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THE GENTRY AND THE COUNTY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY CARDIGANSHIRE

THE rift between the Welsh landed gentry and the remainder of rural society which, aided by the polemics of radical politicians, was to deepen as the nineteenth century wore on, had hardly begun to develop by 1800. Rural society was relatively peaceful and despite the paranoiac obsession in some quarters with the idea that Jacobinism would follow in the wake of the French Revolution, life in Cardiganshire, as in much of west Wales, remained largely unaffected by events taking place east of Plynlymon. True, years of scarcity would often provoke corn riots, and the arrival of a pair of nervous enclosure commissioners on a piece of common land cause a little local disturbance; but, overall, life was tranquil, its rhythms being ordered by the eternal cycle of the seasons. The acknowledged leaders of this society attended to their many duties in the county, functioning as justices of the peace, militia officers, guardians of the poor, administrators of the rates and controllers of the Poor Law and public health measures, among many other activities. While the more affluent squires drank the waters at Bath and Matlock and partook of the dubious pleasures of the London season, total absenteeism was rare. The great houses of Gogerddan, Nanteos, Trawscoed and Cilgwyn maintained London residences, normally for use by whichever member of the family happened to be occupying a parliamentary seat at the time; but most squires were content to remain at home attending to their estates, hunting their foxes and maintaining their 'interest' in the county. For their society they relied upon the complex network of friends and acquaintances forged by political liaisons, patronage, marriage and long-standing family connections with others of their class within the county.

In the eyes of the tenants and the poor, the early-nineteenth-century Cardiganshire squire served the function of leader of local opinion, adviser on all manner of problems, and sympathetic patron in times of distress. The latter function was particularly important when cereal harvests failed and grain shortages posed a very real threat of widespread winter starvation among a population much of which was unable to pay the inflated grain prices which inevitably followed a poor harvest. Such a situation obtained in 1794–96, when a succession of bad harvests caused

local grains to be consumed during the immediate post-harvest period so that no surpluses remained for the winter. To make matters worse, unscrupulous farmers took advantage of the situation by withholding corn from the market in order to advance prices. Combined with pre-existing wartime price inflation, the overall effect was such that labouring families were forced to spend upwards of sixty per cent of their income on the purchase of corn. Not unnaturally this caused deep resentment, and in the winter of 1795 gangs of lead miners mounted nocturnal raids on the warehouses of Aberystwyth in search of grain. The magistrates (comprising, to all intents and purposes, the local gentry), motivated both by charitable intent and a wish to avoid widespread rioting, immediately passed a resolution forbidding the export of grain from the county. Moreover, when a ship laden with rye and barley arrived in the harbour the following July, they ordered that prices be fixed at five shillings and six shillings per bushel respectively in order to prevent dealers from selling to the highest bidder.¹ Although the Cardiganshire magistrates did not go to the lengths of their colleagues in Welshpool and cancel the annual great sessions supper, in order to donate the saving to the purchase of corn for the poor, they did undertake numerous personal acts of charity at this time.² When Anne Evans of Highmead distributed her customary gifts of barley and mutton to the poor on Christmas Eve 1794, she noted in her diary, with the satisfaction of one convinced of reaping her reward elsewhere, 'It was good mutton, not *old* sheep'.³

Of course, many people saw charity as a Christian duty and, perhaps, as an excuse for failing to deal with the real problems of rural poverty—inadequate wages, poor housing and lack of employment opportunities. Other landlords, however, fully realised that while direct acts of charity could provide short-term relief, more drastic measures were required if any real impact were to be made upon the basic malaise. For example, David Williams of Bronmeurig who, in 1817, had proposed the establishment of a

¹ D. J. V. Jones, *Before Rebecca* (London, 1973), p. 14; idem, 'The Corn Riots in Wales, 1793–1801', *ante*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 325–27; *Bye-gones relating to Wales and the border counties* (Oswestry, 1857), p. 177. Society looked to the squirearchy/magistracy to act in this way. When grain was scarce in Haverfordwest in 1800, townspeople had declared that unless the condition of the poor were relieved, they would themselves take action. By way of warning, Richard Wright's hothouse and Dr. Edwards's garden were destroyed and Mr. Priest underwent the unpleasant experience of having gunshots fired through his windows (N.L.W., Owen and Colby MS. 2150: James Thomas to John Colby, 5 June 1800).

² *Bye-gones*, 1875, p. 312.

³ N.L.W., Highmead MSS. (unnumbered).

local branch of the London Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor, attempted a positive approach to the problem. Writing to W. E. Powell of Nanteos in an attempt to solicit a subscription to supplement the £200 which Lord Robert Seymour had already collected, he suggested that instead of being used as a 'dole', money collected by the Association should be devoted to a more constructive purpose. Given the poor communications within the county, he argued, the building of a road from Cardiganshire to Breconshire through Strata Florida might well prove a worthwhile project, providing work for the unemployed, who would be kept 'in the habits of Industry', and a reduction in the poor rates which would be to the benefit of the farmers. 'Charity', he observed, 'is very well at a pinch—and to relieve the infirm and the old, but it exhausts itself if it attempts to support a whole Population. Something must be struck out which will benefit him that gives and him who receives, but promiscuous *doles* neither bless the giver nor the receiver.'⁴ Powell, whose estate was on the verge of total financial collapse, was himself maintaining 120 Cwm-ystwyth residents in work to avoid throwing them onto the parish. His neighbour, Thomas Johnes of Hafod, who had died in financial straits the previous year, had always employed many more labourers than necessary, taking on, without exception, any man who requested work. Despairingly he had written to Arthur Young, 'I know no other remedy than feeding, employing and taking care of them'.⁵

Even so, direct charitable contributions were expected of the landed gentry to both local and national causes. The Bowens of Llwyngwair, whose estates lay on the borders of Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire, devoted an average of £35 annually of estate income to various charities throughout the eighteen-twenties and thirties. Their nonconformist sympathies were reflected in the following list of contributions:⁶

The Sunday School Society £1 0s. 0d.

Society for the Conversion of Jews £1 0s. 0d.

Continental Society £1 0s. 0d.

⁴ N.L.W., Nanteos MSS., Box 32.

⁵ Young, *Annals*, XXXIV, 1799, p. 201. W. E. Powell of Nanteos, lord lieutenant and *custos rotulorum* of the county, whose mother lived abroad in self-imposed exile, spent his estate income in a manner which drove his trustees and legal advisors to despair. Despite their efforts to restrain him, Powell's excessive expenditure, aided and abetted by the incompetent management of his local representatives, led the estate increasingly into debt. See R. J. Colyer, 'Nanteos; a landed estate in decline, 1800–1930', *Ceredigion* (forthcoming).

⁶ N.L.W., Llwyngwair MS. 8.

Church Missionary Society £1 0s. 0d.
 Prayer Book and Homily Society £1 0s. 0d.
 Naval and Military Bible Society £1 0s. 0d.
 Bristol and Clerical Society £2 2s. 0d.
 Cardigan National School £1 0s. 0d.
 Newport Bible Society £5 5s. 0d.
 Towards College Building for Church Missionary Society
 Missionaries £2 2s. 0d.
 Cilgerran Methodist Chapel £1 0s. 0d.
 To the widow of the captain that was lost off Cardigan £1 0s. 0d.
 London Missionary Society £2 0s. 0d.
 S.P.C.K. £1 0s. 0d.
 Towards the building of a new chapel at Pembroke £2 0s. 0d.
 Seaman's Friendly Society £2 0s. 0d.
 Moravian Missionary Society £6 6s. 0d.

Other landowners preferred to apply charitable acts to more practical purposes. Major Herbert Evans of Highmead, for example, ensured that the medical expenses of the workers and the poor on his estate were met from his own funds, and his accounts with J. H. Thomas, the Lampeter surgeon, have a special 'for the Poor' section containing such edifying entries as 'Bleeding William Jones, Rhuddlan 6d', 'Worm powder for John Jones child (Carpenter) 4d' and 'Embrocation for Cattw's hand 4d'.⁷ Lady Bonsall, wife of Sir Thomas Bonsall of Fronfraith, further advanced concern for the health of the poor by founding the Aberystwyth Dispensary for the relief of the Sick Poor which, after her death in 1817, continued to function with the support of the houses of Gogerddan and Nanteos.⁸ The dispensary's local importance is highlighted by the request from passengers in the Aberystwyth-Shrewsbury coach that the £5 fine, levied upon Enoch Hughes for using abusive language and driving the coach while under the influence of drink, be directed to the dispensary's use.⁹

It was widely believed among the old county families that donations to charity were among the duties expected of a man in return for the privilege of landownership. As such, these hereditary duties were discharged unceremoniously and unself-consciously. New arrivals, however, who came into estates either by marriage or by some means of collateral inheritance, often felt

⁷ N.L.W., Highmead MSS. (unnumbered).

⁸ G. E. Evans, *Aberystwyth and its Court Leet* (Aberystwyth, 1902), p. 119.

⁹ H. Williams, *Stage Coaches in Wales* (Barry, 1977), p. 27.

moved to lavish charity and patronage in a grand manner as a means of establishing themselves in county society or, perhaps, of creating a good impression upon which to base a case for selection as a parliamentary candidate. Such a man was John Scandrett Harford of Blaise Castle near Bristol, the friend of Hannah More and William Wilberforce, who had married the daughter of Richard Hart Davies of Peterwell and Millfield in 1812. Author, art collector and philanthropist, Harford inherited Peterwell in 1821 and proceeded to spend large sums upon the improvement of the estate, and the provision of a pure water supply for Lampeter and cottage allotments for householders in that town. Though he never actually resided in Cardiganshire, Harford was deeply concerned both for the well-being of his estate and for the development of the borough of Lampeter. His interest was rewarded with an invitation to stand as Tory candidate at the Cardigan Boroughs election of 1849. Perhaps his greatest philanthropic act involved the granting of the site of Lampeter castle for the foundation of St. David's College, of which he was eventually appointed Visitor. Believing that a college at Lampeter 'would tend to civilise and improve the vicinity', he offered the three-acre Castle Field to Bishop Burgess in 1820, subsequently becoming a generous benefactor of the college. Both Harford and John Jones, squire of Derry Ormond and treasurer of St. David's, endowed open scholarships to the new college. To the west of Lampeter, the town of Aberaeron owed much to the opportune marriage of the Hampshire clergyman, Alban Thomas, to his cousin, the Ty-glyn heiress, Susannah Maria Jones. Alban Thomas subsequently inherited the Mynachty estate from Lewis Glynne and, arrayed with two additional surnames, Alban Thomas Jones Glynne proceeded to spend lavishly upon the development of Aberaeron, which stands today as a credit to his particular form of enlightened self-interest.¹⁰

In the early years of the century few Cardiganshire parishes were provided with schools. In the main the education of young people was the preserve of the nonconformist ministers who attempted to instil the rudiments of learning in chapel lofts, farmhouses or even stables. Alarmed at the potential propaganda advantages which

¹⁰ *Dictionary of National Biography*; R. Furneaux, *William Wilberforce* (London, 1974); D. Price, *A History of St. David's College, Lampeter* (Cardiff, 1976). Among Harford's numerous books were lives of Tom Paine, Wilberforce and Michaelangelo, together with several volumes of translations from the Greek classics, especially the Agamemnon of Aeschylus. For A. T. J. Gwynne, see R. G. Owen, 'My Dear Reverend Cousin', *Ceredigion*, VIII (1977), 223–26.

this might yield to the nonconformist cause, the gentry took action to establish schools under their own patronage. Aberystwyth was particularly well served in this respect: in 1812 Pryse Pryse of Gogerddan, Matthew Davies of Cwmcynfelin and George Bonsall of Glanrheidol became trustees of a charitable institution for the education of children, 'according to the established principles of the Church of England'.¹¹ Four years later, Pryse subscribed £200, and W. E. Powell of Nanteos £50, to the establishment of a National School in Aberystwyth, while the former gave generously towards the foundation of a similar school in Lampeter in 1825.¹² Even Pryse's father, Edward Lovedon Lovedon of Buscot Park, Berkshire, subscribed to the National School. Inviting him to visit the school in 1819, the headmaster, Mr. Richards, assured Lovedon that he would be 'much gratified at the improvement which I flatter myself will then be visible in these poor neglected creatures and the gratification must be increased by the reflection that the improvement has been brought about chiefly through the benevolence of yourself and family'.¹³ The 'poor neglected creatures' were also provided, in 1837, with a school at Hafod by Thomas Johnes's successor, the fourth duke of Newcastle, a man who, although intensely unpopular in England, seems to have enjoyed the respect of his Cardiganshire tenants and neighbours.

