

TITHE AND BENEFICE INCOMES IN DERBYSHIRE 1772 - 1832

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There seems to be no single source which enables us to calculate the total value of tithe income in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, although it appears that less was paid in direct tithes in Derbyshire than the average for the country as a whole.¹ A study of the county's enclosure awards however suggests that the burden of tithe payments on the agricultural economy was considerable. An undated *Derbyshire Return of all Land and Money Payments assigned in lieu of Tithes under Inclosure Acts, the Awards of which are enrolled with the Clerk of the Peace*² lists thirty-one awards made between 1775 and 1846 in which tithes were commuted for land allotment and distinguishes the acreage assigned to lay appropriators, incumbents and ecclesiastical corporations. The allotments total, to the nearest acre, 9,067 acres, of which lay impropiators received 6,960 acres or 77%, ecclesiastical corporations 205 acres or 2% and incumbents 1,902 acres or 21%. The total acreage of new enclosure was 52,303 acres. The percentage of this new enclosure allotted to lay impropiators was 13%, to ecclesiastical corporations 0.4% and to incumbents 4%. The total area of the parishes represented in these awards was 116,006 acres. Therefore these allotments amounted to almost 8% of these parishes, and the tithes they represent prior to enclosure, even allowing that valuations were handsome, must be reckoned in excess of the traditional 10%. That this was so is demonstrated by the enclosure acts which substituted a corn rent for tithes. At Beighton for example the enclosure act substituted a corn rent of 2/15ths of the annual value of all old enclosure for all tithes on those enclosures. This was some 13%, and it is little wonder that farmers regarded tithe payments as an onerous tax.³

Yet it was the lay impropiator who received the lion's share of the tithes. In the cases cited above, three-quarters of the allotments went to them. Not even the rectors with cure of souls were in all cases free from the depredations of impropiators. The Archdeacon of Derby's articles of enquiry for his visitation in 1823 and 1824 reveal several cases where they were not. At Egginton the rector shared the great tithes with his patron, Sir Henry Every, and at Mugginton half the great tithes went to the patron. At Staveley the Duke of Devonshire had a moiety of the great tithes, while at Kedleston Lord Scarsdale took all the tithes and paid the rector a modus of £90 p.a. in lieu, his total income from the benefice. Two of the rectories of which the Dean of Lincoln was patron, Bradley and Bonsall, had all the great tithes impropiated by him, or leased to a lay impropiator.⁴ It was observed in 1811 that lay impropiators were

considerably more severe in exacting their Tithes than the Clergy, collectively; and . . . the non-resident part of the Clergy are vastly more strict and oppressive in this respect than . . . the resident and officiating Ministers.⁵

In addition, as Samuel Butler, the Archdeacon of Derby, pointed out in 1833,

impropiators generally receive the full, or nearly the full value of their Tithes, without murmuring, from the tithe-payers, while the Clergy rarely receive more than about two-thirds, and often less, paid grudgingly.⁶

Butler was commenting upon the proposals to appropriate and re-distribute Church revenues, and suggested that "lay tithe owners should *fully* participate in any burthen to be laid on ecclesiastical property . . ." This was only just, as the contribution tithe owners made to the Church in the maintenance of chancels was "too frequently meted out with a sparing and reluctant hand [even] by very extensive lay impropiators."⁷

The increased value of tithes

Despite the depredations of impropiators, all tithe owners benefited from the prosperity of agriculture in the years up to 1815. If the incomes of rectories, vicarages and perpetual curacies are analysed separately it can be seen that each type of benefice had achieved a substantial increase in income by the close of the period, but that livings which derived none of their income from tithes — the perpetual curacies — increased at a much slower rate up to the eighteen-twenties.

*Comparison of the incomes of 81 rectories, vicarages
and perpetual curacies, 1772 - 1832⁸*

Date	Rectories (30)			Vicarages (33)			Perp. Curacies (18)		
	Total	Average	% incr.	Total	Average	% incr.	Total	Average	% incr.
1772	£4220	£141		£1786	£54		£581	£32	
1824	£14214	£474	236%	£6509	£197	265%	£1707	£95	197%
1832	£13758	£459	226%	£6450	£195	261%	£2138	£119	272%

This table shows that benefice income derived from great tithes increased at a rate somewhat slower than that derived from small tithes, and that income from great tithes suffered disproportionately in the periods of depression after 1815.⁹ This latter was only to be expected. The owners of small tithes were likely to be least affected when corn prices were low. R. R. Ward, vicar of Sutton-on-the-Hill, pointed out in 1832 that

when Corn is low in price, then the Vicarage improves in value. When Corn is high in price the Vicarage sinks in value. When Corn is dear the farmers plough up their Grass Lands to the injury of the Vicarage.¹⁰

Thus during the 1820s vicarage incomes were virtually maintained whereas rectory incomes declined by some 3 to 4 per cent.¹¹ That this was due to a decrease in income from great tithes is suggested by the fact that whereas in 1832 some 46% of all benefice incomes was derived from tithe, 61.2% of rectorial incomes was so derived.¹² Even so, throughout the period the rectors enjoyed a much higher income than other incumbents and, as owners of great tithes, they stood to gain most from enclosure.

