

# THE SAVING OF A YORKSHIRE ESTATE: GEORGE LANE-FOX AND BRAMHAM PARK

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Several classic examples of aristocratic indebtedness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have attracted the attention of historians. The fall of the 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos was a melancholy warning to Victorian landowners during his own lifetime; through politics, entertainment, collecting, land buying and litigation he had contrived to accumulate over £1,500,000 of debt before his financial collapse in 1846. The 1st Marquess of Ailesbury reached an almost equally dangerous position in the 1830's, through rash building and large family provisions, but was saved by careful trustees. Another Yorkshire landowner, the 6th Duke of Devonshire, spent so much on buildings that even he, a great magnate, was compelled to sell his East Riding estate; he left debts of £1,000,000 on his death in 1857. Family charges amounted to over half of the 7th Duke of Bedford's encumbrance of over half a million in 1839; and in the 'forties debt charges consumed £20,000 of Ailesbury's gross income of £54,000, £60,000 of Devonshire's £200,000, £45,000 of the 3rd Earl Fitzwilliam's £150,000 and £26,000 of the 2nd Earl of Durham's £40,000 (he having inherited £635,000 of debt in 1841).<sup>1</sup>

Such debts arose from many causes, but few led to the tragedy of the Buckingham sales. Careful Victorian retrenchment and an aversion to Regency profusion saved some estates, while others were aided by rearrangement of family portions, large-scale agricultural improvements and the rise in mineral and urban incomes. Many debts were incurred not for traditional gaming, entertainment or political purposes, but for ventures which themselves promised an increase of income. Thus Sir James Graham of Netherby owed a total of £200,000 to the Equitable Assurance Society by 1831; he used the debt partly to consolidate previous borrowing at a lower rate of interest, and partly to improve his estate. And the 7th Duke of Devonshire alternately mortgaged and encumbered his great rural properties by his pioneer industrial ventures at Leeds.<sup>2</sup> There were many similar examples.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine the problems facing the owners of a 'second-line' estate in the nineteenth century and the methods by which they were solved.

## I.

The Lane-Fox family of Bramham Park near Wetherby was descended from William Fox, a landowner at Grete in Worcestershire in the reign of Edward IV. In the seventeenth century Joseph Fox served with the Army in Ireland, where he married Theodosia Blayney, the widow of Sir Henry Pierce and daughter of the 2nd Lord Blayney. His son Henry (d. 1719) first married Jane Oliver of Clonodfoy and in 1691 established the family's fortune by marrying secondly Frances Lae, the daughter of Sir George Lane of Tulse, the Irish Secretary and later 1st Lord Lanesborough. Henry Fox's son George succeeded to the large Lane estates on the death of his uncle James, the 2nd Viscount, and in 1751 assumed by Act of Parliament the additional surname of Lane.

<sup>1</sup> See F. M. L. Thompson, 'The End of a Great Estate' (*Economic History Rev.*, 2nd Ser., viii, 1, Aug. 1955), 'English Landownership: The Ailesbury Trust, 1832-56' (*ibid.*, 2nd Ser., xi, 1, Aug. 1958), 'English Great Estates in the 19th century, 1790-1914' (*Contributions to the First International Conference of Economic History* (Paris, 1960), pp. 385-97), *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1963), *passim*; D. and E. Spring, 'The Fall of the Grenvilles, 1844-1848' (*The Huntington Library Quarterly*, xiv, 2, Feb. 1956); David Spring, 'English Landownership in the Nineteenth Century: A Critical Note' (*Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd Ser., ix, 3, Apr. 1957), 'The Earls of Durham and the Great Northern Coalfield, 1830-1830' (*Canadian Hist. Rev.*, xxxiii, 3, Sept. 1952), 'The English Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron, 1830-1880' (*Journal of Economic History*, xi, 1, Winter 1951).

<sup>2</sup> Graham MSS., by courtesy of Sir Fergus Graham, Bt., K.B.E.; S. Pollard, 'Barrow in Furlong and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire' (*Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd Ser., viii, 2, Dec. 1955).