Later in the century, many dissenters, dissatisfied with what they regarded as the inadequacy of the National Schools, attempted to promote the establishment of School Boards. On the afternoon of 11 February 1871, the ratepayers of Trefeurig township, near Ponterwyd, met to discuss this very matter and were told by the Rev. Isaac Jones, a nonconformist minister, that out of a total of 120 pupils attending the present National School, all but eight were from dissenting families who played no part in the school's management. It was argued, however, by the Rev. John Pugh, vicar of Llanbadarn Fawr, that as the dissenters were allowed perfect freedom, and that no religious teaching was imposed upon them, the existing National School was quite sufficient for the purpose of the township. Moreover, Pugh read out a letter from Sir Pryse Pryse of Gogerddan, who objected very strongly to the establishment of a School Board as this would impose an additional rate burden upon his tenants. Sir Pryse

¹¹ A. L. Trott, 'Church Day Schools in Aberystwyth during the nineteenth century'. *Ceredigion*, II (1952), 68.

¹² J. Hughes to Pryse Pryse, 1825: N.L.W., Gogerddan MSS. (unnumbered).

¹³ T. Richards to E. L. Lovedon, December 1819: N.L.W., Gogerddan MSS. (unnumbered).

undertook, if the present school were really considered inadequate, to build a new and more commodious school at his own expense, to be managed by a committee of five members of whom two could be appointed by himself and the remainder elected by the dissenters of the district. On the face of it, this was a perfectly reasonable proposal offered by a man well-known as a humane and considerate landlord. The fact that it was rejected by the ratepayers, who voted to press ahead with their application for a School Board, was very much a reflection of the new climate of opinion among dissenters who, with their growing sense of political independence, were no longer prepared automatically to accede to the wishes of the gentry. It is unlikely that, in 1871, Mr. Richards would have addressed Edward Lovedon Lovedon in quite the same sycophantic tones as he had felt moved to do in 1819.¹⁴

Provided they had no political pretensions or were not escaping their creditors by spending a period abroad, most Cardiganshire squires passed the bulk of their time on their estates attending to their farms and their county duties. A typical small landowner in this category was George Jordan of Pigeonsford (1806–81). In common with many of his colleagues, he was acquainted with the language, feelings and problems of his tenants and commanded widespread respect in the southern part of the county.¹⁵ With a few notable exceptions, Jordan and his fellow landowners stood four-square in support of the principles of the empire, the country, the crown and, above all, of the established Church. By the mid-nineteenth century, as the local influence of the Church became progressively eroded by nonconformity, many landed families rallied to the cause by restoring decaying churches (often to their architectural and aesthetic detriment) and building new ones in the style of Butterworth and his followers. Isaac Williams of Cwmcynfelin, the Tractarian and close friend of Newton and Keble, built Llangorwen church in the hope that this unfortunate edifice would limit the spread of nonconformist influence in the Clarach valley.¹⁶ Later still, in the 1880s, T. J. Waddingham of Hafod, a scholar and linguist noted for his good works, restored

¹⁴ *Cambrian News*, 11 February 1871. I am indebted to Mrs. Susan Davies for this reference.

¹⁵ E. Hope, *Llangranog and the Pigeonsford Family* (Cardigan, 1931), *passim*.

¹⁶ Isaac Williams's connection with the Oxford Movement is well known. Through his influence, both John Hughes, the Aberystwyth solicitor, and Dr. Rice Williams, one of the last of the *Meddygon* physicians, became connected with the movement (*Welsh Gazette*, 22 October 1903).

Eglwys Newydd and built a church at Devil's Bridge, while the Gogerddan family, besides building the churches at Penrhyncoch and Borth, restored those of Llancynfelin and Llanbadarn Fawr.¹⁷

While they were understandably concerned with supporting the cause of the established Church, the Cardiganshire landed gentry were not, as is so often assumed, necessarily the implacable enemies of nonconformity. On the whole they were, both from sentimental and diplomatic motives, readily prepared to grant leases of land for the building of chapels and meeting houses and, in some cases, even to provide financial assistance. A few examples will suffice to emphasise the point. The accounts of the Abermeurig estate reveal that the proprietor paid a yearly subscription of £5 towards the Meeting House at Abermeurig throughout the second decade of the century.¹⁸ Major Herbert Evans of Highmead contributed towards the cost of building the Cilgwyn Meeting House in 1825, while the Cilgwyn estate granted a lease of one thousand years duration for the establishment of a chapel at Llechryd some thirteen years later. Previously the Nanteos estate had allowed a ninety-nine-year lease of land in Aberystwyth for the erection of a Methodist chapel.¹⁹ Moreover, Thomas Lloyd of Mount Gernos, not content with merely providing the land and part of the cash for the building of Bwlchygroes Congregational Chapel, also held a dinner for the ministers when the chapel was opened in 1833.²⁰ Similarly, in the north of the county, the owners of the great estates of Gogerddan and Trawscoed normally viewed favourably requests by dissenters for land upon which to build chapels and meeting houses. Of all the major Cardiganshire families, the Lloyds of Bronwydd were best noted for their generous support of both church and chapel throughout the nineteenth century. Colonel Thomas Lloyd (d. 1807) was evangelically inclined and caused a chapel to be built upon his own land, while his son Thomas (1788 – 1845) divided his devotional allegiance equitably by attending morning service in the parish church and afternoon prayer in the Calvinistic Methodist

¹⁷ *Welsh Gazette*, 29 December 1938. See also, I. G. Jones, 'The Rebuilding of Llanrhystud Church', *Ceredigion*, VII (1973), 99 – 116. In the minutes of a Vestry meeting held at the church of St. Mary's, Cardigan, on 3 October 1821, it was recorded that the parishioners passed a vote of thanks to Pryse Pryse of Gogerddan '... for his liberal attention to their accommodation in erecting a Gallery in this Church for their Use at his Sole Expense' (N.L.W., Aberglasney MS. 28).

¹⁸ N.L.W., J. E. Roger-Lewis deposit, 1971.

¹⁹ *Welsh Gazette*, 2 February 1903; N.L.W., Minor deposits, 1088A.

²⁰ D. Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-west Wales at the turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 26 – 28.

Chapel. Their descendant, Sir Marteine Lloyd, not only provided the land for the Bryngwenith Congregational Chapel in 1882 (for which his daughter laid the foundation stone), but also chaired various Welsh-language meetings and lectures in other chapels around Bronwydd.²¹ It would, of course, be absurd to suppose that this quasi-patronage of dissent was not associated with a certain degree of expediency. While a landlord could, prior to 1872, exercise a degree of control over the voting behaviour of his tenants, he had no direct influence upon the freeholders, many of whom were dissenters whose votes could readily influence the outcome of an election contest. Accordingly, it was often politic to accede to the requests of the dissenters. When a group of dissenters sought leave to build a meeting house in the parish of Penbryn on land belonging to the Gogerddan estate, the proprietor was advised by his agent: 'I am of opinion it is of your interest to grant them a lease as there are many freeholders belonging to that congregation and will be affronted if you will refuse it'.²²

The wooing of the independent freeholders, regardless of their religious affiliations, was a very important matter and one which a landowner with political interests ignored at his peril. Through family connections and political allegiance, many Cardiganshire squires had contacts both at court and in the bureaucracy, and were thus in a position to influence appointments to positions within the local administration. Indeed, many of the more important families claimed from government ministers the right to fill numerous small local offices and sinecures. Patronage extended over a wide area and covered a plethora of different offices. As lord of the manor, a landowner might control the appointment to manor offices and church-livings, while as a member of parliament he might even be in a position to influence nominations to minor government posts. The sensible disposition of this patronage among freeholders in particular enabled a man to advance his 'interest' within the county. This was uppermost in the mind of Pryse Pryse of Gogerddan, who held the Cardigan Boroughs seat for the Whigs from 1818 to 1849, when he wrote to his father requesting his influence in persuading the authorities to appoint one William Morgan as an excise officer. Morgan's father, noted Pryse, was a freeholder whose vote '. . . should always be at my

²¹ Ibid.

²² William Davies to E. L. Lovedon, 29 October 1792 (N.L.W., Gogerddan MSS.).

service if wanted. It is as well to make as much interest as one can, whether we use it or not.'²³

While the status of the squire as local-opinion leader in political and administrative matters continued to grow, at least until the middle of the nineteenth century, his role as patron and supporter of the ancient literary tradition had begun to decline before 1800. It has been argued that the lack of interest in the ancient Welsh culture stemmed from the decline in the native squirearchy in the eighteenth century and an attitudinal change by which their more anglicised successors considered themselves gentlemen first and Welshmen second. While they continued, out of a sense of duty perhaps, to subscribe to Welsh publications, few such volumes found a place on their library shelves and although they may well have been capable of reading these works, the gentry were becoming increasingly interested in the wider world and a broader culture. Such people, being without the antiquarian zeal of their ancestors, had little enthusiasm for the preservation of ancient manuscript material, to the detriment of their libraries and the general culture of the country.²⁴ Unfortunately, there appear to be very few extant catalogues of libraries belonging to the Cardiganshire gentry, although those remaining largely substantiate this view. The Peterwell library, for example, which was sold in 1781, contained no volumes in the Welsh language despite the fact that the Lloyd family is known to have regularly subscribed to Welsh publications. The collection was typically that of a landed family without academic pretensions, containing volumes concerned with the classics, history and the law, together with a sprinkling of theological works. Poetry and drama were represented by Shakespeare, Bolingbroke, Gibbon, Johnson, Gay and Waller, while works on agriculture and estate management were conspicuously absent.²⁵ The Llwyngwair catalogue of 1825, though recording only one volume in the Welsh language, reflects considerable 'Welsh' and nonconformist interest, as might have been expected in a family with strong Methodist sympathies. Thus, a number of histories of Wales lay alongside a life of Howell

²³ Pryse Pryse to E. L. Lovedon, 3 February 1820 (N.L.W., Gogerddan MSS.). Almost a year later George Bonsall of Glanrheidol informed Pryse that 'The exciseman's father was here today and delivered me the names of six freeholders whom he pledges to show his gratitude: Richard Morgan, Pengwerni, Rees Thomas, Llwynygog, Thomas Jones, Dderw, John Jones, Gilfachyrhiw, John Jones, Blaenyresgair, Isaac Davies, Mynyddbrith, (N.L.W., Aberglasney MS. 28).

