

ART. X – *The Decline of the Cumbrian Yeoman: Fact or Fiction?*

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TWENTIETH century Cumbrian historians have claimed that an important sector of the landowning class, the yeoman farmers, plunged into a dramatic and irreversible decline at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.¹ This work attempts to investigate if, when, and to what extent this occurred in Leath Ward, one of the five ancient divisions of medieval Cumberland, situated in the south-east corner of the old county, adjoining Westmorland. Although it is an area of considerable variety in its underlying geology, there was a remarkable homogeneity in farming practice, where pastoral activities were the bedrock of the system, and subsistence cereal crops, predominantly oats and barley, fed humans and cattle, with turnips as the preferred root crop for over-wintering sheep. The study involves the use of three primary national sources that will be examined on four occasions: the Land Tax Duplicates of 1780 and 1829; the Tithe Commutation Act applied locally about 1840; and the Inland Revenue Land Valuation Records of 1910-13. There is no suggestion of an inherent significance in this choice: they represent the occasions when appropriate data is available.

A Cumbrian yeoman differs from the national stereotype in that it implies a small owner-occupier farming fewer than 100 acres. The major hurdle is that none of these records mention the term “yeoman”, but based on the definition above, it may be possible from this study to identify the presence of a “yeoman class” to which they belonged, and note its vicissitudes through the 19th century. The fate of the yeomen as individuals should be reflected in the changes in the class as a whole, as they were subjected to the same socio-economic pressures. The name “yeoman” itself is found only in *Directory* sources, which, despite their alleged vagaries, will be critically evaluated as a means of comparison.

One of the keenly debated issues in the historiography of rural Cumberland has been the decline of the yeoman farmer, regarded as an important agricultural bulwark in a rural hierarchy where aristocratic influence was virtually absent, and there were few gentry landowners. By virtue of its topography and distance from London, Cumbria had fewer great magnates, resident or otherwise, than most other counties. During the 18th century there had been a net loss of aristocratic families in Cumberland, overall the sales of their land exceeded purchases, due to static revenues from their holdings that turned to losses over long periods.² Throughout the 19th century the density of aristocratic settlement in England varied considerably: in 1865 there was one seat for every 31,000 acres in Rutland, at the top of the county list – Cumberland was in 37th place in the county table, with a seat for every 281,000 acres; only two places above Westmorland which came last, and during the course of the century the gap widened between the most and the least favoured counties.³ In Leath Ward the aristocracy was poorly represented: they possessed no estates, only individual farms; and they were non-resident; so that any influence they may have had as leaders and innovators in agricultural improvement was minimal. Their scarcity on the ground is illustrated in Table 1: given the

numbers it is small wonder that they were unable to furnish support in local agricultural affairs at any point during the 19th century/during the current study.

TABLE 1: Showing the relative density of aristocratic and gentry numbers and percentages (in brackets, and expressed as a percentage of all landowners in Leath Ward) from 1780 to 1913.

Date	All Landowners	Aristocracy	Gentry
1780	1,581 (100%)	5 (0.3%)	210 (13%)
1829	1,205 (100%)	6 (0.5%)	199 (17%)
c.1840	1,085 (100%)	2 (0.2%)	53 (5%)
1913	725 (100%)	1 (0.1%)	48 (7%)

(Sources: Databases from Land Tax Duplicates for 1780 and 1829 [56 townships]; Tithe Commutation Act c.1840; and Income Tax Records, Forms 4 and 37, 1913 [42 townships])

Whilst concerned contemporaries observed the decline of the yeomen occurring continuously through the 19th century, most 20th century authors are of the opinion that the major depletion took place in the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, and failed to survive the agricultural depression following 1813, and which lasted for the next 35 years. Following Blamire's almost contemporary views of the collapse, the major 20th century historians writing on this topic, Jones, Beckett and Searle, all agree that this was the case. On the other hand throughout the latter part of the 18th and most of the 19th century there are other, and insistent, voices claiming that the decline was in progress at the time of their writing. A further, and quite different view, was held by Walton who was convinced the decline of the yeomanry was a semantic and visual illusion: in the former case they merely changed their names to that of "farmer"; and in the latter, evidence supports the view that the number of farmers remained remarkably stable through the 19th century.⁴

Who were these yeomen: how had they developed; how did they acquire the title; how numerous were they; which rung did they occupy on the social ladder; what was their contribution to Cumberland agriculture; and, of course, what were the consequences of their demise?