George Fox-Lane (?1696–1773) was Tory M.P. for Hinson in 1734–1741 and for York in 1742–1761. He further enlarged the family's property in 1731, when he married Harriet Benson, the daughter and heiress of Robert, Lord Bingley. Robert Benson was a self-made Tory (and later Whig) who sat for Thetford in 1702–1705 and for York in 1705–1713. He became a Commissioner of the Treasury in 1710 and was Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1711 to 1713, a Privy Councillor in 1711–1714 and from 1730, Queen Anne's Ambassador to Madrid in 1713–1714 and Treasurer of the Household for King George II in 1730–1731. Queen Anne's favour led to a Crown grant of land on Bramham Moor, where Benson built his great mansion in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Created a Baron in 1713, Benson supplemented official receipts by acting as a director of the South Sea Company from 1711 to 1715.

On his marriage, Fox-Lane succeeded to most of the Benson estates; Harriet brought him £100,000 and an annual income of £7000. In May 1762 he was himself created Lord Bingley, taking his title from the township where the Bensons had long been lords of the manor – although the Bingley property had passed for life to Benson's natural daughter, Lady Goodricke. Bingley's only legitimate son, Robert, born in 1732, succeeded to the York seat in 1751 – after failing in 1758. Although twice married – to Mildred Bouchier of Beningborough and to Lady Bridget Henley (daughter of the Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Northington) – he died without issue in May 1768. According to Horace Walpole, General Burgoyne was Bingley's illegitimate son. But when the Baron died in 1773, the title became extinct.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Bingley devised his lands in England and Ireland to his 15-year-old nephew James, the son of Sackville Fox and Ann Holloway, who also inherited the Lanes' Irish estates and name. A man of the world, scholar, raconteur, traveller and philanthropist, Fox-Lane sat in the Commons for Horsham as a supporter of his friend William Pitt, who offered to revive the Bingley peerage for him; Fox-Lane, however, was proud of belonging to 'one of the very few old English families, [being] a commoner (not a trader) of high birth and fortune'. Unfortunately for that fortune, he became a friend of the Prince Regent. Another Yorkshire squire, Sir George Wombwell, 3rd baronet, was said to be the only friend of 'Prinny' who was not financially ruined by the association.<sup>2</sup>

Fox-Lane married the hon. Marcia Pitt, daughter of the 1st Lord Rivers, in July 1789 and died in April 1821, leaving four sons and one daughter. The entailed estates passed to the eldest son, George (who was generally named Lane-Fox), but £300,000 was settled on the widow and the younger children, William Augustus, Sackville Walter, Thomas Henry and Marcia Bridget. Fox-Lane's wife died in London in August 1822, and it was reported that property worth between £8,000 and £10,000 a year then passed to her family. William (1795–1832) served in the Grenadier Guards and married Lady Caroline Douglas; his second son succeeded to the Wiltshire property of Lord Rivers and assumed the name of Pitt-Rivers by Royal Licence in 1880. Sackville entered politics as a Tory and in 1826 married Lady Charlotte Osborne, the only daughter of the 6th Duke of Leeds. Thomas entered holy orders and died without issue; and Marcia married the hon. Edward Stourton, second son of the 16th Lord Stourton, dying in 1826, two years before her husband was created a baronet, as Sir Edward Vavasour of Hazlewood Castle.<sup>3</sup> In general, the younger children were financially secure.

George Lane-Fox, who succeeded to the estates at the age of 28, was a sporting squire who represented Beverley and Pontefract before retiring from politics in 1841 because of ill-health. He was active in Yorkshire society as a Yeomanry major and a Deputy

<sup>1</sup> G. E. C(ockayne), *The Complete Peerage*, ii (1912), 177–178; *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1898 edn.), i, 545; R. V. Taylor, *Biographia Leodiensis* (1865), 173–174; Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754–1790* (1964), ii, 466–467, iii, 19; J. T. Ward, 'A Nineteenth Century Yorkshire Estate: Ribston and the Dent Family' (*Yorks. Arch. Jour.*, xli, 1, 1963); on Bramham Park see N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England. Yorkshire: The West Riding* (Penguin Books, 1959), 141–143.

<sup>2</sup> *Burke* (1898), *op. cit.*, i, 545; Taylor, *op. cit.*, 283–286, 445; J. Wilkinson, *Worthies, Families and Celebrities of Barnsley and the District* (1883), 114–116.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, 285–286; *Burke* (1898), *op. cit.*, i, 545, 1260; *Burke's Peerage* (1845 edn.), 1006–1007.

