrats. Indeed in 1852, almost 70% of North Wexford's landowners owned less than 300 acres and, furthermore, nearly 1 out of 2 of them possessed less than 100 acres. These figures indicate a significant amount of land sales long before the mid-century. The small properties mentioned above were probably owned by tenant-farmers who managed to accumulate enough capital to buy up some small parcels of land. In many instances these 'estates' amounted to no more than ten acres or so, but almost invariably, the owners preferred to rent to somebody else than to work them. Businessmen, solicitors and land agents undoubtedly invested such small properties, too, thus diversifying the landed class even more.

Naturally, the 68 individuals who owned over one thousand acres apiece were important out of all proportion to their numbers. For one thing, between them they owned over two-thirds of the study-area. Their numbers might have been few, but their domains were undeniably large. Secondly, the social and political power which this elite of landowners enjoyed was overwhelming. For centuries the ancestors of these 'magnates' had dominated Irish politics and even after Catholic Emancipation in 1829, they continued to wield a great deal of political power. Furthermore, their social standing in the Irish countryside long survived their

political demise. Indeed, the inordinate amount of attention which travellers paid to such families when writing their diaries attests to this status. Large landowners were clearly the cultural leaders of rural Ireland.²

Was their economic base being eroded, however? After all, the number of tiny estates which Table 7 enumerates suggests that individuals of more humble means were making their way into the landlord business. Table 8 shows that by 1876, a generation later, this development had reached an advanced stage. By then nearly 56% of all landowners owned properties of less than 100 acres in extent. Since these 1876 figures deal with the entire county and considerable acreages of common-lands existed in the southern area, these proportions may be slightly illusory. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in 1876 56% of all landowners were not 'landlords' in the traditional sense at all.³

The so-called 'magnates' were not losing ground to these 'small-fry'. As Table 8 shows, it was estates of between one hundred and one thousand acres which declined in numbers over the twenty-four year period under examination. In 1852, such estates accounted for 40% of all properties in North Wexford, but in 1876, only 33% of all estates in the

²See Thomas Lacy, Sights and Scenes; J. N. Brewer, Ireland.

³Primary Valuation of Ireland, County Wexford.

TABLE 8
 SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF ESTATES IN
 COUNTY WEXFORD, 1876

ACRES	0-100	100-300	300-1000	1000-3000	3000-10,000	10,000+
NO.	656	197	199	93	27	5
%	55.7	16.8	16.9	7.9	2.3	0.4

county belonged to this category. Meanwhile, the proportion of all landowners who owned one thousand acres, or more, remained steady at 11%. From this it appears that the magnates were retaining their position while very small-scale operations, often owned by tenants, were making ground at the expense of medium-sized estates.

Other evidence reinforces this notion of 'magnate resilience'. In Table 9 the survival rate of landlord families during the period 1852 to 1876 is outlined according to categories based on estate size. This data was obtained by tracing names from the 1852 index in the 1876 list of landowners. Obviously, a certain margin of error is unavoidable in such an exercise since, on occasion, estates were inherited by members of a deceased landlord's family who had a different surname. Also, estates were sold to people with the same surname as the previous owner, thus masking the transaction as inheritance.

As Table 9 shows, the highest survival rate, by far, was among those families who owned over one thousand acres. Of the 68 families who were in this position in 1852, no less than 52 still held their estates a generation later, this during one of the most traumatic eras of Irish landlord history. As would be expected, the survival rate of medium sized estates was much less impressive. Almost half of these families had to sell their land, or allow them to pass

TABLE 9
 SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF ESTATES BELONGING TO
 LANDLORDS WHOSE FAMILIES RETAINED THEIR PROPERTY BETWEEN 1852 AND 1876

ACRES	0-100	100-300	300-1000	1000-3000	3000-10,000	10,000+
1852 TOTALS	292	128	113	53	12	3
SURVIVORS	77	61	66	42	8	2
SURVIVAL RATE (%)	26.4	27.7	58.4	79.2	66.6	66.6

out of their hands for some other reason. The most surprising feature of all, however, was the amazingly high turnover of landowners in the smallest category, i.e., 0-100 acres. Three out of every four of them lost their lands between 1852 and 1876, despite the fact that, at the same time, the number of such landowners was actually increasing!⁴

At face value, then, it appears that the ability of a landlord to survive in his profession was directly proportional to the size of his property. Indeed, it may well be that the amazingly poor showing of very small-scaled landowners was due to their inability to pass over ready cash offered for their lands. This would have been especially true in the relatively prosperous decades of the 1850's and 1860's.

None of this evidence should be allowed to obscure the fact that, on average, estates were getting smaller and that, to all appearances, the line dividing tenant from landowners was very ill-defined.

Presuming this to have been the case, the religious composition of the landed class would also have changed. For a study-area such as North Wexford it is very difficult to accurately determine the religion of landowners.

⁴Parliamentary Papers, 1876, LXXX. Summary of the Returns of Landowners in Ireland, County of Wexford.