The term "yeoman" was a mark of status in an extremely hierarchical society, and synonymous with stability. As in other parts of England, locally it bridged the considerable hiatus between the thinly spread "gentry" and the lower levels of rural society – the husbandmen and cottagers who formed the base of the pyramid. However in a Cumberland context a "yeoman" differed from the contemporary view obtaining in arable English shires in two major ways.⁵ Firstly, there was no entry level for membership of the class in terms of acreage, the majority farmed less than 100 acres, and secondly they were a mixture of freeholders and customary tenants.

As a class the yeomen had been in existence for an indeterminate period dating from the weakening of the manorial system in the 17th and 18th centuries, but their heyday was at the turn of the 18th century, when their deeply conservative traditional life style was deemed a virtue and lauded by the new Romantic movement, possibly as a protective bastion against the febrile activities of their counterparts on the other side of the English Channel. Pragmatic agriculturalists

viewed these laudable characteristics unsympathetically, and felt that they were inhibiting progress.

Tenant-right, or customary tenure, was unique to the northern counties, and stemmed from the internecine border warfare that had been endemic from the early 14th century, when the lord of the manor expected his tenants to fight as well as farm. Unlike copyhold tenants who paid an annual rent and a single fine on the death or alienation of the occupant, customary tenants paid this together with an additional fine on the death of their lord. The nature of the customary tenancy was that it was heritable, so that it could remain in the same family for generations. The tenants paid low fixed rents with intermittent “fines”, leading to diminishing manorial revenues over long periods of time. Even with military activities gradually subsiding after the accession of James I, it proved impossible for landowners to buy out these tenancies and lease out the land at economic rents, due to the strength of the title of customary tenants (robustly upheld by the courts).⁶ To recoup some income from their recalcitrant tenants, exasperated landlords resorted to enfranchising those who sought independence, and those who did so gained the freehold rights to their small farm, often by a single payment. These new freehold owner-occupiers became the nucleus of the yeoman group, but because the customary tenants also inherited estates, they could also claim admission to this category.

The yeomen were well regarded for their sobriety, industry, frugality and fierce independence. Their farms employed few labourers, as their families were usually the work force, and they were heavily engaged in secondary domestic industrial activities. Their elevation to the dignity of “yeoman” was usually self-assumed, but the success of their aspirations only became evident if and when their peer group began to use the new title. Thus the term “yeoman” was used to describe a variable amalgam of social and economic status, and this elastic definition was, perhaps, more responsive to changing trends and perceptions.

As individuals are not designated “yeomen” in the records of either central government or the Anglican Church their numbers are difficult to calculate; they are found described as “yeomen” only in *Directories*, where their inclusion appears to depend on non-rigorous criteria. The earliest *Directory* is the Parson and White edition of 1829, which comes 14 years after the critical date of 1815, so no anterior knowledge of their numbers exists. The nearest approximation to a figure may be derived from a study of the owner-occupier class obtained from central government records, on the grounds that major changes here would be accurately reflected in the smaller yeoman group embodied within it. Beginning with the Land Tax duplicates of 1780 and 1829, both of which cover all the 56 townships of Leath Ward, it should be possible to calculate the owner-occupiers, to which both the “freehold” and the “customary tenant” yeomen belong. This class may also be identified in the tithe summaries of c.1840, and in Forms 4 and 37 of the Inland Revenue Valuation process of 1910-13, indeed the latter contains information of the type of holding farmed by the owner-occupiers.

Methodology

It is difficult to avoid the temptation of reading too much into the Land Tax Records. Could it be that some idea of the size of an individual’s landholding was

related to the amount of tax they paid? Not so. The Land Tax was not an equitable impost: the upland pastoralist with more than 100 acres of rough grazing could well pay less than an arable farmer with fewer than ten acres of favoured valley land, and moreover each township was valued at a different rate. The least contentious use of this material is in creating a database for Leath Ward in the years 1780 and 1829 using the same 56 townships in both, giving the names of landowners and occupiers, that appear adjacent to each other on the originals.⁷ The manipulation of this material is dealt with below. Multiple repetitions of the same name at a time when there was a paucity of given names may be confusing, but this is less likely to be a problem in strictly rural communities than in urban areas. Reiteration of a name in a village where the surname is otherwise unknown almost certainly indicates a single individual. Even when the identical name appears in villages where the surname is common, the inference is that it belongs to just one individual, because the Land Tax assessors take care to insert “senior” or “junior” or the name of the owner’s farm after the entry to identify the persons involved.