²⁴ Eiluned C. Rees, 'An Introductory Survey of Eighteenth Century Welsh Libraries', *Journ. Welsh Bibliographical Society* (1971), pp. 197–258.

²⁵ H. Lloyd-Johnes, 'A Cardiganshire Library', *N.L.W. Journal*, IX (1956), 304–5.

Harris and the works of Vicar Prichard. The Bowens owned a total of 439 books, of which all but 112 were of a religious or semi-religious character, including such improving works as Brooks's 'Satan's Devices' and 'Cordial for a fainting soul'. The remainder comprised the classics, works on estate management and a series of dictionaries of Greek, Latin, French and English, along with one work reflecting an interest in contemporary non-religious matters, Burke's *Essay on the Sublime*.²⁶

If the Cardiganshire squire no longer played a leading role as a patron of letters, his home frequently became a focal point for the growing number of topographical writers, painters and travellers who discovered the 'romantic' qualities of the Welsh countryside in the late-eighteenth century. Outstanding in this respect was Hafod, where the titanic efforts of Thomas Johnes to carve out his 'paradise' from the barren hills of mid-Cardiganshire attracted a great deal of comment and an army of visitors. Apart from agriculturalists, botanists and scholars, including Sir Joseph Banks, Sir J. E. Smith and William Roscoe, Hafod was the venue of numerous artists and literary figures. Among those who braved the hazardous journey along the turnpike from Rhayader to Cwmystwyth were Stothard, Fuseli, Samuel Rogers, Chantrey and Turner. Chantrey's visits are commemorated by the sadly mutilated remains of the superbly sculpted family group now languishing in Eglwys Newydd, while Turner's stay resulted in the fanciful little water-colour of the mansion which happily still survives. Coleridge, too, visited Hafod and it has even been suggested that his 'Kubla Khan', conceived under opium in an Exmoor farmhouse, may have been inspired by recollections of the magic of Hafod.²⁷

Johnes, however, was not the only patron of the arts in Cardiganshire. Inventories of family portraits in many country houses in the county frequently include the illustrious names of Gainsborough, Reynolds, Ramsay and Lawrence. Another even more illustrious name, that of Richard Wagner, has also been associated with Cardiganshire and at least one commentator has averred that a number of Wagner manuscripts were lodged in the mansion at Nanteos.²⁸ However, the suggestion that 'Parsifal' was inspired by Wagner's seeing the Nanteos Cup on a visit to the dilettante, George Powell, has little basis in truth as the composer

²⁶ N.L.W., Llwyngwair MS. 14278.

²⁷ G. Gregson, 'Kubla Khan in Wales', *Cornhill Magazine*, CLXII (1947), 275 – 83.

²⁸ C. M. Davies, 'The Treasure House of Wales', *Country Quest*, III (1962 – 63), 31.

had conceived the plot of the opera some ten years before his visit to Britain in 1855. Moreover, the fact that George Powell was a mere thirteen years old makes it seem rather unlikely that Wagner would have troubled to journey to Nanteos. On the other hand, Swinburne and Longfellow and other members of their circle were regular visitors to George Powell when he was resident in the county during the eighteen-sixties and -seventies. George himself was an important patron of the Aberystwyth Literary Institute, having donated 900 of the 2,000 volumes which comprised the Institute's library. He also made a munificent gesture in 1871 by offering his valuable collection of paintings to the Aberystwyth Public Library on condition that the town council provided an appropriate gallery in which the collection could be displayed. Such, however, were the vacillations of the council as to the design and location of the gallery that Powell withdrew his offer the following year.²⁹

It is extremely difficult to draw unequivocal conclusions and somewhat dangerous to indulge in dogmatic statements as to the overall attitude of the Cardiganshire gentry toward charity, patronage and the growing strength of the nonconformist movement. In an age which encouraged individuality, any group of country gentlemen would contain individuals possessed of a broad vista of moral and social attitudes, and although the mid-nineteenth-century press would have us believe that the majority were richly endowed with those qualities of selfishness and greed which Thackeray gave to the notorious Sir Pitt Crawley, there were, nevertheless, many squires equally endowed with their fair share of compassion and humanity. If their social and moral beliefs varied widely, the squirearchy were virtually united in their conviction of the sanctity of church and state and of the inviolability of the class system. They were also largely unanimous in their attitude toward field sports which, by the end of the eighteenth century, had become their principal pastime and exclusive preserve.³⁰ Although they may have grumbled at his insistence that these creatures be preserved for his pleasure, few tenants on the squire's estate would have denied him the simple gratification of hunting the fox or shooting the pheasant. They did, however, object violently to the provisions of the Ground Game Act of 1831, by which they lost the right to kill the rabbits

²⁹ N. Roberts, 'A Town and its Library', *Ceredigion*, III (1956), 162–73.

³⁰ H. M. Vaughan, *The South Wales Squires* (London, 1926), p. 156. See also R. J. Colyer, 'Limitations to Agrarian Development in Nineteenth Century Wales', *Bull. Bd. Celtic Studies*, XXVII (1978), 614–15.

and hares which fed voraciously upon their crops.³¹ While, as F. M. L. Thompson has suggested, the extent of game damage may have been exaggerated by radical politicians keen to drive a wedge between landlords and tenants, there is little doubting the widespread destruction caused by the rabbit in the middle and later years of the nineteenth century in Cardiganshire.³² The attitudes of landlords towards this problem varied from total rejection of any form of compensation for game damage on the Derry Ormond estate, to full compensation based upon mutual agreement between landlord and tenant at Blaenpant. On the former estate, tenants were granted the right to destroy rabbits on their holdings, although this usually proved a fruitless exercise as the rabbits merely took shelter in the numerous estate coverts. On J. C. Harford's Falcondale estate, however, where tenants were also accorded this privilege, the estate office provided rabbit-proof wire netting for farmers whose fields adjoined rabbit-infested coverts. On other estates, notably at Pentre, keepers were despatched to decimate the rabbit population with gun and ferret when extensive damage was reported, while tenants of the nonconformist John Humphreys Davies of Cwrt Mawr enjoyed the right to destroy any game on their farms.³³ Under the terms of the Ground Game Act of 1882, tenants once again won the right to kill rabbits and hares, although many of them still hesitated to do so for fear of incurring the displeasure of their landlords.³⁴ Besides, the rabbit population was so enormous by now as to be virtually beyond control and it was to remain a major problem until the arrival of myxamatosus in the 1950s.

Like his English contemporary, the Welsh squire was obsessed with field sports. In the late-eighteenth century, hunting and coursing occupied the bulk of his leisure hours, shooting being inhibited by the relative rarity of pheasants in the country at this time. Among the numerous local packs of foxhounds in Cardiganshire, the Gogerddan Hunt dominated the north of the county, while in the south, the Tivyside Hunt, founded in the

³¹ E. W. Martin, *The Secret People* (London, 1954).

³² F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), p. 142. In Merioneth, attempts were made to persuade tenants to combine together to refuse to undertake tenancies of farms overburdened with rabbits (D. Howell, 'Merioneth Agriculture and the farming community a century ago', *Journal Merion. Hist. & Rec. Soc.*, VIII (1977), 72). Such was also the case in the grain lands of Essex, where many prospective tenants would not consider hiring farms unless landlords agreed to control the rabbits or permit tenants the right to shoot the vermin themselves: J. Oxley Parker, *The Oxley Parker Papers* (Colchester, 1964), *passim*.

³³ P.P. XXXVII, 390, 460, 529, 540–41.

³⁴ N.L.W., Picton Castle MS. 3903: Rev. Evan Rowland to C. E. G. Phillips, 1885.

early-eighteenth century, was revitalised under the mastership of Captain Lewes of Llanllŷr in the decade following 1815.³⁵ Soon, however, shooting was to increase in importance and eventually to supercede hunting as the principal field sport. In the early years of the nineteenth century, partridges and hares greatly outnumbered pheasants and a day's shooting for the Cardiganshire gentleman usually involved walking his estate with a pair of pointers, a cumbersome muzzle-loading gun and a potentially dangerous powder flask.³⁶ However, the development of the improved shot-gun led to the belief that a gentleman only shot flying game, of which the high-flying pheasant provided the finest sport. This laid the foundation for the 'battue', where birds were driven over standing guns, and the breeding of enormous numbers of pheasants for the four months of slaughter which commenced on 1 October. The game-books of the Gogerddan estate reveal clearly that even in a county where naturally reared pheasants were relatively rare, increasing expenditure upon artificial rearing and preserving could still guarantee a reasonable bag. Between 1805 and 1818, for example, pheasants represented a mere five per cent of total game killed. This proportion increased, respectively, to ten per cent and 15 per cent between 1835 – 38 and 1855 – 58, while at Ffosrhydygaled, pheasants represented over thirty per cent of the total kill during the eighteen-eighties.³⁷

Prior to the invention of the hammerless ejector in the eighteen-seventies, primitive firearms rendered shooting a highly hazardous occupation. Thus, the Holkham gamebook of 1811 reveals that a certain royal duke's bag included 'killed, of game 0, wounded 4; 1 footman slightly, 1 groom severely, 1 hat (on the head of a friend), 1 horse'. Half a century later, the earl of Cardigan abused his keeper for the excessive extravagance of using men instead of boys as 'stops' at a shooting party. 'Beg pardon, my Lord', answered the intrepid keeper, 'but your lordship will recall that last year you shot down all the boys'.³⁸ Although there is no evidence to suggest the large-scale slaughter and maiming of beaters and other personnel by the Cardiganshire squires, accidents no doubt occurred. It would, for example, be fascinating to learn of the circumstances under which Herbert Evans of Highmead felt

³⁵ *Cardigan and Tivyside Advertiser*, 24 January 1958.

³⁶ R. Longrigg, *The English Squire and his Sport* (London, 1977), pp. 149 – 53, 242 – 44.

³⁷ C. Matheson, 'Gamebook records of Pheasants and Partridges in Wales', *N.L.W. Journal*, IX (1956), 288 – 90.

³⁸ Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

obliged to pay ten guineas to one Joshua Evan, 'as compensation [*sic*] done upon my Person by the shot of a Gun'.³⁹

Like his fellows in the rest of Britain, the Cardiganshire squire regarded as sacrosanct his right to kill game. In consequence, his keepers were involved in a state of perpetual war against a growing army of poachers who stealthily roamed the countryside with net and snare. While the appalling spring gun and mantrap had been prohibited and some of the more severe penalties relaxed in 1827 and 1828, the poacher still risked savage punishment. The rural poor, who all too often relied upon poached game to supplement their scanty protein supplies, regarded with dread the approach of the keeper as they set out on their nocturnal forays. The unfortunate keeper whose duty it was to ensure a plentiful supply of game for the pleasure of his master was despised by the majority of the Cardiganshire rural population, especially if he happened to be one of the many keepers 'imported' by the gentry from England or Scotland.

