

THE LANDED ESTATES OF SOMERSET SINCE 1873

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INTRODUCTION

This paper takes as its starting-point the Parliamentary Paper of 1873 called *Returns of Owners of Land* and the revised and corrected version of part of the same data published in J. Bateman's *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1883).

The Parliamentary Paper lists by county those who owned land of an acre or more; Bateman confines himself chiefly to those landowners who held at least 2,000 acres. Using information contained in both surveys, it has been possible to compare the landed wealth of Somerset's gentry families in the late 19th century with their condition in the late 20th century as determined by modern research. A similar study has previously been undertaken by Dr Pam Barnes in her book *Norfolk Landowners since 1880*, and the new data for Somerset has in addition allowed a comparison to be made between the fate of gentry estates in two different parts of the country.

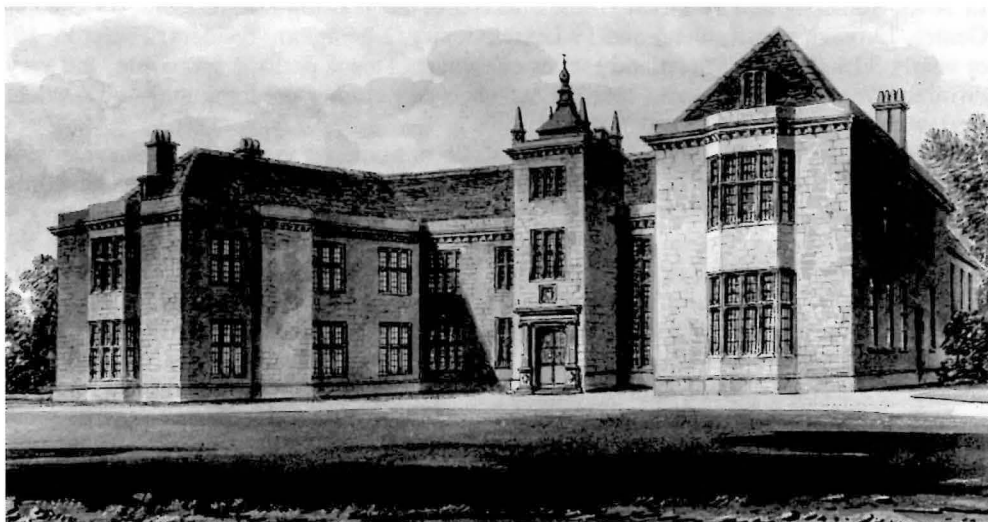


Plate 1 Watercolour drawing of Fairfield, Stogursey, by John Buckler, 1836. Fairfield, the ancestral home of the Acland-Hood family, was part of the estate of Sir Alexander Fuller-Acland-Hood in 1873. His estate has survived more completely to the present day than that of any other of Somerset's landed families. *From the Society's collection.*

METHOD

For the purposes of this study, consideration has been given only to those estates which extended to 2,000 acres or more at the time of the 19th century surveys. 64 Somerset landowners were identified who held such estates in 1873/83, of whom 18 were non-resident, in the sense that their principal home was in another county. This compares with 106 such estates in Norfolk, of which only six were held by non-resident landowners. Table 1 provides details of Somerset landowners who held at least 2,000 acres in 1873/83, and briefly records the subsequent history their estates. Table 2 provides a statistical summary of estates over 2,000 acres in 1873/83.

Having identified Somerset's 64 largest estates in 1873/83, the next step was to discover how many of them survive today with at least 1,000 acres. Following Pam Barnes, original owners were grouped into three categories in order to determine which group has survived best. Great Landowners, whether titled or not, are treated as those who held over 10,000 acres, Greater Gentry those who held between 3,000 and 9,999 acres, and Lesser Gentry those who held between 2,000 and 2,999 acres. Such divisions are, of course, arbitrary, since borderline cases tend to merge into one another, but a line had to be drawn somewhere. Tables 3 and 4 summarise current ownership as compared to ownership in 1873/83.

Several prominent Somerset families are omitted from consideration because their local importance in 1873/83 was not reflected by the extent of their Somerset landholdings. Thus, no reference will be found to the Cely-Trevilians or the Hobhouses. Also excluded are the Malets, perhaps Somerset's oldest family, because the head of the family at that time, after a successful career in India, had decided to acquire a Wiltshire estate. Only in the 1920s did the family return to Somerset on purchasing the Chargot estate in Luxborough.