To avoid errors part of Penrith and all of Alston are excluded, as there are too many variables.⁸ In 1829 an addition to the form was required: a new column containing a description of the property. Only one of the six divisions of Penrith has such a description on the 1829 form (“Middlegate and Sandgate”), and this refers almost exclusively to dwellings associated with an urban community. Two of the divisions, Carleton and Plumpton Head were still rural in both 1780 and 1829, and have been included; the other four comprise the town and have been omitted. Descriptive elements are lacking from the 1829 Alston records, making it difficult to understand the reasons behind the enormous expansion in the number of entries taking place between 1780 and 1829 – almost fivefold from 45 to 217, and very much against the trend elsewhere in Leath Ward, where numbers were falling. This was not due to the influence of the separately taxed mines, nor could it be due to the enclosure of more than 20,000 acres of the commons during the course of 1820 (the 499 allotments were shared between only 88 individuals) as this phenomenon was not seen elsewhere, even in the comparable 1819 enclosure of Inglewood Forest.⁹

As far as the rural townships go it is possible to be fairly certain that all the entries apply to farms and/or land, as there are no significant elements apart from corn mills, quarries or mines, which are normally identified, and these have been excluded together with sums accruing from tithes. All quotas for 1829 include exonerated contributors, and the total sum charged in a township was the same as that obtaining in 1780, indicating that the value of the tax return was eroded over time, particularly when the inflationary pressures of the war years are taken into consideration. Some degree of latitude existed in those eligible to pay this tax: it was possible for tenants paying less than 20 shillings to be excused their contributions; and in some areas the landowners paid all the tax. There is no evidence to indicate that these exemptions were instituted locally. Cumberland was one of the few counties where Roman Catholics did not have to pay twice the going rate.

Land Tax levies of less than a shilling have been ignored on the grounds that where a description of the property on the 1829 returns has been completed, items in this range are described as “house and garden” or just “house” or “cottage”, rarely do they refer to land – and the area thus described must be nugatory. As most

of the returns have no entries under “description”, it is impossible to devise a cut-off point at the lower end of the scale that would retain all the landed property above it and exclude landless dwellings beneath. By keeping the methodology as simple as possible it should make inevitable errors at least consistent, and erring in the same proportion and direction throughout this period.

The large number of owners with only a single property demonstrates that, indirectly, Cumberland was a county of small landowners as well as small farmers. In 1780 there were 1,581 recorded landholders in Leath Ward, suggesting that the person writing to the *Gentlemen's Magazine* in 1766, to the effect that there were “10,000 small landowners in Cumberland at that time” may not have been too wide of the mark.¹⁰

Of the 56 townships in Leath Ward available for study in 1829, only 28 (50 per cent) completed the additional column requiring a property description, and it was done in a variety of ways: some described the land as either “customary” or “freehold”; others put “messuage and tenement” or “house and land”; some actually named the properties; yet others put in both the type of landholding together with the nature of the property (e.g. “free or customary” plus “house and land”), and there were two examples of this combination; altogether five lists show customary tenants. The ratio of owner-occupiers to customary tenants in this small 1829 study is four to one, a figure that could change significantly with modest additional information.¹¹

It was possible from the database to calculate the total number of personal landholdings by excluding the few institutional holdings and owners. The total number of multiple holdings was then deducted from this figure, to which was added the number of multiple landowners, to give the overall number of individual landowners. Carrying the analysis further, the basic owner-occupying class was arrived at by subtracting from the “self” total all those with titles and multiple holdings (in 1829 the Hon. Henry Howard of Greystoke Castle paid Land Tax on 44 properties, against nine of which was entered “Self”, though by no stretch of the imagination could he be described as a yeoman), and then adding to this figure the number with the same family surnames, on the grounds that in this situation one member of the family was acting on behalf of another (usually a widowed mother with her child). This same approach was adopted in databases constructed for the Tithe commutations c.1840 and the Inland Revenue registration of 1913. Acreages are only available for the Tithe and Inland Revenue databases, hence in these categories selection additionally incorporates those in the “owner-occupier” and “same family name” groups who hold fewer than 100 acres.

It is important to make a clear distinction between the Land Tax and Tithes as they are totally different taxes, and therefore not comparable. The former is a tax raised for central government by the local gentry on an acreage of land, and the latter was initially a levy of a tenth on the produce (crops, animals, and dairy products) of certain lands for the benefit and sustenance of the incumbent Anglican clergy, or later, at the Reformation, the lay impropiators who had purchased the tithes. The 1829 Land Tax records in Leath Ward are not accompanied by cadastral maps, however, a decade later the Tithe Commissioners required a map of the township involved on which the fields were marked out and suitably labelled. Thus the Land Tax and the Tithe dues of a given estate may not necessarily be imposed

on the same area, though in Leath Ward there would seem to be a considerable overlap between the two.