Tithe composition

At a time when demand required the most efficient use of land, the dampening effect of tithe was most severely felt. In his report on Derbyshire to the Board of Agriculture in 1794, Thomas Brown remarked that "the collecting of tithes in kind has a tendency to damp improvement" yet

on one of the largest estates in the county of Derby, the agreeing for the tithes is left entirely between the clergy and the occupiers of the land and . . . no estate in the county is in a better state of cultivation and improvement. So far as this goes, it is proof that lands may be improved under the present system of tithes where there is moderation on the side of the clergy, and candour on the side of the farmers.¹³

Farey observed seventeen years later however that it was extremely rare to find "a spirited Improver occupying Lands that are not tithe-free, or whereon a modus or fixed composition is established" and said that the occupier of the largest cultivated farm in the county threatened to lay all his land down to grass if, when the parish tithes were sold they "should be gathered in consequence . . . as was expected."¹⁴ Thus tithes were in effect a tax on farming efficiency. Phipps pointed out in 1769 that it was not the land which paid tithe

but the produce which is raised by the skill, Care, Expense and Labour of the Occupier, in whose Power it is to make much, little or nothing at his pleasure. If he sows it with Corn, it may happen . . . that the Tithe is worth three times the Rent of the Land it grows upon. If he pasture it with Sheep, the tithe will be less; and less still if he feed it with Cows, or breeding Cattle. If he eat up his Grass by Horses, or barren Cattle, an inconsiderable Rate is required. If he plant Wood, and let it stand for Timber, or stock it with Beasts which are *ferae Naturae*, of a wild Nature, or let his Land lie waste, or eat his Meadow, or Corn standing, no Tithe is required. These instances evince that Tithes are paid by the Stock or personal Estate of the Occupier, and not by the Land, for which the Tenant has not an Equivalent allowed him.¹⁵

The 1801 Crop Returns made to the Board of Agriculture by the parochial clergy show how the substitution of a *modus* for tithes in kind promptly effected an agricultural improvement. For example the rector of Darley wrote that 'a *Modus* established for Hay and Milk had encouraged the keeping of Land in Meadow and Pasture. A Lease of the Tithes is this year let to the several Land-holders; which will encourage the Culture of Grain.'¹⁶ By this time a considerable proportion of the tithes had been compounded. George Errington, who was lessee of the Dean and Chapter of Lichfield and of the Dean of Lincoln in some thirty parishes in and near Derbyshire, re-let his tithes to the principal land-owners who incorporated such payments in the occupiers' rents. Around Matlock and Darley and also at Wirksworth the clergy had a survey made annually previous to the harvest by a surveyor who charged certain rates per acre on the different types of crops: hay 2s 6d to 4s 6d, wheat 12s to 14s, oats 7s to 10s 6d, barley 10s and grass lands 4s.¹⁷

Tithe composition was obviously more popular with the farmers. Farey said in 1811 that 'the entire commutation of Tithes in lands or for Corn Rents seems now imperiously called for.' Equally some clergy resisted composition, though the same observer admitted that 'the Clergy as often compound and at as reasonable rates, for their Tithes, as the Laymen do.'¹⁸ Certainly in the early years of the period clergy resisted any move which would prevent them sharing in the growing prosperity of agriculture, and they gathered their tithes themselves where they could. The vicar of Stapenhill reported in 1772 that a *modus* of £6 p.a. in lieu of vicarial tithes from his Cauldwell chapelry had been paid since 1676. These tithes were now worth £40 p.a. and he hoped to have the *modus* set aside and 'to gather the Tithes as antiently gathered.'¹⁹ At Norbury, the rector, Simon Mills, said that his predecessor had let his tithes for £130 p.a., giving him an income of that amount, but that he was now gathering them himself. By 1823 the benefice income was £800 p.a., the glebe acreage remaining at 56 to 58 acres throughout the period.²⁰ But by the close of the period very few of the incumbents gathered tithe in kind, only some 0.75% of the total benefice income of the county coming from this source.²¹ Of the 165 parishes in Derbyshire whose returns to the Ecclesiastical Revenues Commissioners are extant only nine derived any benefice income from tithe in kind, and in only two was there collected tithes worth more than £50 p.a., Pinxton (£73 18s 0½d) and North Wingfield (£60-£70 p.a.).²²