Lieutenant. But agriculture was his principal interest, and he was keenly concerned in the movement for agricultural improvements. He started the annual shows at Bramham Park and was a vice-president of the Wetherby Agricultural Society. He improved the new lands enclosed by his father under the Bramham Enclosure Act of 1807 and spent considerable sums - some £1300 in 1826, £1000 in 1827, £2500 in 1828, £4300 in 1829 and £3300 in 1830 - on estate repairs and improvements.<sup>1</sup> But his good intentions were not enough and his affairs became increasingly difficult, in several ways.

## II.

The young squire does not appear to have been unduly rash in his expenditure, judged by the standards of his time. Certainly he found it necessary to take a London house for the Season. His father had paid £630 *per annum* for 45 Dover Street for six years from 1808, and the family later took a lease in Old Bond Street. But gentry with much smaller properties had London houses. Undoubtedly, the maintenance of Bramham Park and its great gardens was costly; but when the mansion was ravaged by fire in July 1828 the squire moved to a smaller house on the estate. Lane-Fox sought to benefit from new sources of income. Since 1797 the family had drawn mineral rents from Allerton Bywater colliery. In 1821 Lane-Fox sold about £10,000-worth of timber, and in the following year he leased his lead mines at Rimmington for 21 years. In 1823 he even called in surveyors to report on the possibility of minerals under Bramham Park itself. And he held shares in the Aire & Calder and Calder & Hebble Navigations, the Barnsley Canal and the Leeds & Liverpool Canal (which had bought land from his father).<sup>2</sup> Yet his financial position gradually worsened.

Part of the trouble lay in the family's domestic affairs. James Fox-Lane's will had starved the estate of capital by lavishly providing for his wife and younger children. This difficulty continued. In 1814 George Lane-Fox had married Georgiana Henrietta, the daughter of Edward Fery Buckley of Mirestead Lodge and his wife, Lady Georgiana West. They had one son and two daughters, but the marriage failed and in 1824 a deed of separation was negotiated, under which Mrs. Lane-Fox received an annuity of £500. Lane-Fox and his wife parted bitterly, but in January 1826 Lane-Fox proposed a reconciliation. Mrs. Arbuthnot advised her friend to accept the offer, but to make certain that the financial arrangements were satisfactory. However, by 1827 Mrs. Lane-Fox appeared to be accepting the long-continued blandishments of the 6th Lord Chesterfield, and Mrs. Arbuthnot, now much less friendly, thought he was "wasting himself". By 1829 Chesterfield and Mrs. Lane-Fox were virtually living together, offended the Duke of Wellington by staying unchaperoned at Walmer Castle and caused a stir in High Society by issuing invitations to the Doncaster races. Mrs. Arbuthnot would not act the *Madame Commode* and now found Mrs. Lane-Fox 'a person . . . to whom it was impossible to give advice'. Although far from prudent herself, she wished her contemporaries would 'pull up a little and set their faces against the barefaced liaisons that were becoming the fashion'; Chesterfield's arrangement was 'too bad'. Other social gossips were equally shocked. Thomas Creevey met the couple at the Duchess of St. Albans' in 1828 and at Lady Sefton's (where they 'came together and sat together all night', among other 'most notorious and profligate women') in 1829. And in October 1830, when Chesterfield surprised everyone by announcing his marriage to the hon. Anne Forester, it was Charles Greville who carried the news to the harshly-rejected mistress. Even Mrs. Arbuthnot was angry at Chesterfield's 'barbarous' act, believing that he had dropped Mrs. Lane-Fox because when she finally yielded and for two years lived with him he had 'felt the inconveniences of his attachment' through Society avoiding him. Mrs. Lane-Fox could only affect not 'to care a pin' in public, but actually protested even to Wellington. She consoled herself with the friendship of the Prince of Orange, and by 1834 her house, noted Greville,

<sup>1</sup> Lane-Fox MSS. in Leeds City Library, by courtesy of Colonel F. C. W. Lane-Fox, to whom I am indebted for further information.