Of the 56 townships in Leath ward, only 43 (77 per cent) had tithe schedules (*c.*1840) available for study. In practice there are only 42, as one has been mislaid.¹² The unnamed communities must have agreed a modus with the ecclesiastical authorities, and were no longer subject to tithes in kind. Although the schedules give an acreage for the holding, this, with very few exceptions represents only the land on which tithes were payable, and not, for example, the newly created additions to farms from extensive recent parliamentary enclosure, so the actual farm size is not necessarily accurate, and the degree of error is not constant from farm to farm. From this it follows that if there are errors in acreage the figures quoted will always be underestimates. To illustrate the disparities between the two tax returns the 42 townships available in the Tithe study are compared with the same 42 townships in the 1829 Land Tax levy.

The third major source arises from the Finance Acts of 1909 and 1910. Termed the "Inland Revenue District Valuation", it was devised as a means of raising revenue from the increased value of underdeveloped land adjacent to urban areas, an enhancement due to the activities of neighbouring industry or commerce rather than any efforts on the landowners' part.

There are various types of document related to this tax. Firstly Valuation Books were copied from the existing Poor Rate Books. These began with an Assessment or Hereditament Number (the key to all that followed) in the first column relating to each property, followed by the Poor Rate number, then the details of the owner and occupier. These were known as the New Domesday Books (not to be confused with the New Domesday Returns of 1873, or the New Domesday Survey of 1943, the National Farm Survey). The first nine columns contained data from the Rate Books, but thereafter they were invited to enter their own additional details, such as the extent of properties based on OS maps. Virtually none of this additional material appears in the Valuation Books for the present study area, rendering them otiose. Secondly the Valuation Office sent out a form in August 1910 named Form 4 – Land. This appears to be a somewhat intimidating document running as it does to four pages of detailed questions asking about the landed hereditament under investigation as of 30 April 1909. A different document was completed by statutory companies, such as railways, and industrial concerns involved with mineral extraction. The Form 4 documents are held in the Cumbria Record Office in Carlisle, and they have been used to extract relevant information for this study.¹³ Stored with them is the Provisional Valuation of the property or Form 37 originally kept in the District Valuation Offices. This form followed valuation, site visits and survey, and the majority in the study area are dated 1913. It contains the most accurate and recent information concerning the occupier and the surveyed extent of the property.¹⁴ It also contains several different values for a given holding, some are practical, whilst others are hypothetical. Of these only the Total Value is useful, as it was probably nearest to the true market value of the property.

The major pitfall in the use of these records is in confusing Income Tax Parishes with Civil Parishes, as this may lead to serious numerical error.¹⁵ Again only properties described as farms or land have been included in the database, those under one acre have been excluded. To attempt some means of comparison, the 42

townships studied in the Tithe data have been the foundation of this database.

Apart from the years prior to 1829 it is possible to trace the numbers of yeomen in Leath Ward from *Directory* sources at more frequent intervals than the other data. Unfortunately the directories do not include the names of landowners, but only the current occupiers of a property, though in the *Directories* of 1884 and 1911 a tiny minority of the occupiers identify themselves as being the owners, perhaps as a mark of prestige. No attention is paid to those with multiple properties, or the acreage involved. It is doubtful if the data collection was standardised or rigorously scrutinised, not least because there were four different publishers involved over this period. The procedure by which they arrived at the neat columns of “farmers”, with highlighted “yeomen”, is unclear. Did inclusion depend on personal visits or correspondence, were subscriptions required for inclusion, and how many farmers and yeomen, for a variety of reasons, failed to contribute?

Results

Bearing in mind all the reservations hitherto attached to the use of the Land Tax Duplicates in this study, an analysis of the figures for 1780 in Leath Ward reveals that there were 1,855 non-institutional landholdings on which Land Tax of more than a shilling was levied, of these 437 were multiple holdings, owned by 163 individuals. There were 1,581 individual landowners in all. The owner-occupier class were deemed to own their own properties, by being registered as “self”. This group contained 970 members, which, after the exclusion of 30 titled people (i.e. not yeomen), and 75 individuals with more than one holding, followed by the addition of 52 people sharing the same family name, formed the basis for a “yeoman class” of 917 members constituting 58 per cent of the total landholding class (see Table 2). This method of calculation has been employed in all subsequent elements of the study.

TABLE 2: Number and percentage of Yeoman Class in the Landowners Group 1780-1829.

Year	Total Landowners	Yeoman Class	Percentage
1780	1,581	917	58%
1829	1,205	664	55%

(Source: Land Tax Duplicates CRO Carlisle QPR/1/Leath/1780 and 1829/ Township)

By 1829 the situation, using the same townships, had changed: there were 1,691 non-institutional landholdings, the number of multiple landholdings had increased to 737, and owners of multiple properties accounted for 251 individuals, and total landowners numbered 1,205. Calculated in the same way as for the 1780 figures, the “yeoman class” included 664 owner-occupiers and their relatives, who formed 55 per cent of the total landowning class (Table 2).