There is little doubt that the difficulties of agriculture after 1815 made the demand for composition almost irresistible. A Derbyshire land-owner, Sir Hugh Bateman of Hartington, saw early in the post-war period that the recession would make payment of tithe in kind more unpopular still, and in 1816 he suggested that

individuals would bestow their time satisfactorily to the public by endeavouring to ascertain whether any plan could be formed for the commutation of tithes, which might be acceptable to the Clergy and to the lay impropiators of livings. For it would seem that the agriculturalists would be assisted by this means, and that the religion of the Church of England would be benefited by removing a source of discontent between the clergymen and their parishioners.²³

After the turn of the century there was a marked disinclination to preserve tithes on enclosure. A study of the fifty-five enclosure acts for Derbyshire parishes passed between 1771 and 1830 which had direct economic consequences for the clergy shows that only twelve made new enclosure subject to tithes and preserved tithes on all ancient enclosed land, and only one, the Whitwell act of 1813, was passed after 1803. Compositions based upon the average price of corn over a number of years related the

income of the clergy to the declining prosperity of the farmer and were obviously more popular with the farming community. Few of the later enclosure acts made provision for this type of composition however, although Archdeacon Butler welcomed the Tithe Commutation Bill in his *Charge* to his clergy in 1833.²⁴

The unpopularity of tithes

In common with farmers everywhere, Derbyshire producers had always been unwilling to pay tithes even in good times, and, particularly before the turn of the nineteenth century, there were invariably six to ten farmers from the county cited to appear before the consistory court at Lichfield each year for non-payment of tithes and other dues. All that the court could do was to excommunicate the farmer if he chose not to appear before it, yet there are several cases in the Lichfield cause papers of excommunicated persons petitioning the court for absolution on payment of their tithes and dues.²⁵ If the farmer did appear and the case went against him, his costs, which could be considerable, were recoverable as a civil debt, and this possibility rather than the fear of excommunication would have served as a deterrent to would-be non-payers. It is significant however that there is only one citation for non-payment against a Derbyshire farmer in the cause papers between 1806 and 1832. Tithe-owners had apparently come to the conclusion that the uncertainty of the legal process was not worth the cost. If of Samuel Pegge it could be said that of tithes 'he took just what he wanted and no more — just enough bread for himself and . . . corn for his horse'²⁶ one may be fairly certain that he acted thus from no conscientious scruple.

The 1801 Crop Returns show evidence of a considerable unwillingness on the part of the farmers to disclose to the incumbent, both as the agent of the government for this purpose and as a principal tithe-owner, their acreage under the plough. Matthew Olerenshaw, perpetual curate of Mellor, said that

I have employed a man to make Enquiry thro' ye whole District, from House to House: But many of ye Farmers are very backward to give any Account.²⁷

while from Thomas Field, curate of Brampton came the comment:

neither from the Person who rents the Tithes, nor from the Farmers themselves have I been able to obtain any Information. The Person who Rents the Tithes urged for his Excuse, that the Composition for Tithe been made 14 or 15 years ago, he cou'd not, at all, ascertain the present Number of Acres. And, when it was proposed at a Vestry that a Person shou'd go round the Parish to obtain Information respecting the Crops, several of the Farmers objected to the Enquiry; and declared their Unwillingness to ascertain to any one their Quantity of Land under the Plough.²⁸

Similar comments came from the incumbents of Taddington, Etwall, Darley and Quarndon.²⁹ As will be seen, the collection of tithes in kind became almost impossible in the eighteen-twenties, the unpopularity of tithe being exacerbated by the depression and the general unpopularity of the clergy.

Yet however much tithe, 'this grand evil of the Farmer' as Farey described it³⁰, was hated by the farmer, it was the staple of the parson's income not only in kind and by composition but also by virtue of land allotted in lieu of tithe on enclosure. It is impossible accurately to compute the proportion of all church lands in the county which, by 1832, had been granted in this way, but on the basis of the acreage given under the thirty-one awards already noted, with the average rentals prevailing throughout the period³¹, it may well be that up to 50% of the land producing income for the benefices in 1832 had been allotted in lieu of tithe.