FINDINGS

In 1873, Somerset had 10 Great Landowners, 5 of them being non-resident, 35 Greater Gentry, 12 being non-resident, and 19 Lesser Gentry, 2 being non-resident. Therefore 19, or nearly 30%, had their heartland estates elsewhere. This is perhaps surprising, and very different from the situation in Norfolk which was a county predominantly of resident landowners.

In 1994 only 2 out of 19 Lesser Gentry estates in Somerset are known to survive with at least 1,000 acres. Out of 35 Greater Gentry estates only 6 are known still to have this much. (In one case, information is unavailable.) Of 10 Greater Landowners only 3 survive, consisting of 1 estate of 6,000 acres, 1 of 5,000 acres and 1 of 2,000 acres. By comparison, in Norfolk today only 5 out of 32 Lesser Gentry estates survive, as do 18 out of 56 Greater Gentry estates, and 8 out of 11 Great Landowners (this excludes 6 non-residents and 1 landowner who declined to give information). This shows, not surprisingly, that the greater estates were in a far stronger position to survive than the smaller ones. Their owners were more likely to have other sources of income in addition to farm rentals, such as urban rentals, minerals and other investments.

In both counties it can be seen that the Lesser Gentry or squirearchy have practically ceased to exist. In Somerset the same can be said to apply to the Greater Gentry and to the Great Landowners. Only about a sixth survive in Somerset, whereas in Norfolk the figure is close to a third. Norfolk has for long had an appeal to the grantees and had an enormous predominance of large landowners in relation to Somerset, which has never been a fashionable county. In the early 17th century Somerset did not contain a single peer, and even in 1873 there were only four resident peers in the county.

There were multiple causes of the decline of the landowning aristocracy. These were felt nationwide although with some variations in different regions. The great agricultural depression, beginning in 1875, seemed endless, and affected particularly the eastern grain growing counties, such as Norfolk. Other major reasons for decline were death duties and other tax burdens, and the failure of male heirs, due in many cases to the slaughter of the First World War, and to a lesser extent of the Second World War.

It is now thought that the enormous estate sales of 1918–22 happened only partially from necessity, and that in many cases such sales represented capital reinvestment because of the minute return from agricultural estates. Another factor was the hostile political atmosphere which began in the Edwardian period under Lloyd George. A number of families had incurred large debts in the prosperous years by grandiose building projects, and, in addition to having to make provision for dowagers, sisters, and younger sons, they were unable to cope when hard times came. This factor seems to have been less important in Somerset than in Norfolk, where a number of families were ruined by a desire to provide an impressive setting for the entertainment of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) and showed a selfish disregard for future generations of their family.

An attempt has been made in Table 4 to record the area of surviving landholdings of those owners still holding at least 1,000 acres. This gives a perhaps over-optimistic total of 35,593 acres, and represents a loss of more than 90% since 1873/83. A silent revolution indeed. If to this figure the acreage remaining to those having under 1,000 acres is added (around 5,500 acres), the losses look a little less dramatic. To complete the picture, a table has been included from Bateman showing the acreage held by all landowners having at least 1,000 in 1873.

Of the country houses attached to the landed estates of a century ago, 18 have become institutions of one kind or another, 5 have been handed over to the National Trust, and 2 have been demolished.

TABLE 1

Somerset Landowners having over 2,000 acres in 1873/83

Landowner and Seat	Acres	Still holds 1,000 acres	Comments
10,000 acres or more			
<i>Resident</i>			
Sir A.F. Acland-Hood, Bt., St Audries	11,337	Yes	St Audries was sold in 1920 and became a school, but Fairfield (having been in the family by female descent since the 12th century) went to Lady Gass, niece of the last Lord St Audries, who has 6,000 acres. Her mother has over 1,000 acres at Wootton.
Sir F.W. Knight, Simonsbath	16,103	No	Failing a male heir, he sold the reversion to the entire estate to Earl Fortescue in 1886. In 1927 Honeymead and four other properties, totalling 1,745 acres, were sold to Sir Robert Cohen. 2,500 acres have been retained, the remainder having been acquired by Somerset County Council.
G.F. Luttrell, Dunster	15,374	Yes	Dunster Castle went to the National Trust, but Sir Walter still has 5,000 acres and lives at the Court