Both quarter sessions records and estate diaries bear witness to the concern of Cardiganshire landlords to reduce the incidence of poaching, although, perhaps for reasons of sentiment and a desire to maintain local popularity, few of them were keen to bring poachers before the magistrates. Instead, they seem to have preferred to allow their keepers *carte blanche* to mete out rough justice where it seemed appropriate. The fact that the poachers often operated in large gangs meant that the keeper's duties were frequently carried out in the face of considerable danger. 'J. Lewis is indefatigable after the Poachers', wrote William Lewes of Llanaeron in a letter to a friend requesting a pair of pistols for his keeper; 'the night before last, which was a most severe one, just at Bedtime he heard a Gun and away he started in pursuit and did not return for Hours. It is [a] hazardous undertaking and in his own defence I think a pair of pistols would at any rate be safe and would alarm them. He attacked five in number yesterday and seized a Gun from one of them, tho' all had large clubs they made no resistance.'⁴⁰

In a society characterised by grinding poverty and seasonal malnutrition, large-scale poaching by rural labourers and cottagers was inevitable and was no doubt accepted by many landlords. Farmers, too, angered by the sacrifice of their crops on the altar of game preservation, would willingly aid and abet, and not

³⁹ N.L.W., Highmead MSS. (unnumbered), 22 March 1802.

⁴⁰ N.L.W., Nanteos MSS., Box 32.

infrequently joined the poacher at his trade.⁴¹ There can be little doubt that game preservation not only inhibited agricultural progress, but also imposed such stresses within rural society that the Game Laws were to become burning political questions in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. While it is becoming increasingly clear that much of the indictment of the landed gentry by the nonconformist press, pamphlet and pulpit had little factual basis, the preservation of game on the part of many landlords gave rise to genuine grievances. Even so, few men in *early*-nineteenth century Cardiganshire would have been prepared to risk overtly challenging the rights of the gentry in respect of their sporting activities any more than they would have challenged the political hegemony of the landowning class.

Prior to 1832, the Cardiganshire political arena was dominated by a small number of ancient families who enjoyed the more-or-less unquestioning support of their estate tenants and any burgesses and freeholders whose interests they had managed to secure. Allegiance to a particular family on the part of a burgess depended less upon matters of political principle than upon a semi-feudal, sentimental attachment, together with an unwritten agreement that as a recipient of patronage of one sort or another, he would rally to his patron's colours when required. Estate tenants, especially those holding their farms at will rather than as leaseholders, almost invariably voted according to the wishes of their landlord, notwithstanding their own particular view. So much was this the case that election agents were confidently able to predict the outcome of elections on the basis of the 'block votes' from different estates and so tended to restrict their canvassing to estate owners, in the hope that they could be persuaded to instruct their tenants to cast their votes for a particular candidate.

Parliamentary candidature depended in large measure upon the possession of a landed estate yielding at least £600 and £300 per annum for selection as candidate for the County or Borough seats respectively. Moreover, the candidate required substantial cash reserves (or abundant credit) to meet the heavy, and often ruinous, expenses of an election contest. Of importance also was his social standing and concern for the neighbourhood, as reflected in his charitable works, his activities as a justice of the peace in petty and quarter sessions, and, above all, his willingness to support the established interests of a class based upon the ownership of land. Given the obsession of the gentry with matters of lineage, it was

⁴¹ D. J. Williams, *The Old Farmhouse* (London, 1961), p. 18.

helpful too if a candidate were possessed of a lengthy family tree. This was fully appreciated by the banker, Richard Hart Davies of Peterwell, who, as a new arrival in the county in 1812, was wise enough to lend his support to the candidature of Herbert Evans of Highmead as member for the Boroughs rather than seek election for himself.⁴²

Besides supplying members of parliament for the County and the Boroughs, the great landed families were almost entirely in control of local government. Thus, the houses of Nanteos and Gogerddan secured Aberystwyth by nomination to the chief town offices, while Lampeter and Aberaeron were controlled by Peterwell and Mynachty respectively. In Aberystwyth, even after 1832 when a family could no longer legally gain control of a town by mere nomination, sheer weight of tradition was such that the wishes of Nanteos and Gogerddan on local and political issues were rarely ignored. Drawing attention to the innate conservatism of Aberystwyth, Professor I. G. Jones has observed that the town may well have contained men rich enough to meet the cost of parliamentary elections, but their lack of an independent spirit was such that the highest political service to which they aspired was that of nominating or seconding a member of the Pryse family at the election.⁴³

By 1832, however, when the franchise was extended to tenants paying rents in excess of £50 per year, the growing strength of nonconformity had begun to provide tenant farmer and cottager alike with a fresh sense of values. This led them to question the political power of a class which had become increasingly anglicised and less readily identifiable as leaders of Welsh rural society. The deep emotional appeal of the nonconformist movement and the eloquence and sincerity of its leaders won the minds of the people away from the traditional allegiance to local landed families. The sentimental landlord-tenant attachment, although by no means destroyed, had been so eroded by the assault from the pulpit that the manse had come to replace the mansion as a focal point for villagers or farmers wishing to discuss their domestic, financial or personal tribulations. Nevertheless, there prevailed, during the immediate post-Reform period, a general tendency for tenants to continue to vote with their landlords, especially where the latter were Whiggish supporters of parliamentary or tithe reform, with which

⁴² R. D. Rees, 'Electioneering Ideals Current in South Wales, 1790–1832', *ante*, II (1964), 233–49.

⁴³ I. G. Jones, 'Cardiganshire Politics in the mid-Nineteenth century', *Ceredigion*, V (1964), 22–23.

nonconformist voters could readily agree. Of course, there were individuals who could not, in conscience, vote according to the wishes of Tory landlords, and their insistence upon political freedom sometimes led to the *threat* of eviction and the demand that rents be regularly paid on time. Occasionally a squire would instruct his agents to remind the tenants of their 'duties' and quietly to suggest that notices to quit would follow dereliction of such 'duties'. Thus, in the 1839 election, Lloyd of Dolrhaidd threatened his tenants and so did Thomas Lloyd of Coedmore's agent ten years later. The agent's behaviour upset Edward Crompton Lloyd Hall of Cilgwyn, who acted as solicitor for the Tory candidate, John Scandrett Harford. 'I have written to Lloyd', he explained to the Whig candidate, Pryse Lovedon [Pryse], 'to beg to have his authority for stating to tenants so circumstanced that they have as little to fear from him as they have from my father [B. E. Hall], for ye unbiased exercise of their Electoral franchise which I have no doubt he will allow me to do.'⁴⁴ Like his father before him, Pryse Lovedon [Pryse] was strongly opposed to coercion and often encouraged his tenants to vote for whom they pleased. Accordingly, he was deeply angered when fourteen tenants of the Nanteos, Moelcerni and Penglais estates received notice after giving him their support against the Tory, John Inglis Jones of Derry Ormond, in the elections of 1852.⁴⁵

While actual political evictions were rare, a landlord's 'displeasure' could be manifest in a variety of less draconian ways, ranging from refusal to renew leases and insistence upon the immediate payment of rent arrears, to denying tenants' requests for loans of money or agricultural machinery. Annoyed that the voting behaviour of certain of his tenants and workers had made nonsense of his predictions as to the outcome of the 1849 election, Edward Lloyd Hall (who, it will be remembered, had expressed his objections to political coercion) instructed his bailiff to discharge workers at Cilgwyn who had not voted as they had previously agreed and to insist that defaulting tenants promptly discharge their rent arrears, 'as I cannot depend upon their word and will not trust them in anything'.⁴⁶ Even after the passing of the Ballot Act of 1872, the practice followed by many landlords of arranging to transport their tenants to the voting booths and strategically

⁴⁴ N.L.W., Gogerddan MSS. (unnumbered).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ E. C. L. Hall to Benjamin Jones, 10 February 1849: N.L.W. Gogerddan MSS., unnumbered.

positioning their agents in such a way as to observe how a tenant marked his voting slip, provided an additional means of exerting pressure.⁴⁷

With the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, some of the grievances of the dissenters had been relieved, although they were still excluded from the ancient Universities, legally bound to pay tithes and subject to certain restrictions regarding marriage and burial. The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 and the Marriage Act of the following year had permitted them both to conduct their own marriage services and to become involved in local government affairs. Even so, the great hopes which dissenters had pinned upon the Reform Act had failed to materialise and both local and national power still tended to remain the preserve of the landed classes. Thus, in Cardiganshire there were few challenges to the unwritten rule that members of parliament were traditionally elected from the Pryse, Powell and Lisburne families. Only John Lloyd Davies of Alltyrolyn, who amassed a considerable fortune from his law practice, managed to break into the hallowed circle by gaining the acceptance of county society and securing his return as Tory member for Cardigan Boroughs in 1855.

Change, however, was in the offing. An awareness of the realities of rural poverty and agrarian problems gradually dawned upon the countryside and were especially highlighted during the brief years of the Rebecca riots. Subsequently the polemics of radical journalists in both the Welsh and English press helped to create and nurture a climate of opinion in which increasing numbers of people began to question the old order and to exhibit a greater degree of political independence. Although the timidity of nonconformist tenants had caused a disillusioned Henry Richard to withdraw from the 1865 election, the 1868 contest was a very different matter. The Irish Church question now made it impossible for nonconformists of conscience to vote with their landlords. The countryside seethed during the run-up to the election. Tension mounted and tempers flared in an atmosphere which revealed the irreconcilable *political* rift which had grown between church-going landlord and chapel-going tenant. Elizabeth Inglis-Jones, in her fine (but now virtually unobtainable) novel, *Crumbling Pageant*, offers some indication of this deepening sense

⁴⁷ The inventory of T. E. Lloyd's 1874 election expenses includes: 'Conveyance of John Jenkins and John Morgan from London to vote, £7 0s 0d', 'Conveyance to poll of several voters, £1 10s 0d', 'To one wagon and four horses with outriders in colours to bring voters from Ysbytty and neighbourhood, £2 0s 0d.' (Dyfed R.O., D/LL/4/522).

of disenchantment with the old order and the inevitability of its eventual decline. Her heroine, married to the drunken heir of a famous, but decayed, Cardiganshire estate, restores the house to its former glory but is totally unsympathetic to the needs of the farmers, leaving the management of the estate to a firm of solicitors. Thus, she reneged upon her duty as patron and squire and thereby lost the respect of her people. 'Like a scab the estate surrounded Morfa, foul and festering. Some day it would irrupt; its poison, gathered to a head, would break through the thin crust which held it and drown them in its spate. She saw her people, black, angry shadows hiding in their bleak moorlands and sinister little valleys, watching her; biding their time to spring forth and destroy.'⁴⁸

Against this sort of background, the 1868 general election took place with Evan Mathew Richards, a wealthy Swansea businessman, standing as Liberal candidate against the Tory, Edward Mallet Vaughan, nephew of the earl of Lisburne. Richards, proudly boasting the support of the Gogerddan family, fought vigorously and lavished substantial sums on his campaign.⁴⁹ Vaughan, however, relying upon the support of his fellow landlords and a bevy of lawyers for his success, took little interest in events. His sanguine approach proved disastrous to the Tory interest, and Richards was declared elected when polling eventually closed. There followed a Tory backlash of unprecedented proportions, with the boycotting of shops and tradeplaces of Liberal voters and, according to the evidence of Thomas Harris of Llechryd to the Select Committee of 1870, the despatch of almost two hundred notices to quit by 'very nearly all' the Conservative landlords in the county.⁵⁰ While it is possible that the voting behaviour of certain tenants may have been only one of a variety of factors resulting in their receipt of notices to

⁴⁸ This splendid poignant writing is found in several of Elizabeth Inglis-Jones's novels, most of which are concerned (at least, in part) with the decrepitude of the neglected estates of west Cardiganshire. Works like *Starved Fields* (1929), *Crumbling Pageant* (1932) and *Pay Thy Pleasure* (1939) are remarkable portraits of a proud, but now shabby, genteel society in decay. The powerful dialogue and characterization and the rapidly moving plots of these novels help to create a fine portrayal of the *sol y sombra* of life in west Wales during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They have been out of print for far too long.