Lead tithe

Although the lead-mining industry was in decline by the beginning of this period, some notice must be taken of tithe income from this source.

The story of the disputes over tithe between the miners and the clergy belongs to the seventeenth century³², but there would still have been many miners at the close of the

eighteenth century who would have lamented with Edward Manlove, who wrote in 1653 of the 'poor men' who

... may sell for need
If they cannot procure the dish with speed
Provided always that to Church and Lord
They pay all duties custom doth afford
For which the vicar daily ought to pray
For all the miners that such duties pay,
And, reason good, they venture lives full dear,
In Dangers great, the vicar's tythe come clear;
If miners lose their lives, or limbs, or strength
He loseth not, but looketh for a tenth.³³

During the middle years of the eighteenth century tithe payments on lead raised the benefice income of Eyam to £1,600 p.a., the rector receiving one penny for every dish of ore. This income had declined to £400 p.a. a century later.³⁴ By 1789 the Derbyshire lead miners were producing 5000 - 6000 tons annually, but it was 'almost universally admitted' that the industry had declined during the previous twenty years.³⁵ In these circumstances the tithe-owners did not exact tithe from the small mines as scrupulously as from the richer mine - owners. At Eyam in 1781 mining profits had declined dramatically and the partners of the Ladywash mine were compelled to ask for a reduction in tithe 'in consideration of the poverty of the mines.'³⁶ In 1780 the mine-owners of Wirksworth parish agreed with the vicar on an ore tithe of 1/25th. This agreement was rejected by the working miners who refused to give more than 1/40th, which the vicar, Richard Tillard, was forced to accept. At Castleton the incumbent received 1/20th.³⁷

The income from tithe ore varied considerably. At Wirksworth it was said to vary from £1000 in one year to £100 the next, while at Eyam the income of £1,600 induced a cleric to pay handsomely for the next presentation to the benefice. When the ore tithe income dropped suddenly to £200 - £300 'he tried, but in vain, to back out of the bargain and revenged himself on the parish by never residing.'³⁸

By the close of our period an already declining industry was being further crippled by the depression. The vicar of Wirksworth wrote to the Ecclesiastical Revenues Commissioners in 1832 that

unless there is a protecting Duty on the Lead Ore exported from Spain and other countries the produce of the Mines in this District will scarcely render a remunerating price to the miners, and as the Mining Business continues much depressed, the amount of Tithe proportionately decreases and the poor's rates are likely to increase.³⁹

He stated that his income from tithe ore in the previous three years had been

Sept. 1828 - Sept. 1829	£207 4s 2¼d
Sept. 1829 - Sept. 1830	£151 1s 0¾d
Sept. 1830 - Sept. 1831	£140 3s 7¼d

'and the fair inference is that in the present state of things the net Income of the benefice will become still less.'⁴⁰

The economic importance of tithe for the clergy cannot be over-estimated. If it is assumed that 50% of the income from benefice lands in 1832 came from land allotted in lieu of tithe, and as over 40% of all benefice incomes was derived from tithe in kind or by composition, it can be seen that some 60 - 65% of the total income of the benefices was derived directly or indirectly from tithe. Hated as it was by the farmer, the 'grand evil' was the basis of the parson's income, and although there is no doubt at all that receiving tithe compromised his pastoral ministry, without it he would have been more impoverished than he was.

