

# The Micro-Management of a Late Seventeenth Century English Landed Estate

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[NB: this paper forms part of a larger project entitled 'The Social Topography of a Rural Community'. The first fruits of the project have recently appeared as 'Below Stairs at Arbury Hall: Sir Richard Newdigate and His Household Staff, c.1670-1710' [The IHR Marc Fitch Lecture 2010], *Historical Research* (2011): <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2011.00574.x/abstract>

## **Context:**

**Personal:** Sir Richard Newdigate was a failed politician and suspected Whig conspirator with time on his hands in the early 1680s; a godly but irascible spendthrift who was also something of control-freak with a penchant for measuring, computing and collecting information about the landed, mineral and human resources of his Warwickshire, Leicestershire and Middlesex estates—expressed in a series of personally annotated but invariably incoherent account books, and culminating in 1684 in a remarkably detailed five-volume survey of his Arbury estate which includes, famously, a 'census-type listing' of the names, ages and occupation of the 780 inhabitants of the parish where his estate lay: Chilvers Coton—a place-name (like Colyton in Devon or Shepshed in Leicestershire) with which the historical demographers like to conjure.

**Economic:** as is well known, the period from the 1660s to the 1720s was one of demographic stagnation, when falling prices and rents and above all arrears dictated that landlords needed to be more proactive in retaining and securing tenants; Newdigate's predecessors had enfranchised the copyholders on the 2400-acre Arbury estate so the tenantry was divided between a significant number of freeholders (many of whom were resident with small holdings for which they paid modest quit rents); a lesser number of leaseholders on tenures of twenty-one years (rather longer than might be expected at a time when tenants were reluctant to tie

themselves to fixed rent for any longer than two or three years at most) and about thirty cottiers holding as tenants-at-will tiny plots (usually just a croft and garden) for which they paid unimproved rents of under £1 a year. In 1684, the jurors had described farms larger than thirty-four acres (roughly a yardland or more) as 'middling'; those between four and thirty-four acres as 'small'; and those of less than four acres as 'very small'. In these terms, only three of Newdigate's own tenants were middling farmers, eleven were small farmers, and the eighty-odd that remained were either very small farmers or cottiers

### *I: Discourses*

How did Sir Richard Newdigate, second baronet of Arbury Hall near Nuneaton (Warwickshire), deal with his tenants? More to the point, how did he think they should be dealt with? In an undated memorandum probably drawn up shortly before he inherited the Arbury estate in 1678, Newdigate argued that the principal problem confronting the late seventeenth century landlord was a recalcitrant tenantry who were 'often backward in paying their rent and sometimes very crosse'.<sup>1</sup> But the appropriate response to such quarrelsomeness depended on two key variables which structured Newdigate's discussion of relations with his tenants: first, whether the tenants held simply at the will of the lord or more securely by lease; and second, whether rents were payable with or without demand from the landlord. On the face of it, dealing with arrears accrued by tenants-at-will (such as virtually all those who rented cottages from him in Coton Town and in Griff) should not have been a problem, since theoretically they could be turned off very easily if they failed to pay the rent. On the other hand, too heavy-a-hand with evictions would quite possibly leave him out of pocket with empty, dilapidated cottages and unprofitable land-in-hand. There was accordingly a very careful balance to be struck between the aggressive policing of the rental to ensure regular income and the tolerance of arrears to avoid empty tenements.<sup>2</sup>

Sir Richard accordingly resolved that he would be lenient in respect of one missed rent payment but ruthless thereafter. He thought it prudent 'never [to] stay with any tennent [in

arrears] above six months, whatever pretence hee hath to perswade forbearance'. Newdigate's logic here was simple: the tenant who could not pay one rent, he argued, 'cant pay two together', and he was only prepared to exercise patience if the tenant undertook 'upon a penal bond' to pay the arrears within three months.<sup>3</sup> For those who owed only one payment, however, he was determined to be tolerant: 'never take a severe course with any one before demand', he wrote, even though 'the agreement may bee to have rent paid without demand'. If the tenant promised to pay 'within a competent time', then it was appropriate to 'forbear so long to see if they keep tough', but only if the arrears was no more than six months' rent. But forbearance should be finite in such cases: once any tenant in arrears 'break promise, trust him no more'. With tenants-at-will, therefore, forbearance must be forthcoming, though it should have tolerable limits.

