The Fates of the Larger Devon Estates in the 1920s

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At the launch of the *Devon in the 1920s* project, Professor Henry French gave a presentation on 'The Fall of the House of Palk and the Fate of the Great Estates in Devon'. In it, he set the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century history of the Haldon Estate in Devon, which had been developed by the Palks, sold on and finally vacated in the 1920s with farms and properties individually purchased. He set it in the context of the national history of the concentration and dispersal of landed estates over the half-century that had elapsed since the 1873 Return of Landowners.[1]

He demonstrated that the income from landed estates fell during the late nineteenth-century agricultural depression; revived in the 1900s; was threatened by prospects of increased taxation, including the imposition of death duties after 1910; revived during the First World War with the advent of subsidies for food production; and then fell when subsidies were removed in 1921. He referred to the popular narrative that estates had been sold off after the war as so many gentry heirs had been killed. However, he suggested that this was less significant a factor in the sales of the 1919–23 period than changes to taxes and reductions to income generated from agriculture, when it has been estimated that as much as one-quarter of the land area of England changed hands.[2] He challenged researchers on the *Devon in the 1920s* project to investigate the sale of the great estates in Devon and to gain a better understanding of the purchasers and their interests in these transactions.

In response to this challenge a study was undertaken of one particular aspect of sales and purchases of estates in Devon in the 1920s: what happened to the 'great estates' – those of 1500 acres and over that had been listed in the 1873 Survey of Landowners. The research, described below,

[1] *The Return of Owners of Land, 1873*, London, HMSO (1875) was published by the Local Government Board.
[2] Originally suggested in *Estates Gazette* (December 1921); subsequently discussed by F. M. L. Thompson*, England Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1963) and later revisited by John Beckett and Michael Turner in, 'End of the Old Order? F.M.L. Thompson, the Land Question and the Burden of Ownership in England, *c.*1880–*c.*1925', in *Agricultural History Review*, 55(2) (2007), pp. 269–88. Beckett and Turner suggest the idea that the volume of sales represented a revolution in landownership is due to the excitable analysis of the author of the note in the *Estates Gazette*. They suggest that sales in fact represented less than 10 per cent of the cultivated land area.

concludes that the dominant feature of Devon's great estates in the 1920s was continuity rather than change. In the study, 63 of the 107 estates in Devon were in the hands of the same landowners at the end of the 1920s as they had been in 1874, although some sales of peripheral lands had taken place. A further 11 had only been sold once after 1874 to another family who continued to hold the land in the 1920s. This represents almost three-quarters of the total number of estates. The number of large-scale landowners who sold up completely (12) or who sold a substantial portion of their estates (6) in the 1919–23 period was relatively small. The vast majority of the estates sold during this period were at the smaller end of the scale, those below 2,500 acres.

Devon's Estates

In a national context, Devon did not have high numbers of landowners with large estates. Clemenson has calculated that no more than 22% of Devon's land was owned by what she terms the 'great landowners' – i.e., those owning more than 3,000 acres; and a further 14% owned by the 'greater gentry' – those owning between 38 and 3,000 acres per seat. These figures result in her ranking Devon as the 19th county in the country for 'great landowner' estates and 35th for 'greater gentry' estates.[3] Overall, Devon had more small-scale landowners than many other counties.

This enquiry focuses on estates of 1,500 acres and above. On the 1873 *Return of Owners* there are 127 entries in total of estates of this size. Six of these entries relate to Devon portions of estates held by landowners just across the border in the adjacent counties of Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset (e.g. Henry Luttrell of Dunster Castle) and have been discounted for the purpose of this analysis. Four of the scheduled estates had been amalgamated with others since 1873 and represent two 1920s estates. The 1920s position related to a further eight of these have not so far been identified, though research to track them down continues. It seems likely that they had been sold and broken up between 1874 and 1914. The analysis has therefore been undertaken on 107 estates.

(It should also be noted that it appears that some returns are missing. For example, Langdon Court, Wembury, is not listed. Its owners, the Calmadys, had put the estate up for sale in 1872 but did not succeed in selling until 1876. These estates have not been included in this analysis.)