			House, East Quantoxhead, which has been in the family since 1232.
Earl Poulett, Hinton St George	22,123	No	The last 1,298 acres were sold in 1968. The title became extinct in 1973. The acreage stated is the figure given in Bateman; the County Return shows only 10,117 acres.
Sir J. Smyth, Bt., Ashton Court	13,542	No	The title is extinct. The house belongs to Bristol Corporation and the farms were bought by the tenants in 1948.
<i>Non-Resident</i>			
Sir T. Acland, Bt., Killerton, Devon	20,300	No	Sir Richard gave the Somerset estate of 9,848 acres at Holnicote to the National Trust in 1941. Later acquisitions make the estate up to 12,450 acres.
Earl of Carnarvon, Highclere, Hants	12,800	No	The present Lord Carnarvon confirms that the family has not owned any land in Somerset since 1920. The Pixton estate of some 5,000 acres was bought by Auberon Herbert's grandmother, Lady Carnarvon, in the 1890s. On his death in 1974 the estate was split up, generally going to his nephews. The late Mervyn Herbert told me that Tetton was separated from the Carnarvon estate well before 1880, was originally about 700 acres, but now stands at some 2,000 acres. He thought that the Carnarvon interest in Somerset was very overstated by Bateman. Edward Herbert of Tetton was murdered by Greek brigands in 1870.
Earl of Ilchester, Melbury, Dorset	13,169	No	The title and estate are now separated. The estate manager says there is no longer a Somerset estate.
Viscount Portman, Bryanston, Dorset	24,399	No	Hestercombe was the eldest son's home, but he died without issue in 1911 and it subsequently became the Fire Brigade's HQ. Lord Portman says he no longer has any rural land, only retaining the London property.
William Wyndham, Dinton, Wilts	11,231	Yes	Dr Katharine Wyndham still manages 2,000 acres and is restoring the house and gardens. The house was very dilapidated when the family returned to Orchard Wyndham in 1917. Bateman adds in the holdings of the Countess of Egremont and the trustees to give this figure. The estate is in trust for the widow and descendants of George Wyndham, deceased.

3,000 to 9,999 acres

Resident

P. Bleydell-Bouverie, Brymore	3,470	No	His son died unmarried in 1925. Brymore is now an agricultural school.
Viscount Bridport, Cricket St Thomas	3,103	No	The estate was sold in 1897. It is now a Wildlife Park.
E.G. Carew, Crowcombe	4,577	Yes	By female descent to Anthony Trollope-Bellew, who still has over 1,000 acres. Crowcombe Court is now a nursing home.
Earl of Cork and Orrery, Marston	3,398	No	The estate was sold in 1905. It is now the headquarters of Foster-Yeoman Quarries.

J.H. Dickinson, Kingweston	4,279	No	The farms at Kingweston were mostly sold off between the wars. The house is now a boarding house of Millfield School. The last heir was killed in the RAF in 1941. His father Captain F.W. Dickinson lived until 1964.
T. Marriott-Dodington, Horsington	3,286	No	The house and estate were sold between 1918 and 1926.
C.E.J. Esdaile, Cothelstone	3,000	Yes	1,500 acres have come by female descent to W.H.G. Warmington.
R.G. Evered, Otterhampton	3,142	No	The estate was bought in 1755 and was sold and broken up in 1946.
R. Neville-Grenville, Butleigh	3,434	No	Sold in 1946. The house was converted into flats and the land sold to tenant farmers.
H.A. Helyar, Coker	3,349	No	The estate descended to the Walker-Heneage family but has since been sold.
John Hippisley, Ston Easton	4,216	No	The contents were sold on Colonel Hippisley's death in 1956, but the property failed to sell for several years. The house eventually became a hotel.
J.F.F. Horner, Mells	6,786	No	The house went by female descent to the Earl of Oxford and Asquith, but the estates were sold to Amey Roadstone.
A peer, Radstock	4,293	Yes	The present holder of the title, who prefers to remain anonymous, confirms that he still holds at least 1,000 acres.
W.S. Gore-Langton (later 4th Earl Temple), Newton and Hatch Park	6,660	No	Newton was sold on the death of the fifth Earl Temple in 1940 to the Duchy of Cornwall, who leased it to a teacher training college. The Hatch Park estate is now much diminished but the house remains in the family. (In 1873 the Duchy of Cornwall owned 5,323 acres in the county. By 1987, this had grown to 14,500 acres in Somerset and Avon.)
Sir Wroth Lethbridge, Bt., Sandhill	3,420	No	The house and estate were sold in 1913; the house later became a hospital.
Sir W. Medlycott, Bt., Milborne Port	3,556	No	Ven House was let from 1906 and sold in 1957. The remainder of the estate was apparently sold on the death of Sir Christopher in 1986.
Sir P. Miles, Bt., Leigh	4,929	No	Sir William says he has just under 1,000 acres.
R.H. Paget, Cranmore	4,067	No	The house became a Roman Catholic prep school, having been sold in 1932.
J.H. Smyth-Pigott, Brockley	6,000	No	Weston-super-Mare was sold in 1914, and Brockley in 1946.
Hon. Mrs E.J. Stanley, Quantock Lodge	5,772	No	It became a hospital and then a school. The land was sold in the 1920s to the County Council to provide small holdings.
Sir A. Trevelyan, Bt., Nettlecombe	6,361	No	The house is now occupied by the Field Studies Council. The estate went by female descent to the Wolseleys. John Wolseley lives in Australia, but Thomas has a studio at Nettlecombe. The farms were mostly sold by Garnet Wolseley (a relation of the famous general), John's father, but considerable woodlands remain.
Col. Kemeys-Tynte, Halswell	4,707	No	The house and part of the estate were sold in 1950, the remainder in 1953.