<sup>2</sup> Lane-Fox MSS., *passim*; J. T. Ward, 'West Riding Landowners and Mining in the Nineteenth Century' (*Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research*, xv, 1, May 1963).

had become 'the great rendezvous of a considerable part of the Cabinet . . . It certainly was a droll connexion'.<sup>1</sup>

The heir to the estate, the second George, had expensive tastes as a young man. Educated at Eton and Christ Church, he was rusticated from Oxford because of his excessive devotion to sport. He was a regular racegoer, a member of the Four-in-Hand Driving Club who often drove the Tadcaster stage coach and the Glasgow mail, and he hunted four or five times weekly. When, in 1837, he married Katherine Mary, the daughter of John Stein, a former M.P. for Bletchingley, his father provided a jointure and pin-money. Lane-Fox's elder daughter, Georgiana Marcia, lived at home, but her sister, Frederica Elizabeth, was married in 1845 to the hon. Adolphus Frederick Octavius Liddell, a Fellow of All Souls and eighth son of the 1st Lord Ravensworth. Lane-Fox had to provide for both Liddells, along with increasing sums to his wife and various retired retainers and workers. Frederica Elizabeth alone had £20,000 settled on her in 1845.<sup>2</sup>

Through these trying years Lane-Fox attempted to maintain his estates with reasonable efficiency. In 1837, when financial troubles were reaching a serious state, he reviewed his expenditure on

Repairs and Improvements on his Yorkshire Estate from 1825 to 1837 inclusive, with a General Estimate of the Sum expended in Substantial Improvements for the benefit of the Property not necessary for Mr. Fox as Tenant for life to have laid out if he had not been anxious to have brought the Estate into the best possible condition.

The steward, Thomas Kell, reported that repairs and improvements had cost over £4200 in 1831, £3000 in 1832 and 1833, £2800 in 1834, £3100 in 1835, £2400 in 1836 and £2100 in 1837. The estimated expenditure on 'substantial improvements for the future benefit of the Property' in the same years was over £2700, £1700, £1400, £1900, £1700, £990 and £1700. Between 1825 and 1837 repairs and improvements cost £33,574. 11. 1. and long-term improvements £18,235. 13. 3. Average annual expenditure was something over £1800 - a fairly high recurrent investment for a gross income which amounted to rather under £20,000 by 1837.<sup>3</sup> In order to maintain his level of expenditure Lane-Fox turned to that savour of Victorian landowners, an insurance business. But by 1839 the British Commercial Insurance Company was threatening to inaugurate legal proceedings against him over a debt of £80,000.

### III.

The Lane-Fox Yorkshire estates lay mainly in Bramham, Rigton, Bardsey, Alwoodley, Walton, Grimston, Netherton, Elsack and Rimmington. There were smaller properties at Lotherton, Oglethorpe, Wothersome, Collingham, Scarcroft, Wreathorpe, Bingley, Farnhill, Hamblethorpe, Skipton, East Halton and Carlton. House rents brought in £151. 2., and the coal rights at Allerton Bywater (where the surface land had been sold to Thomas Davison-Bland of Kippax Park) were a valuable source of income. In 1837 the total rent amounted to £17,377. 1. 7. Woods added £1269 and the land in hand was worth £1176 *per annum*.<sup>4</sup> But by the 1840's Lane-Fox's affairs were becoming progressively worse. In 1838 he mortgaged some of his property to Edward Marjoribanks and Sir Edmund Antrobus, and thereafter became increasingly indebted to the two bankers, after disentailing the estates. He secured a mortgage of £50,000 in 1838 and a further 80,000 in 1839, adding £27,000 in 1841, £15,000 in 1842 and £25,400 in 1846 - a total of £197,400. He managed to make only one small repayment, of £1450, in 1841. The debts might be transferred, by both creditors and debtor, but such sums remained as huge burdens on the estate. By 1848 Lane-Fox's mortgages with Messrs. Coutts amounted to £195,450, with Messrs. J. W. and G. Farrer £21,000 and with Marjoribanks' trustees £10,000. Three bonds made the total indebtedness £232,799. 10. 0.

<sup>1</sup> Francis Bamford and the Duke of Wellington (eds.), *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1820-1832* (1950), i, 167, 175, 286, 300, 301, 407, ii, 2-3, 147, 301-303, 306, 392, 395; John Gore, *Creevey* (1949 edn.), 287, 308, 318; C. C. F. Greville (ed. Henry Reeve), *A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV and King William IV* (1875), ii, 133, iii, 140; Lane-Fox MSS. cxi, 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 3 Nov., *The Field*, 7 Nov. 1896; Lane-Fox MSS.

<sup>3</sup> 'An Account of Money expended by George Lane-Fox, Esq. . . .' (Lane-Fox MSS., lxxxiii, 39).

<sup>4</sup> 'Rental of George Lane-Fox Esquire's Yorkshire Estates, 1837' (Lane-Fox MSS., lxxxiii, 7).