The situation with the leaseholders (like virtually all of Sir Richard's tenants in the Woodland and many of them in Coton Town) was slightly different, for most of them were on twenty-one-year tenures that theoretically at least gave them somewhat greater protection and suited Newdigate because it tied them (albeit at preferential rents) to his lands for an extended period. These tenants required a rather more robust strategy. 'If the tennant hath a lease and a good bargain', he argued, 'the best way is by re-entry to bring him to pay his rent'. But here again there was a distinction to be made between those leaseholders whose rents were payable only on demand and those who were expected to pay spontaneously. Newdigate had a preference for rents 'payable without any demand' which he thought 'the best way of bargaining', because in the case of any tenant with a generous lease who became 'slack' and fell into arrears the landlord may 'without more adoe' re-enter the estate. For those whose rents were payable only on demand, however, the landlord had rather less room for manoeuvre and could not evict the tenant without 'the ceremony of demanding the rent at the house' and then re-entering on the grounds of 'default of paiment'. Newdigate evidently thought that the public humiliation of the tenant by sending the bailiffs round to threaten his eviction would only reflect badly on him as a landlord. Even then, he cautioned, eviction should only be act of last resort. The threat of re-entry for default, he urged, should only be 'to fright, not to undoe his

tenant', and one wonders whether Newdigate, like the earl of Dorset's steward at Croxall (Staffordshire), was prepared to contemplate, in a stylised ritual no less heavy with the symbolism of terror and mercy than the granting of a judicial pardon, eleventh-hour reprieves even after the tenants had been formally evicted.<sup>4</sup> Throughout all this, Newdigate's assumption was that tenants would inevitably fall into arrears and that the landlord was under an obligation to protect his own interests by exercising a certain degree of forbearance. His memorandum is an indication of just how conscious a landlord could be that the cards of the rental market were stacked firmly in the favour of the tenant on a late seventeenth-century estate.

In some respects, the jurors of Sir Richard's court of survey of 1684 agreed, though they subtly turned Newdigate's attitudes and practices to their own advantage. To be sure, the third article of enquiry had asked them a series of leading questions: they were asked to assess whether the tenants 'pay their rents well'; whether 'their usuall times for payment' were quarterly or otherwise; whether any of them were 'forced, or urged, to sell their goods to loss' in order to meet their landlord's demands; and whether a quiet word with the bailiff might not secure them 'money at any time, to stock or seed their grounds or to pay their rents', for up to three months without interest so long 'as they keep their time punctually to repay it'. Most of all, Sir Richard wanted to know whether or not tenants 'run in arrear less now times are ill, than they did formerly when times were good, and when they payd half yearly'.<sup>5</sup> The article of enquiry, therefore, discloses the principles on which Sir Richard's estate policy was based: quarterly rent-payment; short-term interest-free loans, and even (in his apparent willingness to subsidise the purchase of stock or seed in return for a guarantee of rent payment) a hint of informal *ad hoc* arrangements to farm 'by halves'.<sup>6</sup> It is also clear, moreover, that he expected his tenants to be grateful for his generosity both in resisting the temptation to force them to liquidate their assets in order to make rental payments and in lending them money on preferential terms.

The jurors' response to Newdigate's survey repays close reading and is worth quoting at length.<sup>7</sup> They came straight to the point by conceding that 'quarterly payments are a great

benefitt and no prejudice at all to the tenants', especially now that 'times are very ill for making rents as they have been for tenn years last past'. They believed that both the landlord and his tenants were now 'in a better condition' than they were under Sir Richard's father and uncle 'when times were much better'. On the one hand, the landlord had been forced to abate 'very little' rent, so that his income and in turn the nominal rental value of the estate remained steady.<sup>8</sup> On the other, there were no more instances of tenants being 'utterly undone by having liberty to pay their rents when themselves thought fit, whereby they ran much behind & at last all their stock was seized'. In principle, they argued, quarterly rents were actually preferable for the majority of tenants: 'although it be an advantage to a good husband' to pay at six-month intervals, 'tis not so to the generality of tenants, some mens money burning in their pockets, who can better pay a little' rather than 'a great deal' at a time. Their confidence that poorer tenants could realistically be expected to make smaller but more frequent rent payments was perhaps borne of their involvement in dairying, which often sustained very small farms and was attractive precisely because it promised consistent returns which could then be used to pay rents regularly.<sup>9</sup> Even so, it is equally clear that the jurors felt that although affluent and thrifty men like themselves might prefer to remain on a half-yearly schedule, their less prudent and less well-off neighbours were incapable of managing their cash flow effectively.