George Warry, Shapwick	3,500	No	The estate was sold in 1922, but the family retained Shapwick House until the 1950s.
<i>Non resident</i>			
Marquess of Bath, Longleat, Wilts	8,212	Yes	Lord Bath's agent confirms that the estate still has in excess of 1,000 acres in the county, part of the Longleat estate being in Somerset, as well as land at Cheddar.
G.W. Bathwayt, Dyrham, Glos.	5,043	Yes	Mark Blathwayt still has the Porlock Manor estate.
Duke of Cleveland, Raby, Durham	4,784	No	Lord Barnard states that the Somerset estate went some years ago.
Duke of Devonshire, Chatsworth, Derbyshire	3,014	No	The Duke says the Somerset land was all sold by the 9th Duke between 1919 and 1922.
G.W. Wingfield Digby, Sherborne, Dorset	5,125	No	Simon Wingfield Digby says that after big sales in the 1920s the estate only has 175 acres left in Somerset.
Sir H. Hoare, Bt., Stourhead, Wilts	5,310	No	Stourhead House and grounds went to the National Trust in 1947, when the title and estate were separated, but Henry Hoare says he still owns 880 acres in the county.
Earl of Lovelace, East Horsley, Surrey	3,008	No	The Porlock estate went by female descent to the Earl of Lytton who has 850 acres. His brother also farms at Bratton Court.
Sir C. Mordaunt, Bt., Walton Warwick	4,123	No	The present baronet lives in Australia and does not use the title.
Duke of Somerset, Maiden Bradley, Wilts	6,553	?	The Witham Friary estate was sold in 1954. The present Duke says he still has interests in Somerset, but the area is confidential.
Sir C. Taylor, Bt., London	2,716	No	The title became extinct in 1876 and the estate was inherited by his grandson the 3rd Lord Brougham. The present peer lives in London.
The late Countess Waldegrave and Lord Carlingford, Dudbrooke, Essex	5,321	Yes	Lord Carlingford, her fourth husband, died childless in 1898, when the estate reverted to Earl Waldegrave. The Rt Hon. William Waldegrave says his brother still owns the estate of Mendip granted to the family by Queen Mary.

2,000 to 2,999 acres

Resident

T.H.M. Bailward, Horsington	2,931	No	Chris Bailward says he is still there but down to 600 acres.
The late J. Bennet, Cadbury	2,494	No	The Cadbury estate was sold in 1877. A cadet branch was established at Sparkford Hall.
M. Fenwick-Bissett, Bagborough	2,180	No	He died childless in 1884 when the estate reverted to his wife's family the Pophams. It was sold in 1922 but Captain Brooke-Popham's mother bought back the house and 50 acres in 1959.
R.T. Combe, Earnshill	2,776	No	Richard Combe's grandfather sold Donyatt to the County Council in 1919, but he says he still has 640 acres.
Revd W. Duckworth, Orchardleigh	2,174	No	There was a sale of furniture in 1918, but a Duckworth was still living at Orchardleigh until his death in 1986. Since then developers building a golf course have gone bankrupt.