The 107 remaining estates have been categorised under six different headings, as shown below:

[3] Clemenson, Heather, *English Country Houses and Landed Estates*, London, Croom Helm (1971), pp. 22–23 and Appendix One, pp. 229–30.

Table 1: Fates of Devon's larger estates, 1873–1930

Category	Total No.
1. Estates that throughout the 1920s were in the possession of the same family that had owned them in 1873.	63
2. Estates sold between 1873 and 1918 and occupied by the purchaser during the 1920s.	11
3. Estates broken up between 1873 and 1919.	10
4. Estate sales initiated between 1919 and 1923.	12
5. Estates broken up, with significant portions sold between 1919 and 1923.	6
6. Estates sold completely between 1924 and 1929.	5
Total	**107**

The detail of the estates involved is shown in Tables 2–7 in the Appendix.

Devon's great estates in the 1920s

The overwhelming picture of Devon's 'great estates' in the 1920s is one of continuity. Almost three-quarters of the estates (74 estates) had not experienced a change of landowner, or had only experienced a single change, since the 1870s.

The 1919–23 period did see a greater than usual turbulence, with 18 estates being sold or substantially reduced in scale. Only two of these estates (Bradfield and Fallapit) were affected by the death of the heir to the estate in the First World War. Other decisions to sell were driven by financial pressures (Watermouth Castle, Poltimore).

The new purchasers, where the estates were sold, seem to have been less interested in farming than in leisure, although, like John Learmouth, they might have retired from military or professional careers and wanted to manage an estate as well as enjoy their leisure. Some, like Lord Cable, had already been tenants on the estate they later bought. Sometimes the estate agent's guidance caused the sale of the house and its heartland as a separate lot from lots containing farms and cottages even from the outset, in a bid to attract purchasers looking for a 'country house' as a base for leisure pursuits; at other times, as with Farringdon House, the estate was bought as a whole and then parts of it were sold on. The Elmhirsts bought the Champernowne estate in Dartington as a whole (less some farms sold in 1920) as a social experiment, a demonstration of how rural life could be revitalised. Some land was sold for housing development: the Earl of Mount Edgcumbe sold land in Devonport for this purpose; the Cliffords sold land in Kingsteignton, a rapidly expanding part of

Devon; and the Langdon Estate at Wembury went for the development of residences for seaside holidays. Some properties were sold or let as schools (Poltimore, Stoodleigh, Stover).

The data about continuity and sales collected here for the large estates could also be identified for the much larger numbers of smaller estates, although the volume and lack of publicity for information about these estates would make the task more challenging. It is possible that they would have been more susceptible to the challenging financial environment around them. *Kelly's Directories*, however, suggest that in parishes up and down the county, the landowners in 1930 were from the same families that had been there in 1919.

Overall, the core of Devon's landed families kept their estates during the 1920s, though they may have chosen to sell off land, particularly on the edge of growing urban communities. They continued to dominate the county's institutions, whether on local government bodies, the Church of England and the magistracy, or in community and charitable organisations such as the Devonshire Agricultural Association or the County Red Cross.

Appendix

Table 2: Estates that throughout the 1920s were in the possession of the same family as in 1874

Note: some minor sales may have taken place but the core estate remained intact.

1.	Abbot's Manor, Coombe Raleigh 1,770 acres	D'Oyley Bernard family still in possession.
2.	Arlington Court, Barnstaple 5,300 acres	Chichester family still in possession.
3.	Ashbury House, Ashbury, Okehampton 5,300 acres	Woollcombe family still in possession, though house let out.
4.	Bowden House, Totnes 1,600 acres	Netherton family still in possession, though house let out.
5.	Bradstone Manor, Lifton 6,600 acres	Bradshaw family still in possession.
6.	Canonteign Barton, Christow 2,900 acres	Pellew family (Viscounts Sidmouth) still in possession.
7.	Castle Hill, Filleigh 20,100 acres	Fortescue family still in possession.
8.	Churston Court, Churston Ferrars, Brixham 5,300 acres	Yarde-Buller family still in possession.
9.	Clovelly Court, Clovelly 3,900 acres	Fane family still in possession (Christine Hamlyn-Fane).
10.	Cohan Black, Torrington 3,700 acres	Cohan family still in possession, now Cohan-Fleming.
11.	Coombe House, Gittisham 5,600 acres	Marker family still in possession.
12.	Creedy Park, Crediton, 6,900 acres	Ferguson Davie family still in possession.
13.	Cruwys Morchard House, Cruwys Morchard 1,800 acres	Cruwys family still in possession.
14.	Downes, Crediton 2,050 acres	Buller family still in possession. Some urban properties sold.
15.	Duchy of Cornwall, Princetown 48,500 acres	Duchy of Cornwall still in possession.
16.	Escot House, Talaton 4,000 acres	Kennaway family still in possession.
17.	Foxdon, Witheridge 2,800 acres	Benson family still in possession.