REFERENCES

- ¹ The 1811 property tax returns gave 7½d in the pound as the average in direct tithes in Derbyshire. This compared with a national average of 1s 7d. This was due to the proportional extent of exonerated lands (J. Farey, *General View of the Agriculture of Derbyshire* (1811), iii, 640).
- ² Derbyshire Record Office (DRO), Quarter Sessions records.
- ³ Act 1796 and award 1799, DRO, Q/R13/148.
- ⁴ Lichfield Joint Record Office (LJRO), A/V/1/1, published as *The Church in Derbyshire in 1823-4*, (M. R. Austin, ed.) Derbyshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Vol.5 (1974), 88, 160, 107, 51, 46, articles 5 or 66 in each case.
- ⁵ J. Farey, *op.cit.*, iii, 639.
- ⁶ S. Butler, *A Charge addressed to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Derby* (1833), 8.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Based on the incomes of 81 benefices for which statistics are available in the LJRO, B/V/5 and A/V/1/1 and PP 1835, XXII, 458-509.
- ⁹ It also shows how effective grants from Queen Anne's Bounty and from parliamentary grant were in maintaining the real incomes of the perpetual curacies.
- ¹⁰ Church Commissioners file, NB 12/55.
- ¹¹ The effect of enclosure on the rectories and vicarages in the table is analysed in M. R. Austin, 'Enclosure and Benefice Incomes in Derbyshire, 1772-1832', *D.A.J.*, c (1980), 93.
- ¹² 39 Derbyshire rectories for which articles of enquiry from the Commissioners enquiring into ecclesiastical revenues in 1831 are extant were studied for the purposes of this paper. Total income was £17,293 of which £185 only came from tithes in kind, £9,564 from compositions and £832 from corn rents.
- ¹³ T. Brown, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Derby, with observations on the means of its improvement* (1794), 53.
- ¹⁴ J. Farey, *op.cit.*, ii, 30.
- ¹⁵ J. Phipps, *Brief Remarks on the Common Arguments Now used in Support of Divers Ecclesiastical Impositions In this Nation, Especially as they relate to Dissenters* (1769), 15-6.
- ¹⁶ Public Record Office (PRO), H.O. 67/14/82.
- ¹⁷ J. Farey, *op.cit.*, ii, 30.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, iii, 639; ii, 29. See S. Glover, *History and Gazetteer of the County of Derby* (1829), i, Pt.1, 186.
- ¹⁹ LJRO, B/V/5, Stapenhill, art.11. Other clergy in the same period felt that they were likely to do better by compounding 'at reasonable rates' than by collecting their tithes in kind. Charles Hope, vicar of St. Werburgh, Derby, warned tithe payers that 'the full tythe' would be expected from those who did not settle compositions on the date due (*Derby Mercury*, 26 September 1793).
- ²⁰ LJRO, B/V/5, Norbury, art.9; Snelston terrier dated 3 August 1808; A/V/1/1, 63, art.65.
- ²¹ See note 12. Benefice income to all benefices in Derbyshire for which records are extant shows that tithes in kind amounted to the value of £271 only in 1831.
- ²² Church Commissioners files, NB 12/171 and NB 12/177.
- ²³ A Baronet, *Thoughts upon the Causes of the Present Distress of the Country and upon their Remedy* (Bath 1816), 16-17. The author is identified in what appears to be Bateman's handwriting in the copy of this work in Derby Central Library Local History Collection.
- ²⁴ S. Butler, *op.cit.*, 19-20.
- ²⁵ LJRO, B/C/5, see especially 1773, 1775, 1776 and 1780. For absolutions see John Marsh (Chesterfield), 1 February 1777; Joseph Wilders (Ashbourne), 16 January 1781; John Beadesley (Ilkeston), 12 December 1782. Excommunications for non-appearance were abolished in 1813 by 53 George III cap.127.
- ²⁶ J. Thomas, *Walks in the Neighbourhood of Sheffield, Yorkshire* (Sheffield 1830-1), 43.
- ²⁷ PRO, H.O. 67/14/116.
- ²⁸ PRO, H.O. 67/14/66.
- ²⁹ PRO, H.O. 67/14/263; 67/14/99; 67/14/82; 67/14/212.
- ³⁰ J. Farey, *op.cit.*, ii, 31.
- ³¹ Farey observed in 1811 that rents varied from 40s to 60s per acre near Buxton, 47s near Stapenhill, £1 per acre at Kirk Ireton, 16s per acre near Ashover and 10s to 14s per acre for new allotments at Newhaven in the parish of Hartington in the High Peak (*op.cit.*, ii, 27-8).
- ³² *Victoria County History (VCH), Derbyshire*, ii, 331-3; C. Hill, *Economic problems of the Church* (1963), 85-6.

- ³³ Edward Manlove, *Rhymed Chronicle of the Liberties and Customs of the Lead Mines within the Wapentake of Wirksworth in the county of Derby* (1653) in S. Glover, *op.cit.*, i, Pt.1, Appendix 4. A 'dish' held 16 pints of ore, reduced to 15 in 1851.
- ³⁴ W. Wood, *History and Antiquities of Eyam*, 189. See also J. C. Cox, 'The diary of Edward Bagshaw', *D.A.J.*, ii (1880), 79.
- ³⁵ J. Pilkington, *A view of the present state of Derbyshire* (Derby 1789), i, 126.
- ³⁶ G. G. Hopkinson, 'Lead mining in the Eyam district', *D.A.J.*, lxxx (1960), 94.
- ³⁷ *VCH*, ii, 333; J. C. Cox, *op.cit.*, 79.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Church Commissioners file, NB 12/234, articles of enquiry, 28.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, see also articles 15 and 24, and T. C. Ince, *Fragments for a History of the Parish and Mineral Customs of Wirksworth* (MS 1827), 5.