By 1846 Lane-Fox and his son resolved that new arrangements must be made for the management of their debts. Their legal adviser, Burrell, proposed in October that all the estates should be charged in mortgage to Marjoribanks and Antrobus for the sum required and that the Bowcliffe estate should be taken in reconveyance from the devisees of Fenton Scott and (with all lands bought since 1838) used as security with the bankers. Furthermore, Lane-Fox should demise all his estates, except Bramham, Oglethorpe, Bardsey, Collingham and Scarcroft woods, to his son for 99 years, while the son should arrange that all the rents and profits of the estates should be paid into the Farrers' bank in a joint account though the bank should act only on his own orders. After accepting this arrangement, father and son worked out their expenses between 22 July and 1 November 1847. Interest of £3464. 18. 1. was due to Coutts, £509. 13. 9 to James Farrier's executors and £194. 3. 4. to Marjoribanks' trustees. Lane-Fox himself drew £2250 quarterly and his estranged wife (who had negotiated for the payment of her debts and an additional annuity in 1843) took £546. 1. 11. a quarter. George's wife received only £100 half-yearly, as did Mrs. Liddell, while Liddell had £150 per quarter plus £50 as auditor, and George was paid a quarterly sum of £750. Sundry small pensions and fee farm rents made total outgoings £8155. 7. 1. by mid-October. In contemporary circles £9000 a year for the owner of such an estate and £3000 for an heir who had broken the entail would not be considered too generous. But there were further expenses. 'Mr. Kell's drafts during the above period last yr. am<sup>td</sup> to £1400. 9. 3.', and £2491. 14. 11. was due to Farrers, making the total estimated expenditure £12,047. 11. 3. for 101 days. The only expected income was £823. 3. 4. from the Aire & Calder Navigation and (if the 1846 sum were repeated) £750 from coal rents. Consequently, by 1 November 1847 the current account would be overdrawn by £10,474. 7. 11. The Yorkshire rents were not yet due, but, as the harassed squire noted,<sup>1</sup>

since this year commenced, nothing has been remitted on account of the Irish Estate and from the present state of Ireland it is quite uncertain whether any and what remittance will be made herefrom.

The Ireland of the Famine paid little to its landlords. With his affairs in this state, Lane-Fox died on 15 November 1848.

#### IV.

On succeeding to the estates, the new squire inherited nearly quarter of a million of debt and annual payments totalling £14,092. 3. 7. Interest on £200,000 at 10% took £8414. 9. 6., family payments £4570, pensions £466. 5., the rent of a house and stables in Eaton Square £370 and insurances and miscellaneous items £271. 14. 1. His account with the Farrers stood at £3467. 19. 2.: 'the recent receipt of the Yorkshire Rents has placed the account in Cash', he noted, 'but there are payments to make this month and the next for Interest &c. between 5 and 6000 pounds'.

Lane-Fox now started the long task of saving the estate. By 1848 only £10% of the mortgages had been paid off, but in 1851 and 1852 he paid a further £775,000.<sup>2</sup> A valuable new source of income was the sale of land to the railways. The family initially disliked the brash newcomer to the countryside; in 1845 George Hudson complained at a meeting of the York & North Midland Railway that the Earl of Harwood and Lane-Fox had objected to the construction of the Harrogate line. But in April 1846 Lane-Fox sold Harrogate land to the company and in May agreed to sell land also to the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway. His son followed this lead, selling strips to the Lancashire & Yorkshire, the Leeds & Bradford, the Great Northern, the Midland, the North Yorkshire & Durham, the North Eastern, the Rotherham, Sheffield & Goole, the Skipton & Wharfedale, the Sligo, Leitrim & North Coast and the Waterford &

<sup>1</sup> 'Mr. Lane-Fox's Mortgages, 17 February 1853'; 'G. L. Fox, Esq., Annual Payments' (2 Dec. 1848); 'Copy of Mr. Burrell's Opinion . . .' (19th Oct. 1846); 'G. L. Fox, Esq. and G. L. Fox Junr. Esq. Account Current', 1847. (Lane-Fox MSS., *passim*).

<sup>2</sup> 'G. L. Fox, Esq. Annual Payments' (2 Dec. 1848); 'Memorandum as to Affairs . . .' (2 Dec. 1848); 'Mr. Fox's Mortgages', 17 Feb. 1853 (Lane-Fox MSS., *passim*).