18.	Fulford Manor, Dunsford 3,000 acres	Fulford family still in possession.
19.	Fursdon House, Cadbury 2,800 acres	Fursdon family still in possession.
20.	Taviton, Tavistock 2,300 acres	Garnier-Carpenter still in possession, though had moved away.
21.	Glenthorne, Countisbury 1,600 acres	Halliday family still in possession.
22.	Haccombe House, Haccombe, Newton Abbot 10,900 acres	Carew family still in possession. Sir Henry Palk-Carew inherited in 1919.
23.	Halsdon, Dolton 2,800 acres	Furse family still in possession.
24.	Hall, Bishop's Tawton 3,000 acres	Chichester family still in possession.
25.	Hartland Abbey, Hartland 15,100 acres	Stucley family still in possession.
26.	Heanton Satchville, Petrockstowe 14,400 acres	Clinton family still in possession and had absorbed Rolle estate in 1907.
27.	Holcombe Court, Holcombe Rogus 2,400 acres	Rayer family still in possession.
28.	Huntsham Court, Tiverton 6,600 acres	Acland Troyte family still in possession.
29.	Kelly House, Kelly 2,700 acres	Kelly family still in possession.
30.	Killerton House, Killerton 15,000 acres	Sir Arthur Acland had leased (but not sold) the Somerset portion of his estate to the National Trust in 1919
31.	Kitley House, Kitley 7,500 acres	Bastard family still in possession.
32.	Knightshayes, Tiverton 5,200 acres	Amory family still in possession.
33.	Leawood, Bridestowe 4,300 acres	Hamlyn family still in possession, though now called Calmady-Hamlyn.
34.	Lewtrenchard Manor, Lewdown 2,200 acres	Baring-Gould family still in possession.
35.	Mamhead House, Kenton 5,300 acres	Newman family still in possession.
36.	Maristowe, Roborough 12,000 acres	Lopes family still in possession.
37.	Molland House, Molland, South Molton 6,600 acres	Throckmorton family still in possession. Sir Richard inherited in 1919 and his grandson Sir Robert in 1927.

38.	Newton House, Newton St Cyres 3,600 acres	Quicke family still in possession.
39.	Nutwell Court, Lympstone 7,200 acres	Drake family still in possession via Elizabeth, Lady Seaton.
40.	Okehampton Park, Okehampton 3,400 acres	Luxmoore family still in possession.
41.	Parracott, Pyworthy 1,900 acres	Vowler family still in possession. Not resident 1919–30 though listed as landowner.
42.	Peamore, Exeter 2,100 acres	Kekewich family still in possession.
43.	Portledge, Alwington 3,900 acres	Pine-Coffin family still in possession.
44.	Powderham Castle, Kenton 21,100 acres	Earl of Devon still in possession. Some urban portions of the estate sold.
45.	Puddicombe House, Drewsteignton 1,900 acres	Ponsford family still in possession.
46.	Pynes, Upton Pyne 5,500 acres	Northcote family (now Earls of Iddesleigh) still in possession.
47.	Saltram House, Plymouth 4,200 acres	Morley family still in possession.
48.	Sandridge, Stoke Gabriel 2,400 acres	Passed on by inheritance to the Wilsons.
49.	Shobrooke Park, Crediton 5,900 acres	Inherited from 1874 owner Hippisley by Shelley family (cousins).
50.	Shute House, Axminster 5,500 acres	Carew-Pole family still in possession.
51.	Sidbury Manor, Sidbury 3,200 acres	Cave family still in possession.
52.	Strawbridge, Hatherleigh 2,800 acres	Oldham family still in possession, though now Laing-Oldhams.
53.	Sydenham House Maristowe 6,000 acres	Tremayne family still in possession.
54.	Tapeley Park, Westleigh, Instow 2,300 acres	Augustus Christie had inherited and remained in possession.
55.	Tetcott Manor, Tetcott 9,000 acres	Molesworth family still in possession.
56.	Trehill, Kenn 3,200 acres	Ley family still in possession.
57.	Ugbrooke Park, Chudleigh 4,400 acres	Estate still in possession of Cliffords, although Lord Clifford did sell portions.