However, surnames, while not entirely reliable, can be of some help in discovering trends. Tables 10 and 11 compare the prevalence of 'Non-English' surnames among the landowning classes in 1852 with the corresponding pattern in 1876.

(Non-English' in this case refers to all names of Gaelic or Norman-Irish origin.) Obviously, it is very difficult at times to determine the nature of certain surnames, and, of course, a surname may not always be a reliable indicator of religious affiliation. Nonetheless, the patterns revealed by Tables 10 and 11 are interesting and instructive.

For example, in 1852 there was a very pronounced relationship between the prevalence of 'Non-English' surnames in any given category and the estate-size of that category. Although individuals with 'catholic' surnames did not dominate any grouping at that time, they did own over one-third of the properties below 100 acres in extent and one-fifth of those which contained 100-300 acres. However, only very few estates above that range were owned by people with 'catholic' surnames. The catholics, it seems, were creeping into the system but at the very bottom.⁵

This process continued during the following quarter century so that by 1876, as Table 11 shows, individuals with 'catholic' surnames clearly dominated in the 0-100 acre

⁵Primary Valuation, County of Wexford, p. 56.

TABLE 10
 PREVALENCE OF 'NON-ENGLISH' SURNAMES IN
 EACH ESTATE SIZE CATEGORY, 1852

ACRES	0-100	100-300	300-1000	1000-3000	3000-10,000
TOTAL NO.	292	128	113	53	7
'NON-ENGLISH'	104	26	14	2	2
%	35.6	20.3	12.4	3.8	28.5

TABLE 11
 PREVALENCE OF 'NON-ENGLISH' SURNAMES IN
 EACH ESTATE SIZE CATEGORY, 1876

ACRES	0-100	100-300	300-1000	1000-3000	3000-10,000	10,000+
TOTAL NO.	655	197	199	93	27	5
'NON-ENGLISH'	505	39	39	12	4	---
%	77.1	19.8	19.6	12.9	14.8	---

category, making up, as they did, 77% of all landowners in that range. This was certainly a very substantial increase and was more than likely caused by an increasing availability of small parcels of land as larger landowners sold their properties piece by piece in a desperate attempt to maintain solvency.⁶

It has been traditional to claim that merchants, especially those based in Dublin, were buying up huge areas of farmland in Post-Famine Ireland. Contemporaries recognized this development and took it very seriously. As early as 1844, Fraser noted of Camolin Park:

the manor and the surrounding demesne is the only landed property which the noble family of Mountnorris now possess in County Wexford, the remainder having passed into other hands, principally those of Dublin merchants.⁷

Logically certain amounts of land would pass into the hands of urban entrepreneurs, particularly because of the fluid land-market which existed in the later nineteenth century. However, it appears that the extent to which this transfer took place has been exaggerated.

Evidence clearly indicates that, in County Wexford at least, Dublin-based landowners were numerically insignificant,

⁶Parliamentary Papers, 1876, LXXX. Summary of the Returns of Landowners in Ireland, County of Wexford.

⁷J. Fraser, A Handbook for Travellers in Ireland, (Dublin: Curry, 1844).

even as late as 1876. Table 12 has been compiled from information made available in the 1876 Parliamentary Paper on the addresses of Wexford landowners. Possibly, many Dublin merchants who decided to invest in Wexford farmland would have maintained their city businesses and addresses. Therefore, these data are a fairly reliable guide to the 'absentee situation' at the date mentioned. In all, only 6.1% of landowners were based in Dublin and 4.3% in other parts of Ireland besides Wexford or Dublin. Along with this, a mere 2.4% of all landed individuals lived permanently in County Wexford.⁸

These figures are surprising for several reasons. Landlord absenteeism was often condemned as the greatest evil facing nineteenth century Ireland. But obviously, in Wexford at least, the phenomenon was not very widespread. Secondly, the merchant-cum-landlord 'type' was not nearly as common in the county as one would expect. Some merchants undoubtedly did buy up Wexford farmland, but in 1876, they were far from being the dominant influence in the landed class. This position, it appears, was occupied by landlords, big and small, who continued to live among the peasants they exploited.

Were landownership changes, then, a reflection of the

⁸Parliamentary Papers, 1876 LXXX. Summary of the Returns of Landowners in Ireland, County of Wexford.

TABLE 12
 ADDRESSES OF INDIVIDUALS OWNING
 LAND IN COUNTY WEXFORD, 1876

ADDRESSES	CO. WEXFORD	DUBLIN	REST OF IRELAND	BRITAIN	OTHER
NO.	1,014	72	53	28	9
%	86.2	6.1	4.5	2.4	---

impoverished position in which many of the landed gentry found themselves?