Despite 50 years of vigorous parliamentary enclosure in the area, the number of taxed landholdings in individual hands actually fell by 163 (9 per cent) during this period, though the total revenue raised was the same, and early augmentation of property rather than acquisition (already occurring) may have been responsible for

the fall.¹⁶ The fall in yeoman class membership between the two dates was 253 (28 per cent), and in the same period 123 non-occupying landowners disappeared (19 per cent). This was a significant fall to find in 50 years, let alone in the 15 years after Waterloo. The inescapable fact is that both elements of the landowning class structure suffered significantly.

It could be argued that dates nearer in time to the critical years of 1813-15 may give a more accurate reflection of the onset of acute agricultural depression. The dates that come closest in Leath Ward are 1795 (rather too large a gap to be useful), and 1818 for most of the townships (or 1817 in the case of Melmerby and Skirwith).¹⁷ Figures for the landowning and yeoman classes in 1818 give totals of 1,480 and 715 respectively. If this is seen in the context of the totals for 1780 and 1829, interesting percentages emerge (Table 3). These show asymmetric changes amongst the landed class: in the early period 1780-1818 a fifth of the yeoman body have vanished, whereas the non-residential landowners initially increased, though markedly diminished in number over the next decade. Why should this be?

The most likely reason for this is that the losses occurred post-1813 when agricultural turbulence began. Previously farming had been extremely profitable both nationally and locally, with soaring grain prices that peaked in 1812 at levels not seen again for many decades. Many Cumbrian farmers had ploughed up their sheep walks for arable crops and now paid the price.¹⁸ The yeoman class as defined had few reserves, and were vulnerable to the chill winds of competition unleashed when they were exposed to the European market after the collapse of the Continental System. The increase in tenanted farms is most likely due to speculation on the part of their owners in buying the vacated farms of the failed owner-occupiers, which presumably were small and relatively inexpensive. These new owners, with their additional investment, may have found the unfavourable conditions persisting longer than they anticipated. In the last decade this set in train a process whereby they too began to experience severe hardship, and 29 per cent went out of business between 1818 and 1829. At the end of the period the picture is one of a rapid turnover in agricultural property in the post-Napoleonic years. It may be possible, for the first time, to arrive at a verdict on quantifying the situation, and a date for the major decline of the yeoman class.

TABLE 3: Numbers and percentage changes (taken year on year) in Yeoman Class and the Landowners Group 1780, 1818 and 1829.

Year	Landowners	% Change	Yeoman Class	% Change
1780	664		917	
1818	765	+15	715	-22
1829	541	-29	664	-7

(Source: Land Tax Duplicates CRO Carlisle QPR/1/Leath/ Township/1780, 1818 and 1829).

Could corroborative evidence of farming in free fall be obtained from advertisements in the “new” weekly newspapers? Unfortunately Penrith, as the “capital” of Leath Ward, did not get its first newspaper until 1854. Details of farm sales may, however, appear in the *Carlisle Journal*, which began publication in 1798, Whig in conviction, it was the first of the Carlisle papers. To discover what was happening in Leath

Ward the *Carlisle Journal* with a complete set [52] of weekly editions for 1815 was studied. The geographical coverage of the *Journal* was extensive: to the south through Westmorland, with occasional forays into Lancashire and Yorkshire; to the east into Durham and Northumberland; over the border into Scotland, as far north as Argyllshire; and to the Isle of Man in the west. During 1815 in Leath Ward only eight farms were put forward for sale, and 26 were advertised for letting, most of the latter in September with occupancy available on the following Candlemas [2 February 1816].

Extant copies of the *Journal* for the years 1816-19 are relatively few in number, there are only two available for the year 1816, a January issue contains no farms for sale, but on 11 May two estates are advertised; in the three issues of 1818 only one farm appears; in the five issues of 1819, two farms are found to be on the market.

The number of potential sales on the market over the course of 1815 seems very small. It is of the order of 0.6 per cent of all farms in Leath Ward, and argues against the notion of a collapse in Cumbrian agriculture. Also, cursory assessments showed no evidence of greater activity in other areas of the county. Could it be that the situation of some families was so desperate that they sold out precipitately to family, neighbours or larger farmers, without being able to wait for a sale? This seems unlikely as the average time between advertising and sale was of the order of a month: judging by their character most would elect to cling on through this short delay to improve the prospect of wider participation in the event. Even if visits to Carlisle were unusual, the newspaper had three local correspondents in Penrith who would be able to handle advertising arrangements. Indeed it may be that handbills, or even word of mouth, were the normal vehicles for advertising sales in Leath Ward. Nevertheless a note of caution must be sounded in assuming that small farmers suffered a calamitous fall in numbers during this period.