⁴⁹ Richards enjoyed the support of Colonel E. L. Pryse, M.P., of Peithyll, the uncle of the current squire of Gogerddan, who was subsequently vilified by the Tories for introducing such an 'ultra-radical' to the constituency. Pryse, who purported to follow a moderate political line, was subject to the invective of the Tories for many years after 1868. 'In one thing he was moderate', observed a Conservative elector, 'he was moderate in the attention given to his parliamentary duties'. (Dyfed R.O., D/LL/4/31)

⁵⁰ *Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Select Committee on Parliamentary and Municipal Elections*, P.P., IV (1870).

quit, and that the number of notices was almost certainly a gross exaggeration, the fact remains that the Tories deeply resented the defiance of their tenants and the implicit questioning of the old order.⁵¹ The newly-discovered political independence of the nonconformist tenantry, combined with the passing of the Ballot Act of 1872, left few county families in any doubt that their reign as sole political representatives of their people was drawing to its close, and although Thomas Lloyd of Coedmore unseated E. M. Richards in 1874, he was to prove the last Conservative member for Cardiganshire.

As the century drew to a close, many squires, faced with economic difficulties which caused them to question whether political power was worth the expense of obtaining it, and reeling from the trauma induced by the inevitable breakdown of the old system, became increasingly disinterested in politics. Sir Pryse Pryse of Gogerddan spent much of his time abroad, while at Nanteos, pursuit of the fox took precedence over that of political interest. Lord Lisburne, traditional leader of the Tory party, did not even consider it necessary to subscribe to the party Registration Fund and forced the party to seek the local leadership of the bigoted, roughly-spoken fox-hunter, Mathew Davies of Tanybwllch. Even he apostasized in 1895 and won the county seat for the Liberals, and he was to hold it until 1921 when he had reached the age of eighty.⁵²

The final nail was firmly driven into the coffin of landed political control during the elections to the first Cardiganshire county council in 1889. Eighty-nine candidates, of whom twenty-one were from gentry families, contested forty-eight county council seats. While ten gentry members were elected, only three of these, including Lord Lisburne, were of the major landowning families.⁵³ Having secured the goodwill of the electorate by his support of the Liberal cause in 1868 (against the strong opposition of his mother), W. O. Brigstocke of Blaenpant was elected to the council, although in other electoral districts in the south of the county, gentry contenders for seats were largely rejected. Major-General Jenkins of Penrallt was defeated at Blaenporth, as was

⁵¹ Significantly, Harris had only *seen* between thirty and thirty-five of these notices (P.P., IV, 244–5).

⁵² Davies was eventually created Baron Ystwyth by Lloyd George. He died in 1935 at the age of 94. See Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Cardiganshire Politics: The Liberal Ascendancy, 1885–1923', *Ceredigion*, V (1967), 326–32.

⁵³ The Local Government Act (1888) established local councils of elected members and removed the necessity of a property qualification on the part of candidates. The property qualification for the magistracy was abolished under the Justices of the Peace Act of 1906.

Charles Lloyd of Waunifor at Llandyssul and Charles Longcroft of Llanina at Newquay. Even the popular Sir Martine Lloyd of Bronwydd was rejected in favour of the Calvinistic Methodist freeholder, John Powell. Further north, T. J. Waddingham of Hafod and Henry Bonsall of Cwmcynfelin canvassed without success against the Devil's Bridge postmaster and a local coal-merchant, respectively. The spacious corridors of Trawscoed must for many days have echoed the earl of Lisburne's indignation when he learned that Peter Jones, a Methodist, had been elected chairman of the council of which he, Lisburne, was a member.⁵⁴

The humiliation of the gentry during the county council elections and, after 1894, the elections to the newly constituted parish councils was not, in most cases, the result of personal unpopularity. It was, rather, the reaction of a politically-emancipated class against an archaic institution. Nonconformist leaders, men of conviction who were striving towards national self-awareness, had fanned the flames of discontent for some years and had successfully laid the basis for the rout of 1889. Their condemnation of the gentry, their opposition to the church, and their passionate emotional appeal had captured the imagination of an electorate which, for generations, had mildly accepted gentry rule. Out of nonconformity grew local Liberalism, the seeds of which yielded a harvest of parliamentary members and county and parish councillors, and was to break for ever the political power of the gentry. The eclipse of the gentry as a political force was paralleled by a progressive decline in their economic fortunes which, in many cases, had reached crisis proportions by the 1870s and was to be intensified during the period of agrarian depression which marred the remainder of the century. In the sense that financial embarrassment limited their capacity effectively to carry out their duties as landlords to the satisfaction of the local community, it might be argued that this was an important factor determining the political downfall of the landed gentry. Accordingly, the remainder of this article examines those aspects of the economy of the landed estate which resulted in the financial difficulties leading to the extensive land sales of the opening decades of the present century.

⁵⁴ See Jenkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 274–78; Morgan, *op. cit.*, 330–31.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century it had become almost universal practice, especially on the larger estates in Cardiganshire, to ensure the continuity of a property within a family by effecting a 'family settlement'. The settlement had originally been conceived in the seventeenth century as a device to reduce damage to an estate from the possible imposition of fines, or even sequestration, consequent upon the owner committing a felony or treason. By 1800, however, it had come to be seen as a means of preventing a profligate heir from entirely dissipating his patrimony. The settlement was customarily effected upon the marriage of the eldest son and heir, he being declared tenant-for-life of the estate with the right to enjoy revenue but without the right to dispose of capital. Following his death, the estate was normally entailed to his eldest son. The settlement also made provision for the bride's jointure, together with portions or annuities for daughters and younger sons of the marriage, money for this purpose usually being raised by means of the long-term mortgage. With the concurrence of his father, it was possible for an eldest son, on coming of age, to 'suffer a recovery' of an estate as a means of barring an existing entail prior to effecting a resettlement. This procedure, however, was abolished by the Fines and Recoveries Act of 1833, by which a simpler device for barring entails, the 'Disentailing Assurance', was created.⁵⁵

The family settlement usually necessitated the appointment of trustees, whose function was to ensure that the estate was satisfactorily managed, that rents were appropriated according to the settlement, annuities and dowries paid and, above all, that the life-tenant behaved responsibly in the discharge of his duties towards the estate. Most estates had two or three trustees, of which one at least would be a lawyer and the others either relatives (without a financial interest in the estate) or close family friends. Trusteeship could be a highly satisfying occupation when the life-tenant and his family were cooperative and responsible. However, as trustees of various settlements on the Gogerddan and Nanteos estates discovered, it could equally be a frustrating and annoying business when one was involved with a spendthrift, self-indulgent and uncooperative life-tenant. Prior to the death of Colonel Lloyd of Mabws in 1820, his uncle, John Lloyd Phillips of Dale Castle in Pembrokeshire, had agreed to act as trustee to the Mabws estate

⁵⁵ See G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry* (London, 1976), p. 68, and B. W. Harvey, *Settlement of Land* (London, 1973), pp. 11–34. One effect of the family settlement, which tended to lead to extravagance and eventual mismanagement of landed estates, was the right granted to an eldest son to borrow against the expectation of his inheriting the estate.

before the coming of age of the heir, John Lloyd. By 1823, when his great-nephew came of age, Lloyd Phillips was beginning to regret this 'good natured act'. In a series of choleric letters to Evans and Sons, the Haverfordwest solicitors, he lamented having to deal with his great-nephew, who had 'neither the Manners nor the Morals of a gentleman', and whose behaviour was an amalgam of 'Simulation, Dissimulation, Deception, Hypocrisy and Lies . . .'. The tenants of Mabws had believed that young Lloyd would resemble 'in mind and conduct' his great-grandfather, whose memory was still revered. They were sorely disillusioned. 'This Reptile', complained his great-uncle, had led a dissolute life and was already heavily burdened with debts which he flatly refused to pay, and ' . . . is of opinion that the Trustee and Executor was to run every Risque of Mind, Body and Estate for *his* Benefit and Comfort'.⁵⁶ Although Lloyd Phillips's unhappy spell as a trustee was hardly typical, the unpaid job, even with the cooperation of a reasonable life-tenant, could still be burdensome, involving a great deal of correspondence and travelling.

Apart from giving gratuitous advice on financial matters, working with legal authorities in cases of litigation, and restraining the tendencies of a life-tenant to overspend, the trustees were responsible for ensuring that legatees were paid the jointures, allowances and annuities which they enjoyed under the family settlement. These often amounted to enormous sums, especially when allied to annual payments of interest on mortgages which had been raised for the purpose of land purchase or the discharge of old encumbrances. The occupier of an entailed estate encumbered with dowries and annuities frequently found himself forced into a vicious circle of borrowing to pay off annual interest and to maintain social position, thereby precipitating further indebtedness. A long-lived dowager in possession of a large jointure would often encumber an estate to such a degree as to stifle any good intentions which a life-tenant may have had with regard to the improvement of his estate. Thus, the Trawscoed estate would have been deeply relieved by the death, in 1791, of Dorothy, wife of the second Viscount Lisburne of Trawscoed, who had outlived her husband by fifty-one years at an annual cost to the estate of £400.⁵⁷ It will be shown below that fixed annual outgoings of this sort had a crippling effect upon the overall

⁵⁶ J. P. L. Phillips to Evans & sons, 6 and 24 February 1824; 8 May 1825: Dyfed R.O., D/L/P/2/18(a); D/L/P/2/18.