Sir A. Elton, Bt., Clevedon	2,411	No	Now National Trust since the death of the 9th baronet in 1951, having been owned by the family since 1709.
A. Gibbs, Tyntesfield	2,182	Yes	Lord Wraxall writes: '1. The first 300 acres was bought by my great grandfather William Gibbs in 1844, to join his cousin George who was living in the house next door, and formed the present park. 2. By 1880 my grandfather was tenant for life of 3,100 acres here. The trust had been created by his father's will in 1875. 3. By 1887 the property here had 4,100 acres or thereabouts. 4. I broke the entail male in 1952 and so the property became mine absolutely. 5. But meanwhile, about 1,000 acres had been sold for death duties etc. and so I inherited some 3,100 acres. 6. But my purchases and sales have added a bit, leaving me now with some 3,200 acres.'
Wyndham Knatchbull, Babington	2,513	No	He died childless in 1900. His widow sold the remaining 716 acres in 1920.
V. Vaughan Lee, Dillington	2,935	Yes	By female descent to Ewen Cameron, who states the family still owns 3,000 acres. The house is now leased to Somerset County Council.
H.G. Mildmay, Hazelgrove	2,500	No	Sold in 1935. Now the junior school of King's School, Bruton.
William Neal, Kingsdon	2,170	No	The senior branch became extinct in 1942, but a cadet branch, Vivian-Neal, lived at Poundisford from 1928. It was offered for sale in 1995.
F.W. Newton, Corfe Barton	2,214	No	By female descent to J. Halliday, who has 800 acres. Barton Grange has largely been demolished.
W. Phelps, Montacute	2,926	No	Belongs to the National Trust. Was formerly leased to Lord Curzon, who renovated it.
W. Sanford, Nynehead	2,600	No	Nynehead is now a home for the elderly, but Chipley Park has been retained with less than 1,000 acres.
W. Speke, Jordans	2,536	No	The house has been demolished and the estate, Peter Speke says, has been reduced from 1,000 acres to 950 acres due to the rebuilding of the A358.
T. Thring, Alford	2,325	No	The estate was sold in 1906 but Admiral Thring says he bought back the house and 150 acres in 1945.
C.C. Tudway, Stoberry	2,827	No	David Tudway Quilter, Vice Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, is the grandson of the last Tudway of Stoberry Park.
<i>Non Resident</i>			
Viscount Clifden, Gowran, Kilkenny	2,537	No	The 8th Viscount died in 1974 without male heirs; the title became extinct, the Mendip barony passing to the 6th Earl of Normanton.
Lord de Mauley, Langford, Oxon	2,457	No	Lord de Mauley says the Pawlett property was sold in 1921.

Total number of landowners: 64

Total acreage of estates: 360,580

TABLE 2

Summary of Table 1 Showing Ownership in 1873 by Category

<i>No. of Owners in 1880</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Total Acres</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
10	15.6	Over 10,000 acres	160,378	44.5
35	54.7	3,000–9,999 acres	152,514	42.3
19	29.7	2,000–2,999 acres	47,688	13.2
64			360,580	

TABLE 3

Summary of Current Ownership by Comparison to Ownership in 1873

<i>Over 10,000 Acres</i>	<i>Yes†</i>	<i>No‡</i>	<i>Not Known</i>	<i>Total</i>
Resident in 1873	2	3	0	5
Non resident in 1873	1	4	0	5
	3	7	0	10
 <i>3,000 to 9,999 Acres</i>				
Resident in 1873	3	20	0	23
Non resident in 1873	3	8	1	12
	6	28	1	35
 <i>2,000 to 2,999 Acres</i>				
Resident in 1873	2	15	0	17
Non resident in 1873	0	2	0	2
	2	17	0	19
 <i>Summary</i>	11	52	1	64

† Yes: Landowners still retaining at least 1,000 acres.
(Nine of these are now resident in Somerset and Avon.)

‡ No: Those now owning less than 1,000 acres.

TABLE 4

Survivors with at least 1,000 Acres

<i>Landowner</i>	<i>Acres</i>
Lady Gass (Acland-Hood)† and mother	7,000
Sir Walter Luttrell	5,000
Dr Katherine Wyndham	2,000
Anthony Trollope-Bellew (Carew) and mother	1,600
Hugh Warmington (Esdaile)	1,500
A Peer	?*
Marquess of Bath	1,000
Earl Waldegrave	3,500**
Lord Wraxall (Gibbs)	3,200
Ewen Cameron (Vaughan Lee)	3,000
Mark Blathwayt	3,500
	31,300
	4,293***
	35,593

* Not available. This owner retains at least 1,000 acres but has not disclosed his current acreage.

** Elaine Fogg stated in *The Times*, 9 January 1995, that the Waldegrave family estate is now 3,500 acres.

*** Acreage held in 1873 by anonymous peer's family.

† The names in brackets are those under which the estates appear in Table 1.

TABLE 5

Somerset Landowners having over 1,000 Acres in 1873
(extract from Bateman's 1883 edition)

<i>No. of Owners</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Acres</i>
10	Peers	120,519
31	Great Landowners	217,352
	[at least 3,000 acres]	
67	Squires	113,900
	[1,000 to 3,000 acres]	
108		451,771

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