Is it possible that more details will emerge from the contents of the *Journal*? A likely cause for the collapse is soon found – the price of wheat per bushel (a Carlisle bushel = 3 Winchester Bushells) in January 1812 was 35 shillings, and in July 60 shillings, and for the same months in 1815 was 25s. 6d., and 25s. respectively. In none of the 52 issues of the *Journal* in 1815 are there any editorials or articles on the topic of agricultural distress and its effects on the small owner and farm workers. The early months of the year were taken up with the fight against the Corn Law, with letters claiming agricultural problems without specifying their nature, and the gathering of huge petitions. But with the passage of the bill in March, attention was deflected to Napoleon's escape from Elba, and the slow evolution of events to Waterloo, and thereafter stories of great celebratory dinners and endless speeches raising money for wounded soldiers went on into the autumn.

Another view of the state of agriculture may be obtained from the stock market reports: Penrith New Fair on 4 March put forward "good cattle at low prices". As the season wore on, even at the major sales in Carlisle, Brough and Rosley this was a common refrain: good cattle, many of them fetching below average prices, with inferior stock unsaleable. These observations are indicative of troubled times in agriculture, and some form of acknowledgement of its existence seems tantalisingly close; but at the major agricultural event in the north of England, no note of crisis was sounded in any of the speeches or toasts at the Workington Agricultural Society on 19 August.¹⁹

In the 42 townships of Leath Ward where tithes were being commuted, there were 1,691 properties liable to tithe charges in private hands, with 886 multiple landholdings, 280 multiple landowners, and a total of 1,085 personal landowners. There were 529 non-residential landowners, and, after excluding gentry and those with multiple landholdings, and adding members of the owner's family, there were 475 individuals holding fewer than 100 acres. In this different source the yeoman class constituted 44 per cent of all the landowners.

If these figures are compared with those of the 1829 Land Tax a decade earlier for the same 42 townships and parishes, for purposes of illustration only, the figures for non-institutional landholdings are 1,230, a total of 930 landowners, and 549 owner-occupiers. There are 97 exclusions, and 53 family members to be added, giving a yeoman class totalling 505 in all, and constituting 54 per cent of the landowning group. Comparisons between the two sets of figures show that the Tithe records contain many more landholdings than the Land Tax for the same townships, and almost twice as many multiple holdings and owners of multiple properties. The final size of the yeoman class in the two instances are not in any way comparable, the Land Tax does not contain acreages so it is impossible to assess the number of the yeoman class with fewer than 100 acres. This exercise illustrates three features: firstly the inherent consistency of the Land Tax figures, secondly the impossibility of comparing the figures for the two taxes, and finally the significantly more numerous contributors to the tithe levy, perhaps reflecting its longevity as a tax. It is worth noting that no other industries except agriculture were required to pay either tax: further burdens to add to the farmers' financial woes.

In 1913 the situation in the 42 communities subject to the Tithe Commutation Act in c.1840 was as follows: there were 1,435 personal landholdings, a total of 725 landowners; there were 262 owner-occupiers, eight with titles, and 41 multiple holdings had to be subtracted from this figure, with 28 family members to be added to it. The number with farms with less than 100 acres produced a final figure for the yeoman class of 198 individuals, which constituted 27 per cent of all the landowners. This was about half the percentage of 1780 and 1829. It seems unlikely that all these claimed yeoman status. Indeed only two individuals out of the whole group (numbering 725) elected to describe themselves as such on Form 4.

There is, however, an opportunity to study the tenancy arrangements in the early 20th century. A surprising number of customary tenants persist: overall 19 per cent of tenancies were still held in this way in Leath Ward, and a further 16 per cent held their property as a combination of customary tenancy and freehold. The distribution varies considerably between townships: in Greystoke and Newton Reigny, for example, there were no "customary tenants", whereas three quarters (75 per cent) of all the properties in Gamblesby were held in "customary tenancy", and a further 15 per cent were held in combination; in Great Salkeld two thirds of the holdings were either "customary" (36 per cent) or "customary and free" (29 per cent). The manorial lord in both instances was the Duke of Devonshire. This is possibly the last glimpse of this medieval type of tenancy, because The Law of Property Act (1922) abolished customary tenure within a decade.