Having accepted Newdigate's innovations in estate management, however, they took the opportunity to quote Sir Richard's own words back at him. He had 'often declared' to them, they reported, that although it was within his power to evict any of his tenants on a year's notice if he pleased to do so, he would be very reluctant to exploit this authority to the full. They also noted that he had, presumably in an effort both to protect his honour as a gentleman and give himself wriggle-room, made this undertaking only 'intentionally' and 'not by way of promise'. Even so, it was Sir Richard's avowed intention that if the tenants 'serve God, honnour our King, live honestly and peaceably with their neighbours, kepe ther house and building in good repair and pay their rents', he would neither 'turn out them or their children' nor 'raise their rents whatsoever good pennyworths [i.e. bargains] some may have, as he wishes all had'.<sup>10</sup> In

rehearsing these words, the jurors implicitly endorsed Sir Richard's vision of the model tenant: God-fearing, loyal, quiet, respectable and, above all, solvent. But equally, in reminding him of his quasi-public statement of the desirability both of financial forbearance in time of trouble and of preferential agreements which offered value for money, the jurors were carefully placing on record Sir Richard's recognition of his obligation to protect his tenants. Similarly, while they confirmed that Sir Richard had indeed been extending borrowing privileges to tenants who were now compelled to pay quarterly and had thereby prevented goods from being sold to loss, they implied that this had occurred only in the case of those few wealthier tenants whose annual rents 'are above ten pounds'. They were even able, moreover, to manipulate this acknowledgement of Sir Richard's generosity, arguing that it would be a very great inconvenience if the interest-free loans offered by Newdigate were discontinued and recording their hope for posterity that 'future lords of the manor' would take their warning 'into consideration'. The jurors implicitly argued both that Newdigate had made a public commitment to avoid evictions and that although quarterly payments were tolerable, perhaps even preferable, for some tenants, they were sustainable only if landlords were prepared to offer easy credit. This remarkable document might be read as the acceptable face of tenant subversion, a formal statement of the kind of sentiments often covertly expressed in the rent strikes, rescues of distrained livestock and reluctance to take up leases on the lands of evicted farmers which characterised the infra-politics of landed society in this period.<sup>11</sup>

## *II: Practice*

How far does this subtle and cautious exchange about the ideals of estate management reflect the reality of relations between landlord and tenant in Chilvers Coton? Newdigate's private accounts are, in fact, packed with elaborate schemes for augmenting his income in ways which would have radically transformed his relationships with his tenants. In the winter of 1686-7, for instance, he was fantasizing about the money that might be made by 'stocking the Spring Woods, turning them unto tillage, making great canals on the heath, floating the

parkland, [and] valuing and raising [the rents of] the farms now set dog cheap'. In September 1693, he flirted with the idea of enclosing those parts of the estate which remained unimproved and calculated that his annual income would increase by over 83 per cent as a result. By January 1696, he was thinking even more ambitiously about 'the highest improvement' that might be made at Chilvers Coton: 'buy Mr Perkins land who offers to sell it to me, but preserve the chief rents, and get in the farms & cottages with what others can be procured; settle the linen manufacture at Coton to prevent increase of pore; lay ground to Nuneaton; float Greenmore Field; and establish a market [in the parish] if it may be'. These wide-ranging pie-in-the-sky proposals, which encompassed virtually all those strategies of 'positive action to support the rental' identified by Christopher Clay, came to nought.<sup>12</sup>

Newdigate's policy towards his tenants accordingly has to be reconstructed piecemeal from his dealings with individual farmers and cottagers. A number of themes emerge from this analysis: first, the problem of arrears; second, his fine-tuning of the level of rent; and third his more positive strategy to support the rental.

The over-arching context for Newdigate's management of his estates was, unsurprisingly, the problem of rent arrears. As early as 1675, the Lady Day rents of the Chilvers Coton tenants were over £207 (or 35 per cent) in arrears three months after they were due.<sup>13</sup> Even substantial farmers, who might be expected to find rent more easily, were substantially in arrears. When the juror Robert Parker died intestate in 1688, for instance, he was so far behind on his annual payments of almost £66, that even with an inventory valued at over £140 Newdigate could only hope to recoup the outstanding rent from his widow 'by degrees' over five years.<sup>14</sup> In July 1690, his bailiff William Jacques drew up a list of some twenty-seven tenants who had simply 'gone off', absconding with outstanding arrears of over £71. To these, he added the names of another thirty existing tenants who together owed over £106. In addition four tenants of Lord Coventry's estate, which Newdigate had contracted to lease and manage, were also in arrears, one of them for almost £28 (or almost 14 per cent of the annual value of the Coventry estate) and another had not paid at all for over twelve months.<sup>15</sup> It was not, moreover,