⁵⁷ J. M. Howells, 'The Crosswood Estate, its growth and economic development, 1683 - 1830' (unpublished University of Wales M.A. thesis, 1956).

economy of the estate. 'Extricate me from these Horrible Annuities', wrote Captain Webley-Parry of Neuadd Trefawr to his lawyer in 1824, prior to the coming of age of his son; '. . . remember, it is a money concern in which friendship must be put on one side, and as you regard my future as well as my Son's . . . you will in this case act promptly after things are decided; let me see you do this for it must be done . . . get this business through well and properly and you secure my firmest friendship; reflect only on these ruinous annuities'.⁵⁸

It was possible to discharge encumbrances by raising mortgages on a settled estate (at rates varying between three and five per cent) and so to pay off annuitants with appropriate capital sums. This procedure was adopted at Gogerddan where, by the late-nineteenth century, annual income was insufficient to meet the yearly requirement of £5,000 for the growing army of dowagers and annuitants. Payment of capital sums was, of course, appropriate where the level of mortgage interest was less than the total annual outgoings in the form of annuities. Even so, mortgage interest and the repayment of capital raised on mortgage could absorb a substantial proportion of estate income. Typical of the range of fixed annual outgoings payable on a large estate is the following list, drawn up by the Trawscoed agent for the attention of Ernest Augustus, earl of Lisburne in 1844. The list covers

Charges on the Welsh estates of Ernest Augustus, earl of Lisburne, 1844

| | <i>Annual Charge</i> |
|--|----------------------|
| Mortgage of £15,800 (for younger children's portion) | £632 |
| Life Policies | £1,047 |
| Annuity to Elizabeth Sara Ann, Money | £317 |
| Countess's pin money | £300 |
| Interest on purchase money of estates £7,000 | £350 |
| Mortgage on Abermad Estate £12,000 | £480 |
| " " " " £13,000 | £520 |
| " " " " £5,000 | £250 |
| Mortgage on Trawscoed £15,575 and repayment of capital | £2,000 |
| | <hr/> £5,896 <hr/> |

⁵⁸ N.L.W., Neuadd Trefawr MSS. 1381, 1382. An officer in the Royal Navy, Webley-Parry was writing from Rochester with the request that he receive £1,000 yearly from his estate to support the life-style expected of a gentleman in His Majesty's Service.

charges payable on the earl's Welsh estates and does not include the heavy encumbrances upon the Lisburne estates in Devon, Northumberland and Durham.⁵⁹ It will be noted that an item of £1,047 for 'Life Policies' appears in the list. Life insurances were effected by landowners in the mid-nineteenth century to provide capital sums for repayment of mortgages upon their death, and, after 1894, for the discharge of estate duty.

Once this sum had been paid out of the rental of slightly less than £10,000, the balance remaining for personal expenditure, household costs and general estate maintenance was relatively modest. Further examples of the level of debt chargeable against Cardiganshire estates are given below.⁶⁰

| <i>Estate</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Rental</i> | <i>Total Debt</i> |
|----------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Mabws | 1825 | £1,600 | £21,494 |
| Neuadd Trefawr | 1828 | £2,000 | £18,314 |
| Mynachty | 1830 | £4,000 | £10,000 |
| Derry Ormond | 1850 | £2,570 | £10,000 |
| Cilgwyn | 1855 | £2,822 | £40,000 |
| Derry Ormond | 1873 | £2,800 | £28,000 |
| Bronwydd | 1877 | £5,300 | £94,000 |

In addition to mortgage capital, the total debt shown above includes the 'bond debts' owed to tradesmen and other landowners, which had a habit of accumulating until the creditors, either acting together or as individuals, threatened legal action. Such action would often precipitate a prudent withdrawal of the debtor to the continent, Calais and Boulogne being especially favoured by the Cardiganshire gentry as havens of retreat from tiresome creditors. The Dowager Mrs. Powell of Nanteos died in Calais in 1826, having narrowly escaped imprisonment by the French authorities for accumulating debts, while her son-in-law, Roderick Richardes of Penglais, was forced to cool his heels in both Calais and Boulogne at various stages of his career.⁶¹

⁵⁹ N.L.W., Crosswood Deeds and Documents, I, 1504.

⁶⁰ N.L.W., Neuadd Trefawr MSS. 1431, 1436; Tyglyn MSS. 22; Derry Ormond MSS. 314, 408; Mynachty MSS. 103–5; Dyfed R.O., D/LL/3/70; D/LP/2/18. Mortgage and bond debts on most of these estates pale into insignificance alongside the Stackpole estate in Pembrokeshire, which had accumulated debts of £123,274 in 1793, their discharge necessitating the sale of 10,000 acres of land in 1802 (D. Howell, 'The Pembrokeshire Gentry', in T. Barnes (ed.), *Carmarthenshire Studies* (1974), pp. 170–71). Even this appears miniscule alongside the debt burden of the Devonshire estates which forced the seventh duke to pay out the annual sum of £40,000 in interest charges throughout the eighteen-sixties (D. Cannadine, 'The Landowner as Millionaire: the finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, 1800–1926', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, XXV (1977), 79).

⁶¹ N.L.W., Glanpaith MSS. 311.

William Powell of Nanteos only managed to avoid imprisonment for debt on account of his membership of the House of Commons, which immunity was denied to Colonel John Vaughan of Trawscoed once he left the House. 'The Vaughans of Crosswood are yet in Paris', wrote Elizabeth Parry of Llidiardau to her husband; 'now that he is out of Parliament he cannot appear in England because of his creditors. What a pity a man of his property should involve himself, whereas a little economy, a little punctuality in paying would have averted all his difficulties and he might yet have been our member with credit.'⁶²

Household expenses, election costs, payments for the stables, kennels and the home farm all tended to build up estate debt, especially when the social and political aspirations of a landowner soared above the level of his income. Throughout the eighteenth-twenties and -thirties, William Powell of Nanteos was constantly being reminded by his agent of the imminent ruin of the estate unless he curtailed his spending and exercised severe retrenchment. Having settled the account of William Roberts, the butcher who had come to him 'with tears in his eyes' on 11 June 1833, he counselled Powell: 'Therefore, dear Colonel, let me try and entreat you to turn these matters in your thoughts most seriously for it is very evident we are getting backwards and unless some change takes place you will be in the same unfortunate situation you were some years ago . . . In consequence of the difficulty I find in paying folks I have been obliged to stop all improvements on your estate.'⁶³ The fourth duke of Newcastle, who purchased the Hafod estate from the executors of Thomas Johnes, succeeded in getting heavily into debt with the tradesmen of nearby Aberystwyth. In 1840, his agent, Hall W. Keary, reminded the duke that he owed some £900 in the town and, 'the thing is, I am sorry to say, made extremely public and gives a handle to those who have not a friendly feeling towards your Grace to raise all sorts of tales in every part of the county'.⁶⁴ His predecessor at Hafod, Thomas Johnes, although considered one of the more enlightened Cardiganshire squires, also accumulated heavy debts with small tradesmen. This no doubt created considerable local resentment and fuelled the anti-landlord agitation which was to reach its peak later in the nineteenth century. While the larger landowner could borrow ever-increasing sums on mortgage with

⁶² N.L.W., Llidiardau MSS. unnumbered (1818).

⁶³ N.L.W., Nanteos letter-books.

⁶⁴ University of Nottingham (Newcastle) MSS. NeC 8687(a).

his estate as security, or, in some cases, upon the strength of money invested in industrial or railway projects, increasing indebtedness on the small estate was a recipe for disaster. This was especially so when the landowner had few financial resources beyond the capital value of his property, and the squire with a landed income of £1 – 2000 per year could hardly afford social or political ambitions if he wanted to maintain his lands in good order.

Despite the problems of making a direct comparison between estate accounts at different periods, consequent upon varying book-keeping methods of agents and their clerks, it is clear that estate expenditure followed a broadly similar pattern throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, if fixed outgoings in the form of annuities and jointures (representing between one-quarter and one-third of total outgoings) and personal expenditure are excluded, the bulk of expenditure on most estates was in the area of general estate repairs and improvements and the maintenance of the household and sporting establishment. From the Nanteos accounts of 1815 – 19 and 1899 – 1909, overall expenditure, net of annuities, breaks down as follows:

| Date | General estate repairs and improvements | Household, stables and kennels | Farm | Rates and taxes | Gardens and timber | Miscellaneous and landlord's personal drawings |
|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------|-----------------|--------------------|--|
| 1815 – 19 [Mean Expenditure £6,753] | 47% | 20% | 14% | 1% | 7% | 11% |
| 1899 – 09 [Mean Expenditure £4,861] | 44% | 30% | 3% | 7% | 6% | 10% |

On the assumption that the increased proportion of expenditure in the household arose from the fact that the home farm, by the eighteen-fifties, was being tenanted, and that administrative changes necessitated higher payments of rates and taxes, the overall pattern of expenditure was much the same for the two periods, with estate repairs and improvements absorbing the bulk of the outlay. Throughout much of Cardiganshire, the eighteenth-century landlords had let their farms on long leases, leaving the tenants to bear the cost of building repairs, with the result that by 1800 many farms were in a sad state of neglect. So much was this the case during the Napoleonic Wars that some landlords, faced

with the prospect of entirely untenable farms, themselves undertook the burden of building and repair costs, even where long leases still persisted.⁶⁵ The standard works of Kent, Marshall and Young, with which many landowners would have been acquainted, constantly stressed the importance of conveniently laid-out farm buildings as an element in efficient estate management. Although financial limitations prevented most Cardiganshire landowners from commissioning such splendours as Robert Adam's farm at Culzean castle, Wyatt's semi-circular poultry house at Winnington Hall in Cheshire and Henry Holland's magnificent dairies at Woburn and Althorp, they did attempt to allocate a proportion of the gross rental towards building improvements.⁶⁶ At Nanteos, expenditure in this area averaged £2,000 per year between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the mid-1860s, declining to an average of £800 during the years immediately preceding the Great War, a decrease arising from the dramatic contraction in the size of the estate. Significantly, over eighty per cent of the total estate labour bill in the periods 1832–47 and 1882–1900 comprised payments to estate labourers, carpenters, plumbers, sawyers and masons. At Gogerddan during the eighteen-fifties, expenditure on repairs and maintenance varied between £2,500 and £3,500 each year, representing forty-five to fifty-five per cent of total expenditure exclusive of mortgage and annuity payments.

Governmental stimulus to estate improvement was provided by the Public Money Drainage Act of 1847, a palliative offered to the landed interest as a means of sweetening the bitter pill of Corn Law repeal the previous year. Under the terms of this act, the government made available on loan, for the purposes of drainage, the sum of £4 million, repayable over twenty-one years at an interest rate of three per cent. At the same time a number of companies were established for the purpose of lending money to landowners wishing to effect a wide range of estate improvements. Among these companies were The General Land Drainage and Improvement Company, The Lands Improvement Company and The Land Loan and Enfranchisement Company, all of which were prepared to advance money for financing schemes proposed by a landowner via the office of the Inclosure Commissioners.

⁶⁵ For a consideration of landlords' capital investment in other parts of Britain, see in particular B.A. Holderness, 'Landlords' Capital Formation in East Anglia, 1750–1870', *Econ. H.R.*, 2nd ser., XXV (1972), 441–46; R. Perren, 'The Landlord and Agricultural Transformation, 1870–1900', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, XVIII (1970), 50.

⁶⁶ See J. M. Robinson, 'Model Farm Buildings of the Age of Improvement', *Architectural History*, XIX (1976), 18–20.