On the face of it the several *Directories* provide a comprehensive account of township activity: the village worthies; clerics; craftsmen and tradesmen; ending with a list of farmers, identifying yeomen. The list is limited to the names of farm

occupants only, not those of landowners or owner-occupiers, though it may be of some restricted value still, provided that it accounts for all occupiers. But does it? Unfortunately this is not the case. Suspicions arise when comparing the number of people entered into the 1829 *Directory*, with the census population as given in the *Directory* text, and, more tellingly, with the numbers found in the Land Tax records of the same township for the same year. For a populous village such as Culgaith there is a huge disparity between the recorded names and the population of the township: the *Directory* gives 16 farmers, all of whom are yeomen; whereas the Land Tax record lists 46 owner-occupiers and 11 individual tenants.

To pursue this striking anomaly in greater detail, the national figures and the directory lists in five of the larger villages were compared at the dates used in this study. In 1829 there were 92 farmers and 73 yeomen according to the *Directory*, but there were 78 tenants and 154 owner-occupiers in the occupiers' column of the Land Tax records. The 1847 *Directory* produced 90 farmers and 37 yeomen, but the tithe summaries of c.1840 gave 115 tenants and 92 owner-occupiers for the same townships. In 1910 the *Directory* figures are 77 tenants and seven yeomen, whilst the 1913 regulations produced 159 tenants and 42 owner-occupiers.²⁰ These figures reveal a variable, marked and persistent under-registration in the *Directory* compared to the official sources that render the use of the former useless in the quest for the elusive yeomen.

If the overall tone of this paper had been elegiac, a brief respite may be found in stories of a few yeoman families who managed to ride out recurrent storms of the agricultural economy. Most of the townships have one or two of these who survived, clinging onto their patrimony through generations. Using parish registers, the Protestation Returns of 1641, the Hearth Tax of 1664, Bishops Transcripts and Census returns, together with some oral history, it is possible to trace these families. In Kirkland parish the Jacksons first mentioned in the 17th century survive to the present day in Skirwith, with the Sandersons (18th century) who only died out in the early 1970s, Culgaith had the Sewells (17-20th centuries), Blencarn was home to the Atkinsons and Cannons (17-20th centuries). So it was feasible with hard work, good health, ability, and perhaps a little luck, for families to survive over several centuries.

Conclusions

The *Directory* series of volumes through the 19th century emerge from this study as being unreliable, inaccurate, and given to reiterating large undigested portions of its predecessors without a blush for their outright plagiarism. It is claimed that one way in which they may be valuable is that they may help to determine a person's occupation or residence in a community at a particular time, but it is clear from this study that if they are not mentioned, it is unsafe to assume that they were elsewhere. Directories did not appear prior to 1829 and are thus unable to contribute to a picture of the Land Tax era: investigation exposes their major failings; gross inaccuracies, under-registration and the paucity of general agricultural information. In general they are unsuitable for use as sources in databases.

The 1910 records reveal a surprising number of customary tenants persisting in certain townships, the distribution is patchy: some have none, others a high

percentage. As a relict of medieval times their persistence into the 20th century is remarkable, and probably best suited to the pastoral society where they were found. The low rents and security of tenure would prove welcome in the upland townships with their subsistence farming, to which they appear to be confined. It is hard to imagine them flourishing in the more competitive arable sector, where the manorial lords would have exerted pressure for enfranchisement in anticipation of profits from subsequent leases for years. In some townships where there is a sprinkling of customary tenants the impression is that they are probably unaware of the exact nature of their agreement. The fact that they are concentrated in certain townships may indicate either, that the manorial lord took a very casual approach to his property, or was very wealthy indeed, and not dependant on his fellside tenants for great profit.

The different methods of registering information in the sources used in this study over the 19th century preclude even elementary comparative statistical analysis in absolute numerical terms, though it seems clear that with the adopted methodology a yeoman entity may be safely identified existing within the total landowning class, which progressively diminished during the period. The most dramatic fall occurred when the records were comparable, i.e. the Land Tax Duplicates of 1780 and 1829, and despite the lack of acreage values, the non-titled owner-occupiers with a single property were the principal victims, with 253 (29 per cent) vanishing in 50 years. Assuming a minimal diminution during the years of prosperity from 1790, and using additional evidence from the Land Tax Duplicates of 1818 it is clear that there was considerable activity in landownership, as almost a third of the yeoman class apparently disappeared in the economic catastrophe following 1813, and whilst there was a transient compensatory increase in the non-resident landowners their numbers fell by 123 individuals (29 per cent) between 1818 and 1829.

