

MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS ON A LARGE ESTATE IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY IRELAND: WILLIAM STEUART TRENCH'S REPORT ON THE SHIRLEY ESTATE IN 1843

by
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Introduction

The middle of the nineteenth century was a critical time in the evolution of Irish demography and society. At the centre of the impending crisis in the 1830s and 40s, were the landed estates within whose boundaries the fates of millions of people were worked out. The following might be seen as the principal parameters of the problems besetting the country. A discernible pinnacle of population growth had been reached. Agriculture had been in a prices depression since the end of the European war. This had a knock-on effect on vast sections of the community which depended on the land for a livelihood. There was constantly rising poverty in the countryside, a growing amount of landlessness, recurring local food crises, rising dependence on state assistance represented, for example, by the Poor Law. All of these are classic symptoms of demographic crisis both today and yesterday. And as proof of contemporary consciousness of their scale and immediacy, all were classically examined in a plethora of state commissions which collected vast amounts of data, as well as being exhaustively quantified in census and other statistical accounts. At the local estate level, there were subtle variations in the expression of these problems which were repeatedly diagnosed and treated by agents, surveyors or landowners, whose prescriptions were more often than not ignored or rejected by the different layers of tenantry.

Because of the exigencies of the times, therefore, the management of estates became of critical importance in the 1830s and 40s. A century, even fifty years earlier, management had some margin for error, a certain degree of 'scope' for mismanagement. Indeed Irish estate agents were regarded as being easygoing by English standards in the eighteenth century, in the words of one commentator, "if he be willing to adopt the *laissez aller* system, and let everything take its course, he may have an easy life of it in Ireland".¹ By the third decade of the nineteenth century, the limits for continuing mismanagement or neglect of the social and economic affairs of estates had been reached. On many estates, the mistakes, errors and lack of planning of earlier generations had left little room for further miscalculation: for example, poverty, land fragmentation and rent arrears - which in the past had often or largely been ignored or only half-heartedly addressed by estate managers - now had to be tackled as a matter of urgency. The introduction of the Poor Law in 1838 especially might be seen as a catalyst in many of the reassessments of estate management policy in Ireland. The 1840s witnessed in a lot of cases the urgent development of policies to correct the errors of earlier generations of management, with often serious consequences for the experience of the existing population on the estate and the future popular reputation of the landlord.

The large 27,000 acre Shirley estate is a good case in point. It must have been one of the most densely populated estates in pre-Famine Ireland. It had large numbers of cottier tenants who had grown up in spite of constant warnings by agents and survey-

1. W. Steuart Trench, *Realities of Irish Life*, London 1869, preface vii.

ors over the previous one hundred years about subdivision and subletting by tenants on the property. In many ways it was a classic example of the consequences of free-wheeling management policies on an absentee estate. Indeed one of the lettings in the middle of the eighteenth century was a disaster by an agent who was quite unfamiliar with the place. Its tenantry by the early 1840s was universally poor, due to limited resources, smallness of holdings, but also due to the virtual collapse in agricultural prices in the previous two decades, combined with the rigid oppression of an administration that was determined to prevent the growth of rent arrears. Whether it was the threat of the new poor law, which was going to bear heavily on estates like Shirley's with large numbers of paupers (as they were called at the time), or whether it was an ominous feeling of eleventh hour disaster on the part of the estate office, brought on especially by events following the sudden death of estate agent Alexander Mitchell in 1843, the management of the Shirley estate was subjected to a thorough examination. And there were few better land agents in Ireland in a position to undertake such a review than Mitchell's successor, William Steuart Trench.

Trench's name and reputation are well known in the Carrickmacross area. A scion of a landed family in Queen's county (Laois), he was briefly agent on the Shirley estate in 1843-44; later from 1851 until his death in 1872 he was agent on the Bath estate. He has been written about before in this journal². But his reputation extends well beyond south Monaghan. He was agent on the Lansdowne estates in Kenmare from 1849 and on Lord Digby's estate in King's county (Offaly) from 1857. It appears that he held onto these agencies while he was living in Donaghmoynne managing the Bath property. That he was not exactly a national figure was not for want of trying on his part: he was a very able self-publicist and his memoirs entitled *Realities of Irish Life*, published in 1869, were designed to outline to an English readership how successfully he dealt with some of the enormous problems faced by him as land agent during these troubled times. His reputation is largely the product of this book, which is frequently cited as an illustration of estate practice in Ireland. The book, however, is tainted by the indisputable arrogance and conceit of its author - as he says himself in his preface, 'I' occurs frequently throughout his book.