Although both Gogerddan and Trawscoed availed themselves of the services of the Land Loan and Enfranchisement Company, relatively few estates seem to have expressed interest in the activities of the companies. Thus, in south Wales as a whole a mere £34,765 was borrowed between 1847 and 1872, of which £7,495 found its way to Cardiganshire.⁶⁷

The Public Money Drainage Act was eventually repealed by the Improvement of Land Act of 1864. This piece of legislation provided for government loans for such purposes as drainage, reclamation, enclosure, road improvement, and the erection of cottages and farm buildings. Again, applications were made through the Inclosure Commissioners, who would sanction loans provided that, in their view, the overall improvement would effect a permanent increase in rental value in excess of the annual interest chargeable on the loan. Outlays in Wales and in Cardiganshire under the 1864 Act were as follows:⁶⁸

| | Drainage | Buildings | Others |
|---------------|----------|-----------|---------|
| Wales | £170,413 | £276,788 | £50,467 |
| Cardiganshire | £13,960 | £38,514 | £6,411 |

Other landowners chose to eschew government aid, preferring instead to limit expenditure on permanent land and building improvements to a certain proportion of income each year. Thus, at Trawscoed and Derry Ormond, expenditure in this area was absorbing between fifteen and twenty-two per cent of annual rental during the last quarter of the century, while at Waunifor, Neuadd Trefawr, Pantirion and Pantaeson disbursements on permanent improvements amount, respectively, to seventeen, fifteen, seven and eight per cent of the rental.⁶⁹ It is clear, however, that though many landowners had attempted to maintain, and in some cases to improve, the condition of farms and cottages on their estates by mid-century, the neglect of previous generations was all too evident in the generally poor standard of both houses and farm buildings in Cardiganshire by 1900. As early as 1811, a return of the Peterwell estate had attributed the very slow increase in the growth of the local population to dilapidated housing conditions. The latter was to be rectified by J. S. Harford a few years later.⁷⁰ As a banker, with

⁶⁷ P.P., XL (1895), 688 – 89.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ P.P., XXVII (1894), appendix.

⁷⁰ N.L.W., Falcondale MSS. VIII.

substantial sources of finance, Harford could effect major improvements despite the relatively low rental value of his estate. Other landowners, however, reliant entirely upon their landed income, were in a less favoured position, and while they may have wished to upgrade the standard of their properties, financial limitations were compelling. Mortgages, enforced upon successive life-tenants faced with the crippling cost of supporting annuitants and dowagers and, perhaps, with the need to discharge debts accumulated by irresponsible predecessors, imposed interest charges which, in many cases, approximated to annual rental income. The modest surpluses remaining were often insufficient even to allow for the effective maintenance of existing estate structures, let alone to provide for investment in new farm buildings. Thus, livestock buildings often remained cramped, dark and ill-ventilated, barns inadequate for their purpose and the house on the smaller farms often little better than the cattle-byre, with low, damp, smoke-filled rooms and poorly thatched roof. The problem, moreover, was one of sheer scale, in which estates covered large acreages, contained large numbers of farms, but yielded only modest rentals. In the 1830s, for example, Nanteos (21,900 acres), Trawscoed (42,000 acres) and Gogerddan (28,600 acres), apart from having responsibility for several hundred cottages, encompassed 133, 168 and 142 farms respectively. With rentals of £5,900, £9,800, and £5,800, from which heavy annual fixed costs had to be deducted, the amount remaining was simply not sufficient to allow even for a 'holding operation' to prevent further deterioration. On the smaller estates of Neuadd Trefawr (4,000 acres) and Derry Ormond (5,000 acres), with annual rentals of £1,520 and £3,772, their respective yearly expenditure of £225 and £837 on maintenance and improvement in the last quarter of the century would have had relatively little impact when spread across the large number of small farms on the estates. Some indication of the actual costs of different categories of farm buildings is provided by a series of estimates prepared for the Trawscoed estate office in 1827–88:⁷¹

| <i>Building</i> | <i>Dimension</i> | <i>Cost</i> | | |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------|----|----|
| | | £ | s. | d. |
| A house at Nantbir | 36' × 20' | 136 | 13 | 0½ |
| A house at Rhosrhydd | 33' × 20' × 13' | 126 | 3 | 6 |
| Stable and Granary | 46' × 20' | 95 | 3 | 9½ |

⁷¹ *Crosswood Deeds and Documents*, II, 823, 863.

| <i>Building</i> | <i>Dimension</i> | <i>Cost</i> | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------|----|----|
| | | £ | s. | d. |
| Stable | 24' × 20' | 37 | 18 | 4 |
| Stable | 20' × 40' | 67 | 7 | 5 |
| Cowhouse | 37' × 20' | 57 | 10 | 9 |
| Cowhouse | 40' × 20' | 75 | 5 | 2 |
| Cowhouse and cartshed | 20' × 50' | 73 | 18 | 8 |
| Barn | 20' × 28' | 40 | 3 | 8 |

The reports of various enquiries at different stages of the nineteenth century drew attention both to the unsatisfactory condition of houses and cottages on Cardiganshire estates and to the archaic and irrelevant nature of the farm buildings, many of which did not effectively meet the needs of a predominantly pastoral agrarian economy. There were, for example, even in the last years of the century, insufficient turnip and cattle houses, a deficiency which tended to force farmers to continue to sell their cattle as lean animals for fattening in England, rather than on the more lucrative local market.⁷² Henry Tremenheere, reporting to the *Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* of 1870, praised R. J. Loxdale of Castle Hill for his notable interest in improving the dwelling houses of his labourers by building numerous cottages of three bedrooms. Of Cardiganshire landowners as a whole, however, he was highly critical, a principal target of his criticism being the practice of granting long-term building leases, under which the tenant built his own cottage with his own materials, often with disastrous results. This was particularly the case on the Gogerddan estate, where only forty out of a total of five hundred cottage tenants actually paid rack rents.⁷³ 'The poor housing conditions and the absence of sanitation (which, we are told, caused villagers regularly to resort to the churchyard for the purposes of nature) left Tremenheere in little doubt that few of the Cardiganshire gentry were 'duly alive to their moral responsibilities and true interests in providing improved accommodation for the class upon whose comfort and welfare so much of their own prosperity depends'.⁷⁴ Conversely, the Welsh Land Commissioners, reporting a quarter of a century later, concluded that most landowners *were* aware of their duty to maintain their buildings

⁷² P.P., XV (1897), 710–11.

⁷³ *Report of the Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* (1870), P.P., XIII, 53.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

and cottages in good and tenantable repair. Recognising the need for a particular course of action had to be balanced by a realisation of the difficulty of obtaining the wherewithal to effect the action. This was the dilemma of most landlords who, although aware of their duties, had become, in many cases, too poor to discharge them. This was certainly the case as far as Cardiganshire was concerned and a study of available estate accounts yields little evidence to substantiate the standard nonconformist allegation that landlords doggedly refused to assist tenant farmers in improving the buildings on their farms.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, agrarian depression resulted in the reduction of rentals which were already unrealistically low, and land sales enforced by burdensome overhead charges which further contracted the size of estates and therefore, of rental income. Accordingly, while a relatively high proportion of income may have been spent upon estate building, the total amount available declined as the century progressed. By the final decade, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that on some estates insufficient cash was available even to maintain the farm buildings erected in the palmy days of the Napoleonic Wars. On others, prudent management and moderation of life-style on the part of the life tenant could help a great deal. Thus, at Nanteos, after two generations of profligate life-tenants, W. B. Powell, by abstemious living and careful husbandry of his limited resources, was able to make some impact upon the decrepit condition of the estate buildings. At Neuadd Trefawr, heavy encumbrances had been such that no cash was available to maintain estate buildings during the life tenancy of D. K. W. Webley-Parry. Between his death and the coming-of-age of the heir in 1892, good management by the Trustees had permitted the discharge of the encumbrances and the refurbishing of most farm buildings on the estate.⁷⁵

In the two final decades of the nineteenth century, landed estates became subject to progressively increasing economic and social pressures. Declining rental incomes, a static (or even growing) burden of encumbrances and increasing levels of taxation caused many landowners to question whether the ownership of large tracts of land was really worth the prestige which it was believed by some people to confer. Taxation especially was a cause of great concern, particularly as the income tax, land tax, succession duty, poor, highway, county police and education rates

⁷⁵ N.L.W., Neuadd Trefawr MS. 1621.

all fell heavily upon the landed interest, while the growing number of villa dwellers whose incomes derived from non-landed sources was comparatively immune.⁷⁶ This apart, by the late-nineteenth century there were numerous alternative areas of investment, particularly joint-stock companies, which gave highly lucrative returns on invested cash. Besides the financial incentives to abandon landownership, the social and political scenario was changing rapidly. The débâcle of the County and Parish Council elections left little doubt in the mind of the landed gentry that the possession of extensive tracts of land no longer conferred real political power or attracted the same deference as in the past. The groundswell of anti-landlordism, nurtured by Thomas Gee and his supporters with their demands for a land court, fair rents and fixed tenure, together with the anti-tithe agitation, caused many a furrowed brow as the traditional leaders of the county reeled from the tirades of the 'League for those oppressed by the Tithes', the 'Welsh Land, Commercial and Labour League' and the Socialist 'Land and Labour League'.⁷⁷ Having for so long enjoyed the loyalty of their tenants, the Welsh gentry could hardly believe that the inconceivable had come to pass and that the old paternalistic order was doomed. Had they continued to benefit from the confidence and loyalty of their tenants, they might well have withstood economic adversity for rather longer. As it was, radical invective had by now succeeded in alienating many of the people from their landlords, thereby administering a profound psychological shock to the landed gentry, many of whom decided that now, perhaps, was the time to go. Thus was the scene set for the flood of land sales characteristic of the early decades of the twentieth century.

Realising that the economic changes, in particular, necessitated some means whereby a life-tenant could sell settled land and reinvest in a more lucrative area, parliament passed The Settled Land Act of 1882.⁷⁸ This act permitted a life-tenant and his trustees to dispose of part of an estate and to invest the capital so realised for the purposes either of effecting improvements and discharging encumbrances or mortgages, or of purchasing stocks to yield income for annuities. Cardiganshire landowners were quick to take advantage of the act, especially as a means of

⁷⁶ See H. Craigie, 'Taxation and the Landed Interest', *J.R.A.S.E.*, 2nd ser., XIV (1878), 385–415.

⁷⁷ P. Jones-Evans, 'Evan Pan Jones; Land Reformer', *ante*, IV (1968); J. D. P. Dunbabin, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1974).