This activity caused surprisingly few ripples in the local press, given that agriculture was the major economic activity in the county: the number of farms for sale did not appear to be excessive, nor were impassioned editorials or heart-rending stories of ruined families encountered in its columns. In respect of other topics there is no obvious policy to suppress bad news. It is clear from grain prices and depressing live stock market reports that a serious calamity had overtaken local agriculture. Any anxiety is displayed by letter-writers, who tacitly assume disaster, as they clamour for defeat of the Corn Law legislation. There are no proposals to create charitable schemes to relieve hardship amongst those who, until very recently, had been their neighbours. This can scarcely be due to an indifferent and callous disregard for their sufferings, a better explanation is that matters had not progressed to the point where these measures were required.

The yeoman class had declined still further in the Tithe records of *c.*1840 and the Income Tax Valuations of 1910-1913; and the same is true, to a lesser degree, of the landowners. It is impossible to say whether this was a gradual or stepwise declension, given the sources available, and the time elapsed.

For the first time it has been possible to demonstrate a numerical dimension to the sharp decline in yeoman numbers, roughly a third, taking place following 1813, prior to which farming had prospered. The time scale for these events is in line with the views of 20th century historians. This is not to deny a progressive long-term gradual attrition of the yeoman class through the long 19th century. The findings

appear to validate Walton's suggestion that the yeomen did not disappear, most of them turned into "farmers". The reasons that lie behind this process of decline and its consequences will be addressed in a sequel to this paper.

Notes and References

- ¹ *Report of the Select Committee on Agriculture* Parliamentary Papers (1833), v, 309-311; G. P. Jones, "The Decline of the Yeomanry in the Lake Counties", *CW2*, lxii, 201; J. V. Beckett, "The Decline of the Small Landowner in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England: some Regional Considerations," *Agricultural History Review*, xxx (1982), 109; and C. E. Searle, "The odd corner of England": a study of a rural social formation in transition: Cumbria c.1700-c.1914 (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Essex, 1983).
- ² J. Thirsk, "Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness" in E. J. T. Collins (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales Vol VI Regional Farming Systems* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 11.
- ³ F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Gentry in the Nineteenth Century* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969), 30-33.
- ⁴ J. K. Walton, "The strange decline of the Lakeland yeoman: some thoughts on sources, methods, and definitions," *CW2*, lxxxvi, 221-233; J. D. Marshall and J. K. Walton, *The Lake Counties from 1830 to the mid-twentieth centuries. A Study in Regional Change*. (Manchester University Press, 1981), Appendix 4, 249.
- ⁵ M. Campbell, *The English Yeoman* (1967 edn.), Chapter 2.
- ⁶ For definitions of the customary tenants see: A. J. L. Winchester, *The Harvest of the Hills* (Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 16. Extended commentaries are also found in R. W. Hoyle, "An Ancient Right and Laudable Custom: the Definition of Tenant-Right in North-Western England in the Sixteenth Century", *Past and Present* 116 (1987), 22-55; G. H. Tupling, *The Economic History of Rossendale* (Manchester U.P., 1927), Chap 5; and, for a brief review, see A. J. L. Winchester, "Regional Identity in the Lake Counties: Land Tenure and the Cumbrian Landscape", *Northern History* XLII (2005), 29-48.
- ⁷ Found indexed in CRO(C), QPR/1/Leath/Township name/1780 or 1829.
- ⁸ D. E. Ginter, *A Measure of Wealth: the English Land Tax in Historical Analysis* (Hambledon Press, London, 1992), 14 -76. As an example, the three very different townships in the parish of Kirkland all contributed the same amount to the overall sum – there was absolutely no equivalence in terms of population, acreage, or land type.
- ⁹ R. S. Dilley, "The Enclosure Awards of Cumberland: A statistical list", *CW2*, c, 225-239.
- ¹⁰ *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXXVI (1766), 582.
- ¹¹ The yeomen were found in W. Parson, & W. White, *A History, Directory and Gazetteer of the Counties of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Wm. White & Co, Leeds, 1829), and involved the townships of Berrier, Hutton Soil, Matterdale, Ousby and Renwick; whose Land Tax indices are CRO(C), QPR1/Leath/1829/name of township.
- ¹² Found in CRO(C), DRC/8/Index number/Township name.
- ¹³ In CRO(C), TIR/4/index number/Income Tax Parish.
- ¹⁴ B. Short, *Land and Society in Edwardian Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 70-71.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 265-9.
- ¹⁶ R. S. Dilley, "The Enclosure Awards", 225-239.
- ¹⁷ CRO(C), QPR/1 /Leath/1818/Township.
- ¹⁸ *English Landed Gentry in the Nineteenth Century*, 221, 232.
- ¹⁹ This information is extracted from CRO(C), *Carlisle Journal*, all issues, 1815.
- ²⁰ The villages selected were: Culgaith, Gamblesby, Great Salkeld, Langwathby and Melmerby.