only the tenant farmers who were in arrears, for the cottagers liable for nominal sums were unable (or unwilling) to pay even their peppercorn rents. By Christmas 1690, five of the thirty cottiers were in arrears for sums ranging between 3d. and 2s.6d. and a further three were behind by Lady Day 1691.<sup>16</sup> Given these problems, it is hardly surprising that Newdigate instructed his bailiffs to forgive arrears as they did frequently in the early 1690s.<sup>17</sup> Even so the 'barren years' of the mid-1690s, disfigured by harvest failure and by the problems associated by the recoinage, resulted in widespread failure to pay.<sup>18</sup> The poor cottiers seem to have been hit particularly hard and paid no rents at all at Midsummer 1695, Lady Day and Midsummer 1696 and Christmas 1698. Perhaps this was simply a matter of Newdigate deciding that, despite the dangerous precedent that might be set, it was hardly worth the trouble of attempting to secure nominal rents from small tenants who lacked even the coin (let alone the income) to pay up. By 1700, however, he recognised that this strategy was inevitably compounding his cash flow problem and indebtedness: 'I do passionately desire', he wrote, 'to make a reckoning and clear with all my tenants'.<sup>19</sup>

The evidence of evictions is, however, sparse. This was an economic context in which the key issue was the retention, and failing that, the replacement of tenants. The centrality of this question for Newdigate is nicely brought home by his calculation in December 1691 that over 1062 acres (almost 44 per cent) of the 2419 acres he owned in Chilvers Coton, were untenanted.<sup>20</sup> Cumulatively, this unprofitable land represented almost 15 per cent of his potential annual income. The problem of land in hand was only compounded by Newdigate's lease of almost 400 acres of Thomas Coventry's estate of which, although he thought it 'not really worth above 6s.8d. per acre', he would 'willingly let five of the twenty parcels' of meadows he had in hand.<sup>21</sup>

From this perspective, the significant question is not why there so few evictions, but why there were so many? In their reply to Newdigate's article the jurors had not only noted the recent tendency of tenants paying half-yearly to run into arrears but had quoted two specific examples of indebtedness to the landlord resulting in 'distress' (in both the emotional and legal



senses of that word). One of these episodes concerned Richard Paul of Coton, a labourer aged 34 in 1684. The jurors noted that until recently he had held a 'good pennyworth' as a tenant-at-will in the Woodland with an annual rent of £5, but forfeited it 'by running in arrear two rents together'. Turned out of his house by Newdigate, Paul subsequently lived in a little house in the Heath End without either garden or common right rented from William Wood and by 1694 was in receipt of a shilling in Newdigate charity money.<sup>22</sup> So far, then, so ruthless. Although there is no further evidence of evictions until the 1690s, Newdigate had by 1691 become so attuned to the possibility that he might have to find new tenants after evicting those that fell into arrears that he was keeping a list of those 'that have desire to take in Chilvers Coton together with the sums they might be prepared to pay'.<sup>23</sup>

There were three cases of eviction in the 1690s, two of them concerning tenants-at-will and one of them a leaseholder: [*no time here to rehearse the details, but could say more in questions*]

Generally, however, the economic climate dictated that the possibility of eviction was more apparent than real. Newdigate's notoriously hot temper made him only too ready to threaten eviction if he felt that his tenants were truculent, insubordinate or ungrateful. In June 1694, for instance, William Johnson 'railed . . . exceedingly' at his landlord about a pit Newdigate had dug near the New Inn. Newdigate explained 'mildly' that he had deliberately left it uncovered in the hope that the parishioners might take the benefit of any further gravel that they might dig out, but Johnson 'went on railing at me and would not hear me nor let me alone', following him from place to place as he went about his business. Newdigate complained that Johnson 'used me as I was never used by any tenants son in all my life'. Worse still, 'his father standing by part of the time did not gainsay him'. Newdigate instantly told the older Johnson 'to provide himself against next Lady Day for the father of such a son shall rent nothing of me'. All those present, however, seemed to recognise the threat precisely for what it was: empty. 'Both father and son', thought Newdigate, 'seemed to like it slighting me and my land for they neither of them seemed concerned at it'.<sup>24</sup>

On the whole, therefore, Newdigate simply had to deal sympathetically with tenants in arrears. This was evidently the case with William Suffolk, a labourer to whom Newdigate had apparently been consistently charitable. Newdigate had originally let Suffolk a house and four acres of garden in Long Itchington for £3 a year, but subsequently thinking it too expensive he first abated the rent by a third and then added a further two acres, reckoning that the whole six-acre plot was worth £2.10s. a year. Suffolk nonetheless 'did no good there and lived idly', falling into arrears. Rather than evict him altogether, Newdigate summoned Suffolk back to Coton, and had by 1684 set him, his wife and four children up at his own charge in a new house with a rood of ground in Griff at an annual peppercorn rent of 2s. The condition of this extremely generous arrangement was that Suffolk agreed to pay 'about 10s. a year out of his wages by degrees till he had cleared his arrears'.<sup>25</sup> Suffolk was nonetheless still dissatisfied with the agreement and in June 1692 effectively withheld his labour and by implication also his rent: Newdigate noted that Suffolk 'lyes abed and will not work' on the grounds that the bailiffs 'stop his wages when he has earned it' for reasons of which he claimed to be ignorant. Newdigate apparently compromised again, forgiving him his arrears, but insisting on a more substantial annual rent of 10s., payable quarterly. Although Suffolk spurned the opportunity to work off his debt by labouring for his landlord, he subsequently found paying his way on the new terms even more difficult. By 1698, his long-standing difficulties with hearth tax arrears resulted in his imprisonment for debt, but Newdigate stepped in again, instructing his bailiff to bail Suffolk out of gaol.<sup>26</sup> This generosity is all the more remarkable given Suffolk's delinquency in other respects, for in 1698 he was substantially fined in the manorial court for his failure to attend church.

Newdigate frequently made notes on individual cottages or farms which could be let at a higher rate. He thought that although it had only a small home close, the ancient cottage with common right rented by the nailer William Cooper was 'worth more money' than the £1.0.s.6d he currently paid, though he did nothing about it. Newdigate was more aggressive with the ground rented for £3.4s.1d by the collier William Cox which he thought 'an extraordinary great pennyworth'. He accordingly 'declared he would have it' and let it for £4 p.a., though Cox

remained as an under-tenant in the associated house and home close.<sup>27</sup> He believed the nineteen acres of Temple Park currently let at 5s. an acre were 'dear enough because of spoil by getting coal' but thought its rental value might be increased by 'ploughing and burning and floating'; that eight cares of the Park adjoining Lea Field could be worth at least £6 a year (250 per cent of its current valuation) if it were floated; and that the income from Buggins Close would almost double to £7 p.a. if it were floated.<sup>28</sup> The rental market would not, however, bear such schemes, and Newdigate was far more regularly concerned about the possibility of tenants falling into arrears. By the 1690s, he was abating rents in order to help them avoid that fate. In 1690, for example, Newdigate considered the rental arrangements for two middling farms, the forty-four acres rented by Richard Drakeford and the thirty-seven acres by Michael Pain, and decided that, although they were 'better land than ordinary', their rents were excessive. He therefore granted what he considered to be 'great allowance or abatement', of just over 57 and 42 per cent respectively.<sup>29</sup> Such piecemeal arrangements were superseded in 1691-93 when Sir Richard abated the parish taxes paid by all his Chilvers Coton tenants by 20 per cent, presumably making up the difference himself.<sup>30</sup>

Newdigate was equally proactive in coming up with arrangements that would encourage tenants to take land on attractive terms. In January 1691, for instance, his agreement to let William Baker have the 'bigger part of Lea Field for £8 a year besides all taxes and levys' included a commitment that Newdigate would 'ditch him out a meadow to float and mound the whole at my charge, 'allow him wood for a hovel' and pay the 2s.6d. cost of drafting the lease. The following month, he let a four-acre close to Widow Frances Smith at £2 p.a. but promised her hedge-wood to fence and gate it and the use of his team of oxen when it went to plough.<sup>31</sup> Even more remarkable is the case of Robert Pain who was the tenant Newdigate found for the woodland after the eviction of Richard Paul. Pain was a husbandman who had in 1684 been aged 53 with five children aged ten or younger, and he had a problematic record as a tenant. The jurors noted that Pain had been 'ruined by holding a hard pennyworth' (a house and yardland at an annual rent of over £19), and had been turned out by his landlord 'for running in

arrears, and owing more than he was worth. 'Being like to be ruined himself, & to become chargeable to the parish, by reason of his wife and many young children', Sir Richard apparently 'took pity of him and his', and not only 'let him a good pennyworth' but also 'lent him corn & money to live upon, & money to manage the ground he let to him, which was almost half as much as he had before of as good land at a fourth part of the rent'.<sup>32</sup> The episode perfectly encapsulated the peculiar combination of altruism and self-interest which characterised Newdigate's handling of his tenants: although he was prepared to evict his own tenant-at-will when he fell a year in arrears, he nonetheless accommodated another inhabitant with a poor credit history and loaned him sufficient cash and corn to keep him and his young family off the parish

More direct evidence of Newdigate's sensitivity to local need is provided by his subsidised grain sales. Over five weeks in the winter of 1696, Newdigate sold over thirty quarters of corn to twenty named tenants at a total purchase price of £4.8s.<sup>33</sup> This in itself represented a significant subsidy, since the going rate rose from an average of 5s.4d. to 6s.8d. per quarter in the harvest years 1696-97.<sup>34</sup> In four cases, however, Newdigate received no payment at all and in twenty-three others the purchaser remained indebted, in two cases for as much as 14d. but in most cases for as little as 2d. Cumulatively, the credit extended here represented some 18 per cent of the nominal price. Of the twenty purchasers, twelve (four labourers, three sawyers, two colliers, a silk-weaver, a miller and a mason) can be identified in the 1684 census; six of them had been exempted from the 1670 hearth tax, and a seventh had been assessed only on one hearth. One, the collier Richard Robinson, had been a collector of Chilvers Coton by 1689 and was on a list of four Newdigate cottagers in arrears at Christmas 1690.<sup>35</sup> This charity of consumption harks back to the 'social economy of dearth' practised by those late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century landlords who had been expected to live on their estates as paragons of virtue and hospitality. In particular it echoes the testamentary charity of one of his mid-Tudor predecessors as lord of Arbury, Harry Acres, who in 1567 has bequeathed half a strike of corn to 'every poor collier in Chilvers Coton'.<sup>36</sup> But Newdigate's

subsidised grain sales also imitate the mechanics of the endowed charitable trusts which had come to play such a significant role in mediating relationships between the rich and the poor in the parish by the late seventeenth century.

### *III: Characterising Newdigate's Estate Management*

In the light of the complexities and contradictions of Newdigate's strategy of estate management, and especially of the significant mismatch between his privately-stated ambitions and his more modest achievements, it is peculiarly difficult to characterise the relationship between landlord and tenant on the Arbury estate. In some respects, especially the sale of grain to his tenants at subsidised prices in 1696-97, Newdigate's approach resembles sixteenth-century ideals of hospitality, in the sense of the charitable exercise of patronage. This impression is lent further credence by the fact that his almost permanent residence at Arbury Hall over a period of thirty years provided hospitality in another more regular sense, the provision of very significant employment opportunities not only for those twenty-odd servants who were co-resident with him but also for those numerous tenants who were casually or permanently employed around the estate. This is precisely what seventeenth-century gentlemen meant by 'keeping a great house'.<sup>37</sup> Whether Newdigate really did throw open his doors and feed his tenants annually at Christmas (as did Horatio first Viscount Townshend at Raynham Hall, Norfolk, into the 1680s) is unknown, though he certainly did make provision for wining and dining his tenants and their wives at the gates of Arbury Hall on the occasion of his funeral.<sup>38</sup>

In some respects, then, Newdigate's lordship looks backwards. In other ways, however, he seems to have entirely jettisoned the languages and attitudes of that older generation of landlords who had regarded themselves as earthly stewards of a God-given estate. His tenants may have been given ale and their wives burnt beer after Newdigate's funeral in 1710 but the poor were kept safely at a distance.<sup>39</sup> He was, moreover, certainly determined to give a good account of his estate management (though his accounting practices themselves were singularly

unsuited to the basic requirement of balancing income and expenditure) but insofar as he recognised obligations in respect of the estate it was with an eye not on the poor but on his own posterity.<sup>40</sup> The key discourse here was *improvement*, and Newdigate deployed it not only in his adventurous schemes for augmenting the Arbury rental but also in the very act of having the estate surveyed in such a systematic and exhaustive manner.<sup>41</sup>

In some respects, therefore, it is tempting to characterise Newdigate's activities as a form of 'agrarian capitalism', encouraging the transition from a rural, peasant society based on subsistence-orientated agriculture to a market-dependent economy in which agriculture is productive enough to support a large non-agricultural population employed in industry and services. But this perspective arguably fails to do justice to the complexities of Newdigate's motives in undertaking his great survey and his practices in managing his estate. Exploitation may, of course, have been one reason among many: the survey was certainly instrumental in a strategy to keep a tight grip on his economic resources, to reduce the number of poor and to maximize the return on his landed assets. But the survey was no less effective as an instrument for the maintenance of *social* order and the exercise of *social* power, *over and above* any economic purposes it may have had. Indeed, the survey might be read as an attempt to establish and impose order in a changing world where traditional social and economic relations were being disrupted, especially by falling prices and rents, but also by high turnover of tenants.

Newdigate's strategies were also in some respects those of 'fiscal seigneurialism', the more demanding estate management practised by landlords from the late sixteenth century, which might involve *inter alia* the revival of forgotten manorial obligations and exactions, and the commercial exploitation of fuel, mineral and water resources.<sup>42</sup> But fiscal seigneurialism also implied the extraction of higher rents, which was a completely unrealistic proposition in the last three decades of the seventeenth-century. Not only was it impossible to augment the rental, it was increasingly difficult to secure the payment of rents at all and the inevitable consequence was abatement and the toleration (perhaps even ultimately the forgiveness) of arrears. However much Newdigate and his jurors talked up the possibility of setting rigorous

thresholds for arrears and the intimidation of tenants with threats of eviction the reality was very different. Even the scheme for the quarterly payment of rent could be guaranteed only by Newdigate's introduction of a system of interest free loans and by his concession that he would pay poor rates if not national taxes. This then was more of a defensive 'response to adversity' than an aggressive policy of policing the rental. Nor, conversely, was it entirely paternalistic in the Thompsonian sense of paternalism as a 'studied technique of rule'.<sup>43</sup> To be sure, there were calculated occasions of popular patronage (Christmas doles, subsidised grain sales) towards the poor, but the 'blur of indiscipline' was visible not only beyond Newdigate's estate but within it, and occasionally (as the recalcitrance of his domestic servants suggests) even within the household itself. It was not the labouring poor but Newdigate's own tenants who were the problem and in large measure they held the whip hand in negotiations over the payment of rents and the covenants of leases. Indeed it is striking that Thompson's analysis of 'patrician society, plebeian culture' is written almost without reference to tenants and entirely without reference to rents.<sup>44</sup> If the 'old paternalism' really was in crisis, that sense of insecurity was created not by the menace of insubordination among the poor but by the self-conscious truculence of a tenantry who knew that economic circumstances had dealt them a winning hand. In this respect, Sir Richard Newdigate was fighting a rearguard action against a confident class of tenant farmers whose social history still remains largely unwritten, and who were arguably one of the principal agents of social cohesion in late seventeenth-century England.

## HINDLE: 'The Micro-Management of a Late Seventeenth Century English Landed Estate'/Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. the chorus of complaint from late seventeenth-century landlords and stewards about tenants falling into arrears reported in Clay, 'Landlords and Estate Management', in Thirsk (ed.), *AHEW V*, II, pp.230-32; Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People*, pp.60-63, 71-74; Broad, *Transforming English Rural Society*, pp.142-44; Except where noted, the following account is based on his undated memorandum on rents in WCRO CR136/V84, pp.29-30. By 'crosse', Newdigate probably meant that his tenants were ill-tempered or peevish. *OED* s.v. 'cross, a' 5a&b. Cf. the anxieties of Lord Weymouth's steward about the 'crossness and untowardliness' of his Shropshire tenants in 1673. Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People*, p.51.
- <sup>2</sup> Clay, 'Landlord and Estate Management', pp.229-30, 232-36. The Verneys, by contrast, 'did not hesitate to evict those tenants who looked unlikely to pay their way'. Broad, *Transforming English Rural Society*, p.142.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. the earl of Dorset's slightly more aggressive views about his Warwickshire tenants, expressed in 1673: 'if they be bad tenants it is better to take a course with them at first than let them run on at length, for I never yet knew a tenant the better for forbearing'. Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People*, p.63n.41.
- <sup>4</sup> Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People*, p.71.
- <sup>5</sup> WCRO CR136/V101, p.2.
- <sup>6</sup> Griffiths, 'Responses to Adversity', in Hoyle (ed.), *People, Landscape and Alternative Agriculture*, esp. pp.82-90.
- <sup>7</sup> WCRO CR136/V109, p.85.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. the ubiquitous late seventeenth-century problem of falling rents, especially in the Midlands. Gay, 'Falling Rents'; Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People*, pp.54-55; Broad, *Transforming English Rural Society*, pp.141-42.
- <sup>9</sup> Broad, 'Regional Perspectives and Variations in English Dairying', in Hoyle (ed.), *People, Landscape and Alternative Agriculture*, p.97.
- <sup>10</sup> *OED* s.v. 'pennyworth, n'.
- <sup>11</sup> Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People*, pp.67-73.
- <sup>12</sup> WCRO CR136/V183, pp.18 (1686-87), 98 (29 Sept, 1693), 148 (2 Jan. 1696). Clay, 'Landlords and Estate Management', pp.232-45.
- <sup>13</sup> WCRO CR136/A25, p.14 (1675).
- <sup>14</sup> LRO inventory Robert Parker (1689); WCRO CR136/V17, p.11 (26 Jan. 1691).
- <sup>15</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, p.15.
- <sup>16</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, p.8 (1690).
- <sup>17</sup> WCRO CR136/V142, pp. pp.3, 4, 12, 19, 28.
- <sup>18</sup> For harvest failures, see Andrew B. Appleby, 'Grain Prices and Subsistence Crises in England and France, 1590-1740', *Journal of Economic History* 39:4 (December 1979), 876-77, 886; R.B. Outhwaite, 'Dearth and Government Intervention in English Grain Markets, 1590-1700', *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. 33:4 (1981), 402, 406; Bowden, 'Agricultural Prices, Wages, Farm Profits and Rents', in *AHEW V*, II, p.57. For the recoinage and its consequences, see Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge, 2000), pp.190-97.
- <sup>19</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, p.309.
- <sup>20</sup> Larminie, 'Lifestyle and Attitudes', ch.2; Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*, pp.12-15.
- <sup>21</sup> WCRO CR136/V183, p.101 (17 Nov. 1691), 147 (16 Dec. 1691). For other references to land in hand, see WCRO CR136/V168, pp.65, 109, 123 (1696-98): financial expediency in lending money in special cases, guaranteed by bond, ensuring repayment in kind or by continued tenancy, obviating the problem of land in hand.
- <sup>22</sup> WCRO CR136/V109, p.82; V17, p.211 (Jan. 1694). The other example, that of William Attwood, has left little trace in Newdigate's accounts and rentals.
- <sup>23</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, p.11 (?Jan 1691).
- <sup>24</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, p.247 (6 June, 1694).
- <sup>25</sup> WCRO CR136/V101, p.18; V109, p.78. For a similar arrangement in early eighteenth-century Yorkshire, see Clay, 'Landlords and Estate Management', p.241.
- <sup>26</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, pp.227 (1692), 607 (1698). *Warwick County Records: Hearth Tax Returns, Volume I: Hemlingford Hundred*, ed. Margaret Walker (Warwick, 1957), pp.207, 24; WCRO CR136/Box D7 (19 Oct. 1698).
- <sup>27</sup> WCRO CR136/V183, p.97



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<sup>28</sup> WCRO CR136/V183, pp.103-4.

<sup>29</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, p.9.

<sup>30</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, pp.8, 225, 226, 264. Cf. Gordon Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1963), p.271.

<sup>31</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, pp.10 (27 January 1691), 13 (February 1691).

<sup>32</sup> WCRO CR136/V109, p.82.

<sup>33</sup> WCRO CR136/V17, p.316.

<sup>34</sup> Chartres, 'Marketing', *Agricultural History Review* 43 (1995), p.119 (table 1). For confusion over the size of corn measures in late seventeenth and eighteenth-century Warwickshire and Worcestershire, see Bowden, 'Appendix I: Agricultural Weights and Measures', *AHEWV*, II, pp.817-18.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. chapter 4.4 below

<sup>36</sup> Walter, 'The Social Economy of Dearth', pp.105-9; Heal, *Hospitality*. TNA: PROB 11/50, image 168 will of Harry Acres (1568).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Hindle, *On the Parish?*, p. 106 n.30.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. chapter 4.3 below.

<sup>39</sup> For the longevity of the ideal of stewardship into the late seventeenth-century, see Brodie Waddell, Unpublished Warwick University PhD Dissertation (2009).

<sup>40</sup> David Oldroyd, *Estates, Enterprise and Investment at the Dawn of the Industrial Revolution: Estate Management and Accounting in the North-East of England, c.1700-1780* (Aldershot, 2007), esp. pp.28-36, 39-146.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1640* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.133-97.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1640* (Oxford, 1988), p.4.

<sup>43</sup> Griffiths, 'Responses to Adversity'; Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian culture', p.397.

<sup>44</sup> Innes, 'Jonathan Clark', p.182; King, 'Edward Thompson's Contribution'.