58.	Upcott House, West Pilton 5,100 acres	Williams family still in possession.
59.	Upottery Manor, Upottery 4,100 acres	Viscount Sidmouth still in possession.
60.	Walland Cary, Bucks Cross 1,500 acres	Family still in possession (Philip Cary Elwes).
61.	Warleigh House, Tamerton Foliot 1,900 acres	Radcliffe family still in possession.
62.	Widworthy Court, Wilmington 3,700 acres	Elton family still in possession.
63.	Winscott House, Peters Marland 4200 acres	Moore-Stevens still in possession, though no longer resident by the mid 1920s.

Table 3: Estates bought 1874–1918 and occupied by purchaser family throughout the 1920s

1.	Stockleigh Court, Stockleigh English, Crediton 2,210 acres	The Bellew family sold to Richard Moore in 1894.
2.	Morebath Manor, Bampton 1,770 acres	The Beres sold to Richard Rothwell.
3.	Stevenstone House, St Giles in the Wood, near Great Torrington 15,100 acres	Sold in 1912 by the Clintons to Captain John Oliver Clemson.
4.	Worth House, Washfield, Tiverton 1,900 acres	Sold by 1888. Madame de las Casas was resident in the 1920s.
5.	Flete, Holbeton 2,500 acres	Sold in 1876 to Henry Mildmay. Resident in the 1920s.
6.	Holne Chase, Ashburton 7,400 acres	Sold in 1882 to Hon. Richard Dawson, whose widow was resident in the 1920s.
7.	Buckland House, Buckland Filleigh 3,100 acres	Sold in the 1890s to William Browne, an Australian sheep dealer. Brownes still resident in 1920s.
8.	Wiscombe Park, Southleigh 1,500 acres	Sold in 1900 to William Edmund. Sophie Edmund resident in the 1920s.
9.	Oxenham Manor, South Tawton 1,700 acres	Sold in 1913 to John Hocking, yeoman. Hockings were still living there in 1920s.
10.	Cloakham House, Axminster 2,900 acres	Sold in 1916 to Charles Snell.
11.	Porthill House, Northam 2,700 acres	Sold on in 1901 to Captain Thomas Gordon, then to Oliver Godfrey Ryder who was there throughout 1920s.

Table 4: Estates broken up, 1873–1918

1.	Duke of Bedford estates in Tavistock and Plymstock 22,600 acres	Duke of Bedford sold the estate in 1911, retaining only Endsleigh Cottage as a fishing lodge.
2.	Blachford Manor, Cornwood 1,770 acres	Portion of estate given by Lord B to Dame Hannah Rogers' Trust in 1887; remainder inherited by Margaret Deere, who gave estate to a distant relative in 1917. The recipient (Frederick Passey) sold part of the estate in 1921.
3.	Silverton Park, Silverton 6,700 acres	Estate of Earl of Egremont. Sold up in 1891 to local farmers, and house blown up.
4.	Brook Manor, Buckfastleigh 2,660 acres	Earl of Macclesfield (of Sherborne Castle) estate sold in lots in 1914. Earl's agent Alfred Michelmore bought and used as holiday home throughout the 1920s.
5.	Eggesford House, Eggesford 16,000 acres	Initially put up for sale in 1913, unsuccessfully. Subsequent piecemeal sales. House demolished in 1927. Earl of Portsmouth retained some land.
6.	Holsworthy Manor, Holsworthy 5,200 acres	Earl Stanhope sold in 1910; property broken up into lots.
7.	Fremington House, Fremington 5,000 acres	Inherited by W.H. Yeo's sister who had already sold much of the land by the time of her death in 1919.
8.	Stoodleigh Court, Stoodleigh 5,800 acres	Sold on several times including in 1918 to a horse dealer called Fairweather. He sold in 1924 to Frank Shearman.
9.	Leigh House, Chulmleigh 11,300 acres	Process of sale began in the 1900s with piecemeal sales of different areas. House in Chulmleigh was let by Preston-Whytes to Lady Gertrude Rolle until her death in 1924 and then sold.
10.	Monkton Manor, Honiton 3,200 acres	Sold piecemeal after it failed to sell as a whole in 1915.