His reputation in Carrickmacross and Kenmare is also a product of the folk memory of his activity as land agent, when he appeared to impose stringent policies of control and rationalisation on the estates and population under his care. His policies in Kenmare especially where he helped 'emigrate' some thousands to America, have given him a notoriety which he could not evade. While agent on the Bath estate, where he also helped to emigrate some thousands of tenants³, he alleged that an attempt was made to assassinate him and folk memories relating to his death and burial are a measure of how he was hated in the locality. In 1873, the headstone on his grave in Donaghmoynne was 'maliciously' broken: interestingly a public meeting was convened in Carrick to restore the monument led by a number of prominent individuals from all sides in the community, including Dean McMahon⁴.

Trench's short period on the Shirley estate is interesting because it would seem that to a large extent his activities there ran counter to his later reputation. It is important therefore, in order to give a balanced assessment of Trench as an Irish land agent,

2. see T McArdle, 'Document on Farney', *Clogher Record* 1975; L O Mearáin, 'Estate agents in Farney: Trench and Mitchell', *Clogher Record*, 1981.
3. It is probable that such records relating to the Bath estate would have been left in Carrickmacross and have been recently destroyed.
4. D353/B/4

to consider his behaviour, as well as the legacy of his behaviour, on the Shirley estate. Undoubtedly, though his career on the Shirley estate was short, it had considerable influence on the subsequent shape and policies of the estate administration.

That Trench was an able administrator is beyond question: the records of his time in Carrickmacross show him to have been a meticulous keeper of records, with a thorough familiarity and commitment to the affairs of this large property. He was a graduate of Trinity College and as the younger son of a landed family he would have had experience of managing property. Presumably he was familiar with the latest works on land management, improvements in agriculture and estate agency. For example, he would probably have read the works of William Blacker, agent on the Gosford estates in Armagh and one of the foremost proponents of improved land-use in Ireland in the 1820s and 1830s.

He came to Carrickmacross, therefore, as a young man, with lots of ideas, energy and enthusiasm. He was, as his letters and other records show, highly articulate, loquacious and opinionated. Indeed, in *Realities* he includes an appendix on the visit of Lord Bath to Carrick in the 1860s, including short descriptions of the various ceremonial events and speeches of the participants. His own after-dinner address is given at great length, emphasising his views on the proper approaches to running landed estates in Ireland. This is a central idiosyncrasy of Trench's: a dedicated, even single-minded approach to land agency and agricultural improvements. Lyne refers to frequent reports of his long speeches advocating, admonishing and defending his strategy on the Landsdowne estates in the famine years, reported at length, often pseudonymously by Trench himself, in the local conservative Kerry press.⁵ He seems to have been always convinced of his own rectitude. In many ways the Landsdowne estates in Kerry were similar to Shirley's estate experience, and hundreds of others in Ireland with absentee owners, often non-local agents, subdivision and subletting, poverty and destitution.

Trench's policy is articulated in the preface to *Realities* where he strongly advocates an interventionist approach to land agency. Looking back, he was objectively correct in strictly economic terms: by the 1840s from the point of view of management, adjustments had to be made in the population-land ratios to correct imbalances inherited from earlier mismanagement. Even from the viewpoint of the tenants their future security, comfort and survival depended on a rationalisation of landholding structures. In retrospect, the emigration of poor tenants may have been preferable to death or deprivation at home; farms had to be consolidated, tenants may have had to be evicted. Trench like many of his class was a doctrinaire Malthusian; Malthus's *Principles of Population* was well known to the propertied classes and Ireland seemed to exhibit all the classic symptoms of a Malthusian crisis. But then as always, Malthusian logic and the application of Malthusian policies were poorly received by the masses, who were concerned with surviving one day at a time. Trench's reputation has probably reaped the rewards of his doctrinaire approach to estate management.

The following analysis of Trench's period in Shirley's office is useful because it represents the beginnings of his career and the application of his principles of estate management. And it shows that at that early stage his intention, if not his practice, was out of keeping with his later reputation.

5. Gerard J Lyne, William Steuart Trench and post-famine emigration from Kenmare to America 1850-55, *Jn of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*, 1996, 51-137.