Despite everything the answer to this question has to be a qualified 'yes'. Land was bought and sold at a fast rate, thus suggesting the need for cash on the part of the sellers. Consequently, the composition of the landowning class was markedly changing. The number of very small properties increased enormously between 1852 and 1876, while the number of large estates, with the exception of very extensive lands, diminished a little. Also, the religious composition of the propertied orders probably altered somewhat. No longer restricted by law from owning land, catholic tenants probably did some small-scale investing of their own. As a result, the terms 'landlord' and 'tenant' may have become increasingly meaningless as the century wore on. Despite the widely-held belief to the contrary, however, the merchant class' role in all this was not very significant.

Quietly, imperceptively almost, a social and economic revolution was taking place in the Irish countryside for decades before the Liberals took up the cause of the 'down-trodden papists.'

position to modernise the system of agriculture in the area. This because the tenantry, who would have suffered in the short term from such an upheaval, had the ability to force their will upon their overlords by resorting to the terrorism threat. Finally, the landlords themselves had become so accustomed to extravagant living and so handicapped by long-standing debts that they could never cut down their levels of expenditure to meet the new situation.

The landowning class had depended heavily on agricultural rents for a long time and other sources of income were of little significance throughout the nineteenth century. On a few estates lumbering took place but, with the exception of the Fitzwilliam property the scale of such operations was small and returns diminished sharply after 1815. The few other resources which the Wexford countryside offered were of little financial significance. Revenue from the limited turf digging and slate quarrying activities in the locality were miniscule and no manufacturing industries of note were established. Indeed commercial farming of demesne lands was the only alternative to total dependence on their tenantry available to the landowners. Where such farming was carried out it proved to be highly successful but records indicate that few landlords were willing or able to affect the transition from manorial to commercial agriculture.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

It is now time to return to the central question with which this thesis is concerned. Why did the landed gentry become financially impoverished during the nineteenth century?

This work has answered that question to some extent. As stated previously the search has been more in the nature of an exploration of the problem than a final sifting and analysis of the evidence. Much more intensive research needs to be done on a far wider scale before truly firm conclusions can be arrived at. Nevertheless, certain theories can be tentatively propounded from the restricted sample used above.

The landowning class of nineteenth century was caught up in a financial dilemma from which escape was very difficult. They depended almost exclusively on agricultural rents for their income yet, after 1815 this source proved to be very inadequate.

This was so for three reasons. Firstly, after that date the peasantry found it impossible to pay the money demanded of them. Secondly, the landlords were not in a

Agricultural rents were not always an unreliable source of revenue of course. Indeed, several examples quoted in this work suggest that before 1815, the tenantry of north Wexford were paying the rents demanded of them with astonishing efficiency. After that momentous year, however, arrears began to mount up and throughout the remainder of the century the landed class was unable to collect large amounts of the rents which were owed to them. Improving the system of land tenure might have benefitted the peasantry in the long term but in keeping with their conservative nature the tenants disliked change. The secret terrorist organisations which had emerged in the eighteenth century saw to it that the ruling class remained sufficiently uneasy about their own security to attempt any sweeping changes in the agrarian system.

The Irish landed gentry engaged in conspicuous expenditure to an enormous extent in the eighteenth century. The cost of covering the landscape with their fine residences must have been astronomical. Spurred on by social rivalry many of the gentry engaged in a constant struggle to match or surpass their peers in the area of gracious living. How difficult it must have been for such families to cut back spending after incomes began to decline at the end of the Napoleonic War. A few did succeed in becoming more frugal, the Fitzwilliam achievement being a particularly noteworthy

example. However the cost of maintaining their luxurious residences along with the burden of annuity payments and legal fees placed many landed families close to bankruptcy. When reputable gentry such as the Rams of Gorey could become hopelessly broke before 1815 many of their 'colleagues' must have been in desperate financial straits during the depression and famine years which followed.

Eventually many long-established landed families had to alienate part of all of their property. This policy, unavoidable though it was, served to disintegrate the land-owning class as a social group. Because small parcels of land were often sold to temporarily offset total liquidation many formerly landless groups gained a foothold in the 'propertied' class. The more prosperous Catholic tenants constantly bought up such small lots and the urban middle class also took its share. Since the medium-sized estates were being lost most rapidly by the gentry, the 'magnates' found themselves isolated in the upper rungs of a class that had bankrupt itself. The huge turnover in small pieces of land between 1852 and 1876 illustrates how speculative the new and smaller landowners were.

When the Land Acts were passed in the 1870's and 1880's, therefore, the old landed gentry were weakened as a social and political force. A new era in Irish social history was beginning and a new ruling class was emerging in the

countryside. Eventually the void created by the fall of the gentry was to be filled by the 'large tenants' who soon became known as 'large farmers'. It was this group which allied with the urban middle class to provide the stabilising force following the upheavals of the 1916-22 period. The remnants of the landlord class joined with these two groups to form the basis of support for the Cosgrave administration in the early years of the new state. And, where they still survive, the scattered descendants of Ireland's fallen nobility remain a definitely conservative force.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Daniel J. Gahan has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Aug 18, 1979
Date

Lawrence J. McCaffrey
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