Table 5: Estates sold completely, 1919–23

1.	Buckland Tout Saints, Kingsbridge 2,400 acres	Sold piecemeal between 1921 and 1925.
2.	Coombe House, Colebrooke 2,000 acres	Estate broken up and sold in 1919. House bought in 1926 by Charles Ford.
3.	Dartington Estate, Totnes 2,400 acres	Sales began in 1921 and estate sold completely by 1925.
4.	Fallapit, East Allington 1,600 acres	Sold between 1923 and 1925.
5.	Farringdon House, Farringdon 2,000 acres	Sold in 1919 to Putnam family, farmers and tent manufacturers, and money from Rolls Royce. Putnams sold on part of the estate in 1923.
6.	Haldon, Dunchideock 10,100 acres	Part of estate sold before 1920s, but final disposal piecemeal post 1919.
7.	Lindridge, Bishopsteignton 2,400 acres	Sold to Lord Cable (who had been the tenant) in 1920.
8.	Medland Manor, Cheriton Bishop 1,700 acres	Owner John Jenkins died in 1920; trustees let till 1926 and then sold.
9.	Netherton Hall, Farway 1,600 acres	Bought in 1919 by Harvey Grenville Barker, theatrical impresario.
10.	Nichols Nymet, North Tawton 1,800 acres	Sold to Mr Matthews of the Indian civil service in 1901. Sold again by 1919 to Richmond Gorle who remained there throughout the 1920s.
11.	Stover House, Teigngrace 8,100 acres	Harold St Maur sold piecemeal in 1920s and his heir sold the remainder in 1927.
12.	Whiteway, Chudleigh 1,900 acres	Earl Morley sold to Ernest Farquhar (sitting tenant) in 1923.

Table 6: Estates broken up with significant portions sold, 1919–29

1.	Grange, Broadhembury 3,700 acres	Sold in 1904 to Col Henry Gundry and sold again in 1929 to Charles Levine.
2.	Bradfield House, Cullompton 2,800 acres	Walrond family still in possession in the 1920s but had sold 1,400 acres in 1919.
3.	Mount Edgcumbe Estate, Cremyll 4,935 acres	Earl of Mount Edgcumbe sold 3,770 acres in 1921 in 239 lots.
4.	Poltimore Park, Poltimore 17,000 acres	Lord Poltimore sold his East Devon lands in 1921, but retained his North Devon properties.
5.	Watermouth Castle, Berrynarbor 6,600 acres	Edith Penn-Curzon, d. of Arthur Bassett sold farms and cottages gradually during 1920s.
6.	Youlston Park, Shirwell 7,000 acres	Chichester sold house and 3,750 acres in 1920 to John Fanshaw Royle.

Table 7: Estates sold completely, 1924–29

1.	Broomford Manor, Jacobstowe 2,300 acres	Sold in 1928 after the death of Sir R White-Thomson.
2.	Oaklands, Okehampton 1,800	Estate sold by Holley in 1927.
3.	Stuckeridge, Oakford 1,400 acres	Sold in 1926.
4.	Wolford Lodge, Dunkeswell 2,200 acres	After death of owner, sold in 1924 to Kembles. House and farms sold separately.
5.	West Ogwell Manor, Newton Abbot 2,000 acres	Sold to a local farmer in 1902, used by the Australian Army during the First World War, then uninhabited. Bought by Brigadier and Mrs Kelly in 1925. Converted into Church of England retreat centre.