⁷⁸ 45 & 46 Vic., cap. 38.

disposing of outlying areas of land, distant from the estate office and thereby difficult to manage. On the Gogerddan estate, for example, 3,000 acres of settled land in Troedyr aur and Bettws Evan were auctioned in 1882, followed by a further 5,184 acres in north Cardiganshire in 1886, and 2,069 acres in the same area in 1895.⁷⁹ Demand for farms was brisk, despite the decline in livestock prices in the mid-eighteen-eighties which decimated farm incomes, and land-hungry tenants clamoured to buy their holdings. Fearful at the prospect of their farms falling into the hands of commercially-minded persons from industry or the professions who might wish to exact rents which would allow a realistic return on their capital investment, they mortgaged themselves to ensure future security. Thus, when the Moelifor estate came onto the market in 1884, tenants bought almost half the land, while tenants of Trawscoed paid over £16,000 for 1,161 acres of outlying farms sold by the estate in 1900.⁸⁰

While the legislation of 1894 and the spectre of estate duty had worried many landowners, it was a relatively unimportant factor affecting land sales over the next decade. Lloyd George's 1909 budget, however, with its revolutionary proposals for Incremental Value Duty and Undeveloped Land Duty came as a rude shock to the landed interest, which reacted by offering large acreages for sale.⁸¹ The fears of present and future fiscal action against the landed interest by Liberal governments were epitomised by Walter Long, the Tory frontbencher, in *The Times*. Long had been forced to sell off a large part of his lands in Wiltshire as a result of government policy, which '... compels all of us who are interested in land to most carefully consider our position. We who are owners have done our best to act as if in partnership with our tenants and have not been governed by purely mercenary considerations. A change, however, is coming over the scene and those of us who do not possess other sources of income must regulate our affairs accordingly.'⁸² Edward Webley-Parry-Pryse of Gogerddan and Neuadd Trefawr expressed similar views at his rent audit speech, maintaining that the 1909 budget proposals

⁷⁹ N.L.W., Sale Catalogues.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Tenant demand continued throughout the years before 1920. When 3,298 acres of the Sunnyhill estate came under the hammer in 1918, tenants bought 1,713 acres. Local tenants often found themselves bidding against affluent London Welshmen and were concerned that the latter might push prices to an unrealistic level in an attempt to purchase a few acres of their homeland (*Welsh Gazette*, 8 August 1918).

⁸¹ Estate duty was levied at the rate of eight per cent on estates valued in excess of £1 million in 1894, being increased to twenty per cent in 1914 and forty per cent in 1925.

⁸² Quoted by F. M. L. Thompson, op. cit., p. 322.

would compel him 'to go and find a new home somewhere else', sentiments which were condemned by the liberal *Welsh Gazette* as 'arrant nonsense'.⁸³ The buoyant demand for land in the decade prior to the first world war eased off during the war years, to recover once again after 1918. The increased cost of living and the dramatic social changes following in the wake of the peace, and in some cases the loss of a direct heir at the front, stimulated further sales throughout the 'twenties and 'thirties, many tenants being keen to buy their holdings despite the depressed state of agriculture consequent upon the repeal of the Corn Production Act in 1921.⁸⁴ Some indication of the chronology of land sales in Cardiganshire over the period 1870 – 1950 is given below, the table being based largely upon surviving sale catalogues in the National Library of Wales.⁸⁵

CHRONOLOGY OF ESTATE SALES, 1870 – 1950

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Estate</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Acreage</i> |
|-------------|---------------|--|--|
| 1870 – 1880 | Alltyrodyn | Llandyssul (30 Sept. 1874) | 4,500 |
| | Court | Llanwenog (1879) | 843 |
| | Gogerddan | Troedyrour Bettws Evan (30 July 1875) Penbryn Llangranog | 1,800 |
| | Hafod | Cwm-ystwyth (1872) | 16,000 |
| | Noyadd | Llanarth (12 August 1879) | 1,267 and Mansion |
| | Pantydefaid | Llandyssul (21 October 1879) | 1,064 |
| 1881 – 1890 | Alltyrodyn | Llandyssul (7 Sept. & 3 Nov. 1881) | 5,042 and Mansion |
| | Gogerddan | Troedyrour Bettws Evan (20 July 1882) Goginan (30 June 1886) Llanbadarn | 8,184 and accommodation and building land |
| | Moelifor | Llanrhystud (1884) | 1,010 |
| | Trawscoed | Outlying Areas (10-16 June 1890) | 8,714 |
| | Tyglyn | Aeron (28 Sept. 1883) | 1,268 |

⁸³ *Welsh Gazette*, 2, 9 September 1909.

⁸⁴ For the situation in Wales as a whole, see J. Davies, 'The end of the Great Estates and the Rise of Freehold Farming in Wales', *ante*, VII, No. 2 (December, 1974), 188 – 99.

⁸⁵ N.L.W., Sale Catalogues; N.L.W. MS. 9871C; N.L.W., Bronwydd MSS. 7281 – 82; N.L.W., Amphlett Lewes deposit; N.L.W., Morgan Richardson MS. 973; N.L.W., Tyglyn MS. 17; N.L.W., *Crosswood Deeds and Documents*, I, 1476; *Welsh Gazette*, 28 December 1938.

| <i>Date</i> 1891 – 1900 | <i>Estate</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Acreage</i> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--|--------------------|
| | Gogerddan | Aberystwyth (10 July 1895) Houses, Hotels, Land and Cwmcynfelin Estate | 2,228 |
| | Nanteos | Aberystwyth (5 August 1897) Houses and Building Land | 369 |
| | Penglais | Aberystwyth (7 September 1876) Houses and Building Land | — |
| | Trawscoed | Outlying Land (12 June 1900) | 1,161 |
| 1900 – 1910 | Gernos | Troedyrour (1907) | 1,373 |
| | Glanrheidol | Goginan (9 September 1910) Shops, Houses, Lead Mine (2 August 1903) | 914 |
| | Pigeonsford | Troedyrour (14 June 1907) | 887 and Mansion |
| | Tyglyn | Aeron (6 November 1906) | 655 |
| 1911 – 1920 | Abermeurig | Talsarn (28 September 1914) | 783 |
| | Blaenpant | (29 June 1912, 4 July 1914) | 4,258 |
| | Bronwydd | (1911) | 2,290 |
| | Cwmcynfelin | Clarach (4 July 1920) | 320 |
| | Derry Ormond | Lampeter (15 August 1919) | 8,000 |
| | Fronfraith | Llanbadarn (4 June 1917) Houses in Aberystwyth | — |
| | Gilfachwen | Llandyssul (17 June 1918) | 338 |
| | Llanaeron | Ciliau Aeron (5 July 1918) | 1,845 |
| | Llanina | New Quay (14 July 1911) | 512 |
| | Mabws | Llanrhystud (23 Sept. 1918) | 1,000 |
| | Mynachty | Llanarth (2 October 1915) Properties in Aberaeron | — |
| | Sunny Hill (Nanteos) | Tregaron (1918) Shops, Inns and Houses | 4,638 |
| | Penglais | Aberystwyth (19 July 1915) | 210 |
| 1921 – 1930 | Bronwydd | Llangynllo (1922) | ? |
| | Gogerddan | Cwmsymlog (8 March 1924) Houses | — |
| | Gogerddan | Lodge Park and (21 July 1930) Angler's Retreat | 7,375 |
| | Gernos | Troedyrour (1922) | 198 and Mansion |
| | Llanaeron | Ciliau Aeron (31 July 1922) Hotels, Buildings etc. in Aberaeron | — |
| | Trawscoed | Ysbytty Ystwyth (18 April 1921) and Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn | 1,368 |
| | Trawscoed | Lledrod, Caron, (22 Sept. 1924) Llanafan | 5,006 |
| | Tyglyn | Ciliau Aeron (2 April 1930) | 169 and Mansion |

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Estate</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Acreage</i> |
|-------------|---------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1931 – 1950 | Bronwydd | Llangynllo (5 August 1937, 4 August 1944) | 4,247 and Mansion |
| | Cilgwyn | Newcastle Emlyn (1932) Buildings and Land in Llandyssul | — |
| | Derry Ormond | Lampeter (4 July 1944, 12 December 1950) | 2,838 and Mansion |
| | Gogerddan | Mansion and land (1950) | 3,839 |
| | Mynachty | Llanarth (30 Sept. 1936) Lands and (12 December 1938) Property in Aberaeron | 4,600 |
| | Trawscoed | (1947) | Mansion and Remainder of estate |

Clearly in the early phases, the larger estates were primarily concerned with disposing of outlying property, although Hafod was sold *en bloc* to the Waddingham family in 1872.⁸⁶ Pressure of taxation, however, finally forced sales closer to the nucleus of the estate and the early years of the twentieth century witnessed the disappearance of many old families from the smaller properties and the dramatic contraction of the great estates. By 1930, when the last male heir died, the Nanteos estate encompassed a mere 4,336 acres, while nearby Gogerddan had disposed of 19,587 acres between 1870 and 1930, a further 3,839 acres being purchased, together with the mansion, by the University College of Wales in 1950. Trawscoed, too, having contracted by 17,000 acres in 1924, was eventually transformed into a public institution, becoming the regional headquarters of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1947. Other gentry houses, after outliving their original purpose, have assumed new roles as academic institutions, while the elegant mansion of Penglais now comprises the 'tied cottage' of the principal of the University College of Wales. Cwmcynfelin, Glanrheidol, Mabws, Mynachty, Llanllyr and Castle Hill feature among the many houses which, though divested of the vast majority of their lands, still remain as family homes. Other mansions have become farmhouses, while still others have simply decayed. A fate typical of some smaller estates was that of Mount Gernos. By 1907, mortgage commitments enforced sales of land to the extent that only the home farm, the mansion and 192 acres remained. These were eventually sold in 1916 and the mansion was extensively renovated by the new owner. Unfortunately, he was compelled to sell in 1922, the buyer being a farmer-cum-livestock

⁸⁶ It had also been sold in 1855, 1864 and 1870.

dealer who unceremoniously stripped the mansion of its fittings and converted the shell into a piggery, in which form it survived until 1960.⁸⁷ With the death of T. J. Waddingham in 1938, what remained of Hafod was allowed to moulder until the building was destroyed in the nineteen-fifties. An unsightly pile of rubble, the occasional portable latrine and, perhaps the ultimate horror, a seasonal mushrooming of caravans are the only reminders of the work of Baldwin and Nash.⁸⁸

In the space of little more than a century, changing social and economic conditions had effected the destruction of the splendours of Hafod, the reduction of Nanteos to a fraction of its former glory and created a scenario in which the shade of Pryse Pryse of Gogerddan could witness the death of one of his great-grandchildren as a vagrant and another as a retired factory worker.⁸⁹ Economic embarrassment which had been an important factor in the destruction of the political hegemony of the gentry, had heralded the decline of the class. Although the majority of them were not the rapacious, spendthrift hedonists which their critics would have us believe, and were in fact conscious of their duties toward their tenants, they were frequently prevented, due to lack of funds, from discharging these duties as effectively as they might have wished. This inevitably resulted in a lack of confidence among the tenantry which the radicals were not slow to exploit and which was to result in the events of 1889. Finally, if their role as political leaders of the countryside had ceased to exist by 1900, respect and admiration for the gentry as individuals lingered on. Even in the 1980s, the names of Pryse of Gogerddan and Powell of Nanteos still carry a ring of magic and manage to evoke murmurs of nostalgia from many country people in Cardiganshire.

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⁸⁷ D. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–25.

⁸⁸ J. Thomas, 'The Architectural Development of Hafod, 1796–1882', *Ceredigion*, VII (1974–75), 215–29.

⁸⁹ R. J. Colyer, 'The Pryse Family of Gogerddan and the decline of a great estate', *ante*, IX, No. 4 (December, 1979), 407–31.