Immediate background to Trench's 1843 report

Trench's report to Shirley followed the near riot which accompanied the death of his predecessor Alexander Mitchell and his own appointment. The tenants appear to have sensed an opportunity for change, as Trench would later express it in his report, to 'kick at the traces'. In a large public demonstration in Carrick on 3 April they demanded a rent reduction and assaulted the new agent - who in spite of his total unfamiliarity with the place was dispatched out of the office by Shirley (newly arrived from England) to meet the tenants and refuse their demands. Trench claims in *Realities* that he promised the tenants that he would look into their grievances. In April and May of 1843 the disturbances continued on the estate with a rent strike by the tenants. The estate retaliated with "the most rigorous measures ... to force them into compliance"⁶: warnings by bailiffs, notices to quit, processes for rent, 'driving'. The bailiffs were systematically thrown into bog-holes and beaten up. Other legal tactics undertaken by the estate were ignored. Driving in the cattle of rent defaulters, accompanied by police, bailiffs, the agent and three or four magistrates turned into a farce as Trench picturesquely described it in his memoirs: "Not a hoof nor a horn was left in the countryside" said the bailiff, and a forlorn little Magheraclone heifer was all that they succeeded in driving to the pound to the "jeers and laughter of the populace".⁷ This was followed in April by a threat by tenants to invade the bogs to cut turf without paying for bog tickets. This caused considerable panic in the estate office, with requests for extraordinary measures to be taken by Dublin castle.⁸ Trench claims that he did not approve of these extremist measures by the estate, recommending instead a policy of compromise, which was ignored by the estate. Ultimately Trench claimed in *Realities* that he won over the recalcitrant tenants and got them to come in eventually with the rent. Later in the year, he kept his promise to the tenants, and presumably also fulfilled a requirement by the administration for a post-mortem analysis of the disturbances, by compiling a confidential report to Shirley on the problems of his Monaghan estate.

Summary of his Report

The report, which he says he read to Mr Shirley for his reaction, consists of three main parts focusing on:

- the tenants' complaints about the management
- recommendations for improvement in the circumstances of the estate
- estimates of the amount of investment in improvements by the estate

In nearly all cases, Trench's report very much favours the tenants' point of view and supports many of his seemingly self-righteous recommendations in *Realities* for an easier line with the tenants. As the report was confidential, it is likely to represent his true opinions rather than a viewpoint constructed for public consumption in his book. It is largely an indictment of the estate and its management policies then in place. Trench appears in many ways - paradoxically in view of his later reputation - as a champion of tenants' rights, a humane and enlightened advocate for the material and

6. *Realities*, 81

7. *ibid.*, 83

8. see PRONI correspondence D3531

moral welfare of the tenantry.⁹

He went on the offensive at the outset of his report by suggesting that he was not surprised at the uprising of the tenants in the face of the Estate's policy of "making a profit on every trifling transaction" without any indication of relief of pressure on the tenants. Mitchell's agency with its inflexible approach to management was the immediate cause of the trouble, he suggested, a foretaste of his analysis of the Landsdowne and other estates. Trench's central attitude to estate practice is expressly stated in the first pages of his report: he strongly believed that policies should be clearly identified as ultimately being for the benefit of the tenantry: "I have long held that anything which is ruinous to the tenant can never be advantageous to the Landlord". Later in the report he emphasises the importance of policies being conducted which lead to greater understanding between landlord and tenant and which demonstrate that the landlord had the interests of the tenants at heart. He also talks later in the report about the positive effects on the tenants of seeing that the landlord will "bear and share" [their costs and burdens] with them; that tenants will be enticed to improve their situation by a demonstration of the landlord's approval and support; that if not shown that the landlord is on their side, the tenants will join the "enemy's ranks" - here he is addressing the immediate context of the recent outbreak. Trench's philosophy is very much in line with contemporary views on property ownership, that 'property has responsibilities as well as rights'. A decade earlier William Blacker had expressed many of these sentiments: "as the horse which is overburthened will not draw, so the tenant that is so overcharged, as to make him lose hope of being able to live by the land, instead of paying the exorbitant rent demanded ... will pay nothing".¹⁰

The Shirley tenants' grievances

The main grievances of the tenants were outlined at length. They consisted of a range of oppressive measures, many of which were unique to the Shirley estate. In *Realities*, Trench says that he was puzzled by some of the shouts of the people who dragged him to Lough Fea: "we'll stand the grippers no longer"; "down with the coppers" and "we'll hang the keepers".¹¹ His report provided the answers.

Keepers and the 'watching' system

This was a practice, by which persons in the neighbourhood were delegated by the Estate Office to keep watch on the crops and transactions of tenants so that the Office would be fully informed about each tenant's circumstances. They were thus prevented from secretly selling off their harvest and claiming insolvency in the rent office; it was designed to enforce payment of arrears etc. This practice was also in place on other properties - for example, the Downshire estate in Blessington. Trench's opinion, however, was that the practice was "carried too far" on the Shirley estate. Indeed, he noted

9. This comes across especially in a separate report by Trench on two tenants who owed arrears to the landlord and other debts to third parties, in which Trench gives the benefit of the doubt very much to the tenants. He objected to the manner in which one was "hunted and harassed and prevented from attending to his farm". D3531/P. I am grateful to Dr Ruth-Ann Harris for drawing my attention to this.
10. William Blacker, *The management of landed property in Ireland*, Dublin, 1834, 5
11. *Realities* 79

that the tenants involved were obliged to pay the costs of the 'watchers'. At a time and in a culture where men were ashamed to beg even in the extremities of poverty, as reported in the Devon Commission, Trench claimed the 'watching system' was "deeply wounding" and a gross infringement of the privacy and the dignity of the tenants. He considered that this system was responsible for serious impoverishment of the tenantry of the estate who would make 'any sacrifices' to pay their rent up to date, depleting their capital in face of a huge reduction in agricultural prices.

Although Trench's recommendation of a temporary reduction in rent was not accepted, he emphasised that the watching system must be discontinued and that "forbearance in getting in the arrears" be used to allow the tenants to recover themselves. Arrears should be got in by encouragement and not compulsion: Trench's reluctant involvement in the 'driving' expedition to Magheraclone was a demonstration of his commitment.

'Double rent' on bogs

Trench pointed out that it was the tenants' perception that they were being charged twice for bogland. Although he noted that in fact the rent was deducted from the land rent, he accused the management of a degree of 'close shaving' which he said was unworthy of a 'large and opulent proprietor'. He recommended that the bog rent should be reviewed. In an extensive footnote relating to the bog rent on Shirley's estate, he pointed out that the estate was unusual among large proprietors in being substantially (21%) over the government's valuation of the land. He referred repeatedly in the report, in a manner which must have been irritating to the landlord, to the opulence of Shirley in the context of shabby treatment of the tenants. John Andrews has noted the growing practice of Irish smallholders in pre-famine Ireland of having surveys of their lands undertaken to protect themselves against such 'close shaving' by the landowners' surveyors.¹² Some tenants on the Shirley estate in the later 1830s submitted private surveys of their farms by Andrew McKittrick. Later in the report, Trench refers to 6d being charged for 'permission tickets' to cut turf, as well as other prejudicial practices which he says should be reconsidered.

'The raising of the coppers'

This was a book-keeping practice in the Office of rounding up to the nearest shilling. Trench gave the example in *Realities* of rent of £6-10s-9d being rounded up to £6-11s. In his report he condemned this as an indefensible practice. With bog and lime charges, he said, it was "these irritating sources of discontent" which brought about the upheaval following Mitchell's death. They were discontinued about the time of Trench's report.

Decrees for rent

This was the practice on the estate of taking out decrees for non-payment of rent, followed by jailing in Monaghan. Trench appears to have been particularly outraged by the fact that the tenant was charged with all the costs, including the travel expens-

12. J. H Andrews, *Plantation Acres*, Belfast 1985

es of the bailiffs. He was concerned at the inhumanity of this treatment of the tenantry which he never heard of happening on any other property. He recommended the discontinuation of this policy.

Systems of punishment and penalties

Trench pointed to a range of penalties - such as distraining, processing and the "general harassing of the multitude" as he called it - which were used to keep the tenants "tightly to their traces" and which in his view were harsh and counterproductive.

Proposals for reform and improvement

Trench then discussed some proactive measures to bring about an improvement in the lot of the tenants through encouragement rather than restraint. He identified three categories of tenant in the estate: (i) tenants of good character and efficient means, (ii) the idle, indolent and ill-disposed and (iii) the completely 'broken down' tenants. Given the poverty and deprivation of the tenants, the only way to encourage them to improve was to offer incentives to them by giving subsidies to those with potential or by assisting the others to emigrate. One direct consequence of this report was that attempts of one kind or another were subsequently made to establish how many tenants on the estate fell into the different categories. A survey of cottiers was undertaken in the mid forties, for example.

The extent of squalor and poverty on the estate shocked Trench, provoking him to enunciate a sort of manifesto for the tenants' welfare. Many tenants' houses had neither windows or furniture: "a decent habitation cannot be had without windows, diet will not appear detestable unless there be good light in the house to point it out". Even if contemporary opinion held that these poor people were unaccustomed to better conditions, Trench insisted that they still "feel their misery" and that this caused the recent disturbance. His compassion for the feelings of the tenantry is clear and practical: "every day convinces me of the necessity of treating the people as human creatures ...

If the gentlemen of Ireland do not quickly do something for the poor of Ireland ... they will do something for themselves". These opinions of Trench at this stage in his career contrast strongly with later perceptions of him as an estate administrator.

He recommended that the landlord set aside a proportion of his annual rent for investment in long-term improvements by the first group of tenants, on the basis of Trench's repeated belief that only if tenants have some material benefits such as a house and out-offices to protect, will they co-operate with the landlord and management. He particularly emphasised the importance of demonstrations of kindness and encouragement from the landlord and condemned the practice of the estate raising rents and other charges immediately improvements are made by the tenants. "If the landlord really wishes [his tenant] to live in comfort