The Rural Estate through the Eyes of the Land Agent: A Community in Microcosm c1812 - 1844

Abstract

This article explores how the Castleman/Anglesey archive forms a micro-study of an estate and its associated rural community at work. It will survey the type of data which can be found within the land agent’s estate vouchers and diurnal correspondence and why they are important. It will begin by examining the concepts and ideology of the rural community and seek to explain why it is so hard to define. The article will then investigate how a micro-study can assist in understanding the ways in which estates reacted to periods of economic difficulties. This will include: why landowners left rent arrears to accrue, the types of petition which the local populace presented, the reasoning behind improving landscapes and the ways an estate contributed to the relief of the labouring poor. The Castleman archive reveals the multi-layered, complex nature of the rural community and the diverse role of the land agent in balancing the relationships which existed within it. In effect it acts as an historical prism.

The rural community during the first half of the nineteenth century remains an elusive concept. Over the years many different interpretations have been proffered. Consequently in its simplest form it has been described as a distribution of houses and other residential units with their associated landscape features such as farmsteads, workshops and street patterns. An understanding of the function of settlements and the addition of socio-economic factors such as religion, industrialisation and agriculture adds depth to the above straightforward perspective (Mills 1973: 12). The village itself often remains shrouded in the romantic idyll of a simple collection of thatched cottages inhabited by contented individuals. In the imagination this nirvana was accompanied by an unassuming social harmony which rested on deference and obedience to the local landowner, in return for his complementary benevolence (Thompson 1981: 458). In reality the situation was considerably more complicated and accordingly it is impossible to use a single set of characteristics to define the agrarian community.

The English countryman or woman, Alun Howkins argues lived in a world embodied by their specific relationship to economic and social power. These complex and multi-faceted ties were expressed by the different connections and associations between: the landowner and the land agent, the farmer who used his own capital and sometimes labour to exploit the land,
and the labourer who worked it. Within this traditional fiscal and communal power base each


group had a specific role and these varied according to locality and regional socio-economic


conditions. The individualistic nature of these relationships thus makes it impossible to
generalise on the experiences of individual communities (Howkins 1992: 85). These inherent
problems have long been recognised. Paul Jennings advocated almost fifty years ago that it was
impossible for one writer to do ‘full justice to the wealth of material available’ (Jennings 1968:
11). While this may be the case, by examining a single estate through a refined case study it is
possible to begin to build a fuller picture of the rural landscape during the period which
encompassed the Agricultural Revolution. Land agents’ records are an important but under-
researched source for the study of the rural community. They contain a myriad of detail about
working and social lives at a time when tenant farmers and the labouring poor rarely kept
records or diaries.

This research has utilised the extensive archive of the Castleman family; land agents to
the Dorset and Somerset estate of the Marquis of Anglesey. It is made up of some 3,000 letters,
10,000 estate vouchers which detail the financial transactions undertaken and bi-annual rental
accounts for forty years. An able and worthwhile land agent, Rab Houston argues, was a good
judge of character and a man who could mingle and connect with the local community. These
social interactions might highlight any problems arising with either the tenant farmers or the
land under his control (Houston 2014: 45). Even the briefest of glances at the
Anglesey/Castleman archive provides a sense of this family’s extensive local knowledge and
the influences they brought to bear (Houston 2014: 45). Effectively it acts as an historical prism
and provides a microcosm of rural life during the first half of the nineteenth century. Historians
such as Gordon Mingay, Florian Thompson and David Spring have emphasised the economic
function of the land agent, but their work is frequently generalist in nature. Subsequently the
extent of the land agent’s power and authority has been under-stated and misunderstood. This
article seeks to begin to redress the balance and evaluate the importance of the land agents
records in analysing and examining the rural community. Close-textual study of the Castleman
archive reveals that his interactions with those living and working within the estate were wide-
ranging and varied. His day to day management included, but was not limited to: leasing farms
and land, negotiating and collecting rents, surveying the estate, compiling the accounts, acting
as political agent, and relieving the poor. As a source however, the land agent’s records are not
without their problems. In many cases the only correspondence which has survived is the out-
going copy sent from land agent to landowner. Fortunately with the Castleman correspondence
the Marquis of Anglesey wrote in the margin of many of the letters, thus allowing the researcher, some insight into this aristocrat’s thoughts, opinions and ideas.

The west-country estate of the Marquis of Anglesey was widely dispersed and contained land in both Somerset and Dorset. The majority of villages lay in the Blackmore Vale and included: Bradford Abbas, Clifton Maybank, Sixpenny Handley, Gussage St. Michael, Kington Magna and Nyland, Manston, Marnhull, Stalbridge, Stour Provost and Todber, Stourpaine, Thornford and Wyle and in Somerset Charleton Horethorne, Cheriton, Henstridge, Temple Coombe, Coombe Abbas, Horsington, Kingsbury Regis, Milborne Port and Wyke, Maiden Bradley, Yarnfield, Stotford and Norton Ferris. There were, however, two main focal points the political borough of Milborne Port (Somerset) and the small town of Stalbridge (Dorset). The estate had been compiled in the mid-eighteenth century by Peter Walker. On his death it passed to the Bayley family and subsequently to Henry William Bayley, Lord Paget who became 1st Earl of Uxbridge in 1784. In 1812 the estate then passed to his son, who in 1815 became the 1st Marquis of Anglesey, in recognition of his efforts at the Battle of Waterloo. Although some of the less profitable parts of the estate were sold early in its history, it remained largely intact until Anglesey’s death in 1854.

Anglesey was a colourful character and although feted as a war hero found himself at the centre of a famous scandal when he eloped with Lady Charlotte Wellesley, the sister-in-law of Arthur Wellesley. His divorce from his first wife cost £55,000, a financial situation which was exacerbated on the death of his father, which revealed the family were heavily in debt, despite their extensive estates in Staffordshire, Anglesey and the south of England. Altogether, his holdings produced an annual income of approximately £76,000, but the family continued to overspend at the rate of £1600 per year. Anglesey was appointed twice as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland although his first appointment was cut short when he was recalled for his Catholic sympathies. He also held the lord lieutenancies of Anglesey and Staffordshire, constable of Caernarfon Castle, ranger of Snowdon Forest and captain of Cowes Castle (OBDN). It does not appear that Anglesey visited his Dorset and Somerset estates during his incumbency. Absenteeism on the part of the landowner, however, was not necessarily harmful and most retained and continued to take an active interest in the running of their estates. Finding an agent who could be trusted to handle the day to day management and the large sums of capital involved, in the case of this estate up to £11,000 or more per annum, was essential. The trust between Anglesey and the Castlemans formed an important bond and thus for the entire period of his ownership, some forty-two years, they managed the estate. Firstly by William
Castleman and then on his death in 1844 by his sons. William Castleman’s father had been a
tenant farmer of the estate and a minor official of Stalbridge Weston Manorial Court (Jones
1993: 57). Castleman first appeared in the estate archive around 1804 when he was paid £31
10s 0d for his work as an attorney in the case of *Place v Burt* and took over the rental books
c1814 at the age of 48 (Jones 1993: 57). He did not work solely for the Marquis of Anglesey
but was also agent for: the Bankes family at Kingston Lacey, the Hanham estate and Chisletts
and Rawlence in Wimborne. Thus his expertise and local knowledge had been acquired over
many years and through working with a wide range of clients. His immaculate record keeping
and copious letter writing now provide a sense of the landscape of the rural community in the
first half of the nineteenth century.

This article will explore through four broad themes the type of information which might
be gleaned through research into an estate and the role of the land agent. Firstly, it will open
by exploring the agent’s role in ensuring estate profitability during periods of agricultural
depression. It will examine, through the use of emblematic examples: the importance of local
knowledge, how this estate dealt with tenant farmers when they fell into arrears and the
different types of petitions presented to the Marquis. Thirdly, it will investigate how this estate
sought to aid and control the community through repairs or improvements to the infra-structure
of the estate such as: enlargement of churches, improvements to roads and payments to
educational establishments. Finally it will study the part played by the estate in relieving the
poor.

The agent sat in a unique position within agrarian society; he was a man of status closer
to the nobility than the tenant farmer. Although his role as seen above was multi-various one
of the agent’s main functions, however, was to act as intermediary between landowner and
tenant. He imparted his local knowledge and advice while representing the tenant farmers, but
could not appear to promote any one person over another (Houston 2014: 45). Contemporary
agricultural writers generally advocated that land agents had poor husbandry skills; yet, in
reality many were experienced farmers, or had family connections to agriculture. (Mingay,
1967: 27) Others like Castleman were landowners in their own right and brought to their estate
management considerable skills and personal experience. Ultimately the function of the land
agent was to ensure estate profitability and the sustainability of rental income even in times of
agricultural depression. The significance of these sources is emblematically illustrated in
Castleman’s handling of the tenants over issues of arrears and rent abatements during periods of economic downturn.

The historiography of the tenant farmer is sparse. Hoyle is the latest historian to acknowledge that we still have little comprehension of them either, as a social group, or as individuals (Hoyle 2013: 1). By using a land agent’s archive as a source it is possible to examine in-depth the tenant farmers in one locality. Furthermore, it reveals how individuals did or did not cope when agricultural prices fell or natural disasters occurred. Any fall in rental receipts meant a fall in landlord income; Castleman wrote in 1821 that it was ‘an ungrateful task for an agent to propose [an] abatement of Rents’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/29). As rental arrears accrued tenants often found themselves struggling under a considerable burden of debt. During the Napoleonic Wars, rents had risen and in the post-war period landowners were reluctant to reduce the rents of existing tenants. After 1815 many farmers were increasingly unable to meet their rent call and frequently landowners chose to make short-term allowances, effectively reducing the sums due (Grigg 1965: 150). This estate was no exception and Castleman’s correspondence contains numerous references to tenants in dire financial difficulties. For example in December 1814 Castleman wrote to the Marquis of Anglesey regarding Baldwin one of the tenant farmers. He stated his:

Arrear is very large … I am convinced that he cannot go on with the farm. I have given him a fortnight to reduce his arrear and to put the payment on some satisfactory footing and if he does not or cannot comply I fear some steps must be taken against him otherwise a heavy lost be apprehended (DHC D/ANG/B5/17).

Baldwin was, however, still in possession of his farm in July of the following year and the issue surrounding his rent had not been resolved, in fact he had only paid £200 at the recent audit. Castleman suggested that if he had not made some considerable payment once the harvest was in, then distraint must be the only option (DHC D/ANG/B5/18).

Low agricultural prices not only affected the ability of tenants to pay their rent but impacted upon the agents capacity to honour out-going payments. This was illustrated in November 1820 when Castleman wrote to the Marquis of Anglesey with the news that wheat had fallen below £13 for 40 bushels and other kinds of corn were equally low. He stated the biggest drop was in the price of sheep from 29/- the previous year to a mere 6/- at a recent sale. Consequently Castleman was forced to ask for an advance of £3000 from the Marquis, in order to meet the estate’s financial obligations. He thought it would be possible to pay this back out
of the audit in March, as he was hopeful that prices would rise in the spring and ‘allow the grower some profit on his skill and Capital’. If however, this did not happen the estate would once again need to explore the provision of rent abatements (DHC D/ANG/B5/26). In the meantime he advocated the complaints of the yeomanry in the locality were as ‘general and as well founded’ as they had been in 1814 and 1815.

Local knowledge was an important asset, acquired through patience; a good agent with the right networks of enquiry was able to use these for both the estate and his own advantage. Castleman demonstrated the depth of his skill in this field in 1822 when a man by the name of Bewsey agreed to rent a farm at Stalbridge at the same rent as Seagram, the previous tenant. The price included the purchase from Seagram’s assignees of a quantity of feed and hay as well as some of the fixtures within the house. His father, however, refused to lend him the capital he needed to stock the farm. Rather than taking this at face value Castleman put in motion an investigation which ultimately proved Bewsey’s statement to be true. He therefore deemed it was not worth enforcing the ‘performance of the Contract’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/31).

As managers of some of the largest business enterprises in the country, the nineteenth century land agent needed to be a pragmatic businessman. The practicalities of this role was illustrated by Castleman’s attitude on the death of Cox of Kington in February 1828. The poor man had fallen from his horse and consequently died leaving large rent arrears outstanding on his farm. Castleman immediately dispatched ‘a Person with Notices of Distress’ in order to secure the estate’s rights, over the property. Cox had been unable to pay his rent during the preceding period of agricultural distress, and Castleman had already distrained against him twice. Anglesey however, had allowed the debt to accumulate, in anticipation that Cox would eventually be able to extricate himself from his financial problems. Now this was impossible, moves were swiftly made to ensure the estate would recuperate at least some of its losses (DHC D/ANG/B4/40). Cox’s financial situation had been exacerbated when on his mother’s death he had made a distribution of her effects amongst his brothers and sisters. Unfortunately the sums paid were of a higher amount than the net value of the property. Castleman’s local networks had failed; he did not find out this information until he levied the first distraint; it was then too late ‘to remedy the mischief. Furthermore if the estate had forced a sale during this period of poor prices its losses would have been significant. Castleman’s understanding of the markets and knowing when to sell paid dividends. The stock was ultimately sold at a much better price than expected and as a result the estate was able to claim back most of the outstanding debt (DHC D/ANG/B5/40).
Castleman used his networks to pursue tenants who disappeared, even though this could take time. The importance of which were demonstrated in July 1828 for example, when he wrote to the Marquis of Anglesey regarding a previous tenant of the estate. Seven years previously Phillips had cleared nearly all the stock and other moveable items from his farm in one night and gone to America. Castleman’s source had stated that Phillips had returned to England to receive a Legacy of some £1500. The aim was to arrest him as soon as he was found and in preparation an ‘Affidavit’ was drawn up and executed so that it might be expedited immediately when required. Tenants who behaved in this manner were relatively rare and the majority were not averse to asking for assistance usually in the form of written requests when economic conditions deteriorated.

These letters are recognised by historians and literary scholars as petitions (Houston 2014: 30). As early as 1761 John Mordant had stated that the steward should ‘study and endeavour … to promote the ease and subsistence of his Lord’s tenant’s and dependants ….he should endeavour to prevent all unnecessary loads and incumbrances falling upon them’ (Mordant 1761: 368-369). Petitions from the Dorset and Somerset estate of the Marquis of Anglesey invariably asked for help. Tenants faced financial difficulties through depressed agricultural prices, disease in beasts or crops and natural disasters such as flooding and storms. Unsurprisingly, Houston suggests that estate documentation is at its fullest when economic conditions are at their worst and this is certainly true of the Anglesey/Castleman archive. Petitions originated from all strata of the community and were recognised as part of the fabric of rural society and estate management (Houston 2014: 56-57). In general these requests exemplified a common recognition of the power held by the landowner; but contained an innate understanding that the tenants could call on their lord for help when needed (Houston 2014: 269). Outside bodies might add weight to a request. One such instance was illustrated by the Reverend G. Davis Hunter who petitioned on behalf of the widow of Elias Green in May 1836, against whom Castleman had distrained. He apologised for taking the liberty of writing to the Marquis of Anglesey and hoped he would accept the representation ‘in the spirit in which it is given’. He requested that

the legal process which is suspended over her may not be enforced as its only consequence must be (not the payment of the Arrears for that she possesses not, nor ever can expect to possess the means of Affecting) but the thrusting her down to a state of parish pauperism (DHC D/ANG/B5/50).
Castleman reassured Davis Hunter that ‘no apology’ was necessary and proffered a different side to the story. It emerged that at the time of Elias Green’s death he owed a large arrear of rent and Castleman felt duty bound to distrain. He stated that he had done everything possible in his power to relieve the widow of any extra expense. Through a partial sale her husband’s arrears had been partially paid and the estate had agreed that she could stay at the farm until Lady day. Security had been procured on the remaining property. Castleman had relied on her honesty and promises of payment knowing there was more than sufficient estate to pay the rent. However she converted the assets into money and refused to pay the rent when due. To compound the problem Castleman was aware that at the time of her husband’s death she had been entitled to some property in her own name. Thus he stated where possible he had made ‘every disposition to forbearance and levity towards persons in distress’. Castleman advocated that when dealing with a large number of tenants it was necessary to differentiate between ‘fraudulent and honest debts’, especially as more ‘frauds have been successfully practiced on Lord Anglesey than on the remainder of the extensive estates under my agency’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/50). In his opinion widow Green now fell into the fraudulent category and he therefore could not guarantee withholding legal action. He suggested she liquidate her assets and paid off the monies outstanding.

Petitions might revolve around extrication from specific circumstances. In May 1823 Castleman had been approached by Brewer one of the tenants at Hanley whose leased cottage had accidently burnt down. Under the terms of the agreement he was personally accountable for re-constructing the building but wanted to be spared the task. The costs Castleman stated were approximately £60, however, should the estate stand the cost; the tenant would lose his lifetime rent advantage. Instead Brewer wished to be ‘let off’ his responsibilities by paying Anglesey an agreed sum of money. This Castleman calculated to be approximately £40 and if this amount was offered his Lordship should accept (DHC D/ANG/B5/32). Letter writers often knew how to manipulate their language to their best advantage; petitions were after all reminders of responsibility as much as asking for assistance (Houston 2014: 271).

A petition of this nature was sent to the Marquis of Anglesey in 1832 from ‘the Tradesmen and others of the Parish of Handley Dorset’. They stated that they had so far managed to maintain their families in ‘an Humble and industrious manner’ but due to the present depression on all businesses this was no longer possible. These men believed that unless Anglesey was prepared to provide ‘some remedy’ they would need to ‘apply for help to the same quarter where the Labouring Poor [were] under the necessity of looking in large numbers’.

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Many of the tradesmen were supporting their families by keeping a horse or cow which provided more than enough manure to keep five acres of land in a good state of cultivation and producing good crops. This helped to keep them and their families independent of parochial aid. Consequently, they requested to each man who had signed the petition, the Marquis let a small amount of land for which they were prepared to give a full rent. The petition was careful to state that they would independently find their own place to store and thresh their produce. It was usual for the supplicant/s to end by offering the recipient some form of assurance of continued service and good will (Houston 2014: 97). So at the end this petition the undersigned stated:

And your Petitioners as in duty bound shall ever pray for your Lordship’s Welfare and be always ready to protect your Property in any case of Riots … should it ever happen again in this quarter.

At the end it was signed by a wide range of tradesmen including: carpenters, shop-keepers, cordwinder, carrier, woodman, maltster, butcher and labourers free from the parish, thus indicating the depth of the recession (DHC D/ANG/B5/44). This particular petition is important for two reasons, firstly, it reveals how the influence of the land agent extended beyond agriculture and into the community as a whole. Secondly, it illustrated the diverse nature of this type of request and demonstrated how the tenants sought a variety of solutions to their financial problems rather than simply asking for cash or reductions of rent.

In May 1822, Thomas Hayward, sent Castleman a more unusual petition. It transpired Hayward was personally unknown to the estate but the owner of a day school in Marnhull near Shaftsbury, a village where the estate held land. He had a large young family that he had been able to support until midsummer 1820 when his wife became ill. Hardly surprising when nine out of eighteen children were living and seven of these were under ten. In order to promote her recovery debts had accrued of around £20, and had proved impossible to pay off. The situation had been exacerbated when the supplicant became afflicted with deafness that resulted in the failure of the school. He appealed to the Marquis ‘to save [him] from the degrading humiliation of applying for Parochial Relief, a humiliation so repugnant to the feelings of a Person who has always (till the present time) lived in credit and is a member of a respectable family’. He claimed the Reverend Henry Place, Rector of Marnhull would supply a satisfactory testimonial as to his character. As there seemed nothing unusual about his case the estate deemed there was no reason for him to be treated any differently to the many thousands who found themselves in
the same situation (DHC D/ANG/B5/31). The latter two petitions display the fear of claiming from the parish for help which trade and professional men experienced.

Success was not guaranteed, even if the person writing was well known to the estate. Mr Longman, who supported the Marquis’s political patronage at Milborne Port, wrote in April 1820, recommending a loan of £50, be paid to John Chislett. It was stated that this man had a large family and was under considerable embarrassment. However, Castleman could not condone this suggestion, as it would form a precedent, which might open the flood gates. Anglesey too noted ‘if Loan is made to one it will be expected from all’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/26). Each landowner reacted individually to petitions and therefore micro-studies such as this make an important contribution to the historiography surrounding the rural community, adding depth and detail to existing knowledge. Furthermore, the Anglesey/Castleman archive reveals the extent of the land agent’s socio-economic involvement in societal affairs. The agent’s work stretched far beyond the boundaries of just supporting the tenant farmers and agriculture. At the core of their role was an underlying belief that the landowner and estate had a much greater role to play in the lives of the estate population.

II

Castleman’s archive has created an historical prism through which can be explored the methods used by both estate and land agent to aid and control the local populace two premises which were closely intertwined. These ideas will be explored here through the improvement of roads, the enlargement of churches and the giving of sums to education. This aid should not be confused with philanthropy but was instead a pragmatic way of the estate further extending its influence within the rural community. Roads were important in agricultural areas for the transportation of heavy materials such as stone for drainage or manure for fertilizing the soil. Even when parishes were active in road repairs, many in rural areas were in a deplorable condition (Ernle 1919: 285). John Lawrence an early nineteenth century writer advocated that it was in the ‘interests and reputation’ of a landowner to ensure that the roads which intersected his estate remain in good order. He maintained that bad roads were a sign of a ‘most contemptible and churlish indolence’. Roads he declared needed constant attention and even then, some were never in a ‘fair and passable state’. It was not unusual for large repairs to be carried out and then the condition of the road ignored until once more it was in an abhorrent state (Lawrence 1806: 285).
References to roads and turnpikes are common in Castleman’s diurnal correspondence. However the estate invariably tended to support improved transportation links when it directly benefitted their needs and those of their tenants. The Sherborne Turnpike first appeared in the archive in 1820 when Castleman negotiated a deal between the Trust and the estate. Under this contract Lord Anglesey sold a portion of his land at Milborne Port and agreed within three months to remove at his own expense the buildings standing on it. The sum to be paid was ninety pounds (DHC D/ANG/B5/26). Under the contract the materials of which the buildings were constructed remained the property of Lord Anglesey. Just over a year later the new Turnpike was still not finished and it appeared that the Trustees would require another quantity of the estate’s land to complete the task. In this instance Castleman sent ‘Gatehouse’ with appropriate instructions to meet the surveyor. His task was to ascertain how much land was required and what the price might be. Despite the problems and the time spent in negotiations Castleman believed the turnpike ‘cannot but be advantageous to your Lordship’s property’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/32).

Turnpikes could also prove problematic. The Vale of ‘Blackmoor’ Turnpike Trust came under discussion in 1837, when the Reverend Yeatman, resorted to legal measures to recover a debt owed to him of some £200 plus interest, however, winning the case, did not give him any advantage over the other creditors. The trust was poor and the mortgage owed to the Marquis had also not been paid. Castleman argued that as the roads made by this trust had been of great advantage to the Vale of Blackmoor, and to a certain extent to Lord Anglesey’s property, there might be another solution to the problem. The Clerk of the Trust wrote to Castleman suggesting the Marquis pay Yeatman the monies outstanding which would bring to an end Yeatman’s involvement and Castleman advocated this was the best way forward. The problem had been caused by an argument between Yeatman and his brother one of the trustees and with the Guardians of some, if not all the Poor Law Unions in the area (DHC D/ANG/B5/51). This incident demonstrates that it was not just problematic agricultural relationships within a locality which caused difficulties. Roads also appear in the guise of the estate attempting to keep the poorer elements of the labouring classes employed.

In the wake of the 1830 Swing riots, the estate had found work on tenanted farms for around 30 unemployed labours by subsidising their wages. In 1832 however when they had asked for this arrangement to continue the estate had withdrawn its support for two reasons. Firstly, many of the women had now found employment within a local glove factory and secondly, the tenant farmers had turned many of the labourers off the farms and were again
neglecting their ‘proper management’. Castleman proposed another solution. He stated that ‘some of the private roads are almost impassable in Winter and during part of the Summer’. This had an adverse effect on the value of the land because it prevented enrichment for want ‘of the means of conveying manure &c in the Winter’. He thus proposed, that a contract be drawn up between the estate and parish Overseers, whereby they would undertake to employ some of the surplus labourers during the winter months to repair the road. He estimated that the cost should be more than £40 or £50 (DHC D/ANG/B5/44). The estate might also act under their own auspices.

In 1836 Castleman forced the parish of Stalbridge to construct new roads through the estate; to which the Marquis contributed £20. At their completion Castleman stated that they ‘are extremely well done’. More importantly they would provide the means by which the rich lands on each side of the new roads were now able for the first time to be manured and dressed ‘as they ought to be’. Furthermore the road was constructed so as to act as a drain, for a considerable part of the adjoining lands and consequently ‘it was admitted by all to be one of the greatest improvements that has taken place in the parish in their memories’. The two-way partnership between the landowner, Anglesey, and his tenants was demonstrated by his declaration that despite the obvious improvement he would not be raising rents (DHC D/ANG/B5/50). The scheme had been so successful, ‘in the minds of the tenants’ that Castleman intended, to extend the idea to other roads on the estate which were not public. So sure was he of the benefits of improving the land that he paid ‘a person out of his own salary to draw up an agreement whereby the ‘surplus pauper Population’ would be used as the workforce. The Marquis would sanction the subscription of up to £30 towards the costs (DHC D/ANG/B5/50). This was just one example of the way in which estate and community worked together, another visible symbol of this co-operation was the enlargement of churches.

The church was an outwardly obvious emblem of social hierarchy and control and might aid in the maintenance of keeping the population settled. Each individual member of the clergy was expected to act as a ‘model shepherd’ and spend his life inspiring the rich to mimic his example. In turn this would stimulate, motivate and enthuse the lower classes (Roberts 1979: 152). The poor were not without their responsibilities they were expected to remain sober, be industrious, contented and obedient, ‘subordination was ordained by God’ (Roberts 1979: 152). The archive contains several references to repairs or enlargement of church properties. In fact almost as soon as Castleman took over he wrote to the Marquis regarding the church at Gussage stating that the lead from the roof was in such an appalling state that the churchwardens had
had to remove it and have a new one cast. As the expense was considerable it had proved to be beyond the means of the annual repairs allotted. Barnes (presumably the rector) had requested a contribution be made. Castleman assessed that while this was usually outside of the scope of sums allowable, in his experience, where heavy expenditure had been incurred, it was usual for the landowner to contribute (DHC D/ANG/B5/16). Not all church schemes however met estate approval.

The plan for the enlargement of the church at Milborne Port in 1822 was controversial. Castleman had two main reservations; firstly, he advocated that the population increase in the town was too small, and secondly, he was wary of the extra expense which the Marquis might incur. He discovered, however, the plans were already well advanced and had received the sanction of Winchester College and the Bishop of Hereford. Mr Owen, the curate, had submitted the papers and enquired of the Marquis how much he, and the two Members of Parliament, would be prepared to subscribe. Enquiries by Castleman had ascertained that Sir William Medleycott\textsuperscript{1} was ‘inclined to evade the subscription altogether’. Owen had resolved that unless the entire sum for the expansion could be raised, he would abandon the idea, as he did not intend to raise any part of the monies by mortgaging the church (DHC D/ANG/B5/31).\textsuperscript{2} As the proposal had the support of the church authorities Castleman was forced to accept the scheme. On 25 April he complained that the papers which Owen had submitted did not furnish the necessary information to ‘guide Lord Anglesey’s judgement’. Furthermore there was no estimate of the total expense and no evidence of subscriptions other than that of the Bishop of Hereford who was Vicar of the parish. Castleman suggested as Sir William Medleycott was the resident parishioner and chief landowner in the district; he ought instead of evading matters to be taking the lead (DHC D/ANG/B5/31).

In May of the same year Castleman again commented on this ongoing project after discussing the subject with Medleycott who had finally determined to subscribe £10. Unsurprisingly Owen seemed somewhat disappointed with this offer especially as the expense of the aisle would amount to approximately £630. It transpired that Owen hoped the Marquis would contribute £50 and the two local Member of Parliament £25 each. As Castleman did not expect Owen to ever raise the whole sum, he suggested the Marquis agree to this figure, but, that it should only be paid when the whole amount had been raised. He stated ‘my notion is that that time will never arrive’ (DHC D/ANG/B4/31). This demonstrated the pragmatic land agent and businessman at work, maintaining the equilibrium between the Marquis and other elements of the rural community.
The perfect solution to the problem presented itself later in the month when the incumbent of the parish of Ryme Intrinsica died. This living had been promised to Owen by the Chancellor, and Castleman suggested the Marquis follow this up through the official channels. He wrote to Anglesey should the plan succeed ‘it will put an End to the Church Subscription, and it will prevent me being hampered by him’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/31). However this proposal failed and finally in February 1823 Castleman had to admit defeat. Owen managed to raise the monies required and he decreed that the Marquis would now have to pay (DHC D/ANG/32). Thus relationships within the rural community and the work undertaken by the agent in dealing with the populace did not just revolve around financial recompense or rent reductions and abatements. One other way in which the estate sought to control social relations within the estate was through its support of education particularly in those localities which were the most troublesome.

Thompson argues that although ‘social control’ was a concept regularly used by historians it lacks a precise definition (Thompson 1981: 190). Generally it is used to describe the bestowing of opinions and habits by one class on another. In terms of the nineteenth century this frequently meant the aristocracy, gentry or clergy seeking to influence the labouring classes. Although maintaining control of the community was complex one way such pressure might be exerted was through the funding of day and Sunday schools. Keith Snell suggests that Sunday schools were the ‘key agencies’ in fostering a sense of orderliness, punctuality, sobriety, cleanliness and virtues surrounding personal behaviour and a sense of social discipline (Snell 1999: 129-130). Many of the aristocracy and Members of Parliament however were of the opinion that teaching the labouring classes reading, writing and arithmetic increased rather than decreased the number of social problems. Ultimately Pamela Horn advocates that education during much of the nineteenth century depended on local conditions and in particular the interest of local landowners, village clergy, squires and occasionally but rarely by the parents (Horn 1980: 131). Robert Brown in his *The Book of the Landed Estate* published in 1869 included a section on estate schooling. He stated that success in ‘any department of business’ was reliant on the ‘character’ of those employed and this was as true for agriculture as industry (Brown 1868: 287). Although neither the Marquis nor the estate founded any schools, they did contribute regular but small subscriptions to a variety of establishments. These payments reflect the sentiments of both the Marquis and his agent-in-chief who both considered education to be a vessel through which it might be possible to moderate the behaviour of a population that was morally weak and at times rebellious; this was especially true at Hanley.
From the beginning of Castleman’s agency the question of a school at Hanley was raised. In response to a letter from Dr Hughes, who resided in the village, Castleman had replied ‘I believe Hanley to be one of the most disorderly parishes in the whole District of the [Cranborne] Chase’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/15). He believed that financially supporting the existing school would be ‘desirable’ and might help to quell the population’s rebellious nature. After making enquiries it transpired the school was in fact a Sunday School, and Castleman suggested that should the Marquis choose to make a subscription the amount should be set at ‘4 or 5 guineas a year’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/14). The estate vouchers reveal that £6 6s 0d was donated on an annual basis. When the Reverend Luke at Stalbridge asked for a subscription towards clothing for the children in the Sunday school, there was some confusion as to whether this had been paid in the past. However Castleman stated ‘Anything likely to improve the morals & conduct of the residing population in that turbulent place is I am sure desiring of his Lordship’s attention & what I shall be most happy to promote’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/37). The importance placed on education as a means of social control was demonstrated in 1834 when the curate at Hanley wrote to Castleman requesting payment of Lord Anglesey’s annual contribution to the charity school in the parish. However in this instance Castleman wanted to withhold the monies but, John Sanderson the agent-in-chief refused, although he empathised with his local agent. He stated ‘wherever a delinquent individual or band conspiring in Acts of delinquency; can be detected let punishment follow for the sake of Justice and to render it effective in the way of warning’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/46). Sanderson, however, would not refuse a ‘charitable’ donation given in Lord Anglesey’s name unless it could be proved that the school was actually instructing the children ‘in the vicious causes of many of the Inhabitants of the place’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/46). There is no doubt that the estate supported and contributed to measures which would benefit both it and its population. However it is only through close archival studies that the extent of the estate’s intervention in the fabric of the rural community becomes apparent. The help and support offered by the landowner encompassed the whole community rather than simply the tenant farmers. Even the poor received a share of the monies available and this estate suggests that they made a substantial contribution to the makeshift economy.

III

Society during the nineteenth century categorized the poor into two social groups ‘the deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. The former appeared ‘blameless’ for their misfortune; their situation was usually not of their doing, being the result of illness, disability, accident, orphanhood or the death of the main bread winner. The latter group were thought to have fallen into
poverty because they had not made sufficient provision for themselves in the event of changing financial circumstances and were thus responsible for their own predicament (Spicker, Leguizamóm and Gordon 2007: 50). The labouring poor used a wide range of survival strategies and this might include payment in cash or kind from the parish, local charities or additional payments from employers. According to poor law and poverty historians such as Steven King, Alannah Tomkins, Samantha Williams and Jane Humphries the makeshift economy incorporated a wide range of activities to generate income and or resources and it placed the poor right at the core of the concept (Williams 2011: 7). This research has concentrated on how the estate contributed to the survival of the poor and surveys the one off irregular payments made to parishes during times of extreme poverty or distress. (Tomkins and King: 2003).

The Swing riots had demonstrated the type and scale of destruction that might be caused by the labouring poor when poverty became extreme. Although the estate did not wish to exacerbate poverty, it had to consider, the impact on its tenants and their voting loyalty when increasing the poor rate. This tax was levied on immoveable property within a parish such as: land, cottages, gardens, shops, inns, parish houses and other buildings (Williams 2011: 72). The duty was place on the occupiers of the property rather than the landowner. The Poor Law authorities calculated the total bill for the parish and then set the rate accordingly (Blaug 1963: 155). The years between 1813 and 1837 have been described ‘as the blackest period of English farming’. During this period the estate correspondence was full of farm failures and struggling tenants (Blaug 1963: 155). Subsequently the poorer elements of the estate were unemployed. Castleman and the Marquis of Anglesey were fully aware that even the ‘undeserving’ poor sometimes needed assistance and one of the vouchers for 1823 specified ‘bread supply for Charity for the Sound Poor of Bradford Abbas from Michaelmas 1819 to Michaelmas 1820, £2 12s 0d’ (DHC D/ANG/B4/48).

Early in his agency Castleman had under the patronage of Lord Shaftesbury established a savings bank for the town and neighbourhood of Yeovil in Somerset. His attitude to the poorer section of the population was clear within this letter as he states

I must confess that I am not so sanguine in my Expectations of the beneficial results of these establishments as some others are. The lower classes of People have in a great degree lost that sense of shame which used to attach to the receipt of parochial relief (DHC D/ANG/B5/23).
Despite his gloomy outlook, Castleman was hopeful that legislation would be passed which would limit the maximum amount which each parish would be expected to contribute. He stated ‘nothing short of such a necessity will renovate the Characters of the Poorer Classes’ (DHC D/ANG/B5/23). These views were his personal opinion. In order to deter the poor from making fabricated claims a memorandum was distributed within the estate which stated that

Paupers giving false statements of their earnings to the Overseers … in order to obtain relief are liable to be Indicted for obtaining money under false pretences. A Man at the Middlesex Sessions was sentenced to seven years transportation for this offence (DHC D/ANG/B5/23).

The estate correspondence and vouchers together demonstrate the sums paid to the poor. When payments stopped their absence was apparent. For example in 1814 Castleman had written to the Marquis of Anglesey stating that under the previous agencies of James and Cox £50 had been allowed annually for the provision of bread and cheese for the poor at Stalbridge. This however, had been discontinued and Castleman had been unable to discover why. At a recent audit the overseers had asked him to investigate, in case it was simply Cox’s inattentiveness which had created the problem. The Marquis commented in the margin

I do not recollect when or why this was stopped I wish to give to Charity but do not approve of an annual sum as it soon becomes a right. Make a distribution of Coals this year and I will think of something else for next (DHC D/ANG/B5/17)

The estate was not averse to assisting the poor but wished to choose when and to whom its assistance was given. While the payments in the correspondence are conspicuous those in the vouchers have rarely been analysed. These numerous slips of paper often detail individual transactions and are time consuming to survey and consequently they are often overlooked. Yet this section of the archive is often the richest source of information. Generally the amounts spent tended to be small but of frequent occurrence. An example of the typical type and size of payments was demonstrated in 1831 when the Marquis donated £3 3s 0d to the fund for providing clothes for the poor of Temple Combe and £2 0s 0d towards purchasing clothing for the poor at Hanley, (although in this instance it was not to be given away but sold at half price), £5 was donated towards supplying the poor of Henstridge with coal at a reduced price (the previous year this donation had benefitted 148 families with 1 cwt per week, a fire was seen as being an essential element of keeping the cottage dry and averting sickness), and those in Stalbridge benefitted to the sum of £20 again for coals (DHC D/ANG/B4/54).
The estate found other ways besides using their own money to relieve the poor. For example at Stalbridge it owned a number of stone quarries which had always been problematic and subject to fraudulent practices. So in 1822 Castleman leased them to the Overseers. Under this contract the overseers would receive half the value of the produce sold. The results were two-fold, firstly they would be able to employ the ‘superfluous poor’ and secondly this would lead to a reduction in the poor rate (DHC D/ANG/B5/31). In the same year one of the tenant farmers had failed and Castleman let a portion of the farm to the Overseers so that it might be split into small allotments and rented to the labourers of the most industrious farmers. This scheme had been tried on the Anglesey’s estate in Staffordshire and Castleman believed it could also be effective in Dorset and Somerset (DHC D/ANG/B5/31). The above are illustrations which demonstrate the way in which the estate interacted with all strata of society within the estate. The historical lens created by the land agent allows a much more detailed and in-depth study of all aspects of the rural community than has previously been undertaken.

IV

In conclusion the historiography surrounding the interaction between estate and rural community is both sparse and generalist. Past research has failed to illustrate and uncover the wide diversity of interactions and relationships which took place between the different social groupings within the rural community. Society was finally balanced and when out of kilter could result in riots and mass destruction as in 1830. Social control has always been exerted by those who have spiritual, military, political, legal, educational and financial influence (Thompson 1981: 206). It is therefore hardly surprising that the land agent acting on behalf of the landowner took a far greater interest in those living within the confines of a given estate than has been generally assumed. Consequently the agent’s role was far wider and more diverse than just the collection of rents. Essentially he formed a pivotal and essential figure who bridged the gulf between landowner, tenant farmer and labouring poor. Although profitability ensured survival and the maintenance of the landowner’s lifestyle this estate suggests that social relations were complex. In fact the landowner portrayed a sense of social duty in protecting the tenant farmers during periods of dearth and in refusing to disallow the charitable payment to Hanley school a sense of social responsibility which has often been overlooked in the historiography.

Land management was by necessity a ‘juggling act’; land agents had to decide when to allow unpaid rents to accrue and when to distrain upon the tenants. In removing a farmer there
was always a risk particularly during periods of economic downturn that it would be necessary to drop the rent in order to attract a new and appropriate tenant. The estate and Castleman only seemed to distrain for specific reasons which included: the debt rising above the value of the farm with its associated fixtures and fittings, the death of a tenant where a large arrear existed, where political loyalty was in doubt and when it appeared the tenant was about to remove or had removed stock to sell. The deep affiliations and working partnerships within the estate were emphasised through the petitions which the population presented directly to the Marquis or to Castleman.

Petitions or letters invariably asked for help, in the instance of this estate they were varied and came from both individuals and groups seeking help singularly and collectively, maybe in the hope that the Marquis would recognise their joint despair. Houston states that a lord had to be careful when handling his people and their people as the supplicants invariably expected generosity. Being too liberal or wasteful was not expected, but rewards for good service were expected, unreasonable requests had to be rejected without causing unnecessary offence. When granting requests it was essential that there was no hint of favouritism (Houston 2014: 273). The idea of fairness was emblematically expressed in the above refusal to loan John Chislett £50. The Castlemans’ acted as the ‘middle-men’ between the estate population – particularly the tenants – and the Marquis of Anglesey. Consequently any discontent from a failed petitioner would be directed at him rather than at the Marquis. The petitions alongside the diurnal correspondence reveal a community in crisis during the 1820s.

The land agents’ records are a useful source of exploring the way that estates improved the infra-structure of the landscape. Generally it appears any such works carried out had a specific benefit to the estate. For example Castleman frequently stated that one major advantage of improving the roads was to allow access to previously difficult areas, so that they might be manured over the winter months and technologies in road building allowed these structures to help with land drainage. Subscribing to church enlargements was a visible symbol of the power and status of both the aristocracy and the State. Through contributing to local day and Sunday schools the estate hoped to improve the morals and behaviour of local communities and Hanley was always at the forefront of the estate’s thinking.

At election time the voting loyalty of tenant farmers was essential and thus meant that the estate was eager to keep the poor rate and any increases low. During extreme periods of distress the estate would make attempts to help the labouring poor within the estate. This was
usually through one off payments for coal, clothes, and cash paid to the local clergy, to use where they felt it might have most effect. The setting up of work schemes such as those at Stalbridge quarry were another form of assisting the poor to find employment. The Castlemans’ understood that they needed to work with the whole community to ensure its viability rather than with one or two small individual elements.

Paul Jennings in his assumption that no one person could do justice to the wealth of material available is invariably true. Instead what is required is a series of meticulous case studies which can be used to form a multi-layered impression of rural communities in different localities at work. This would subsequently allow an assessment of the differences and similarities between localities and regions. It would create an overall picture of relationships within these communities and how these varied between resident and absentee landowners. The aim of this article has been to stress the large amount of data which remains hidden within the land agents’ archives and which if used would reveal how different communities lived, worked and survived.

Endnotes

1. Medleycott had been Member of Parliament for Milborne Port 1790-91 and remained a man of influence
2. An Act of Parliament in July 1822 had allowed parishes to mortgage church properties in order to build new churches or expand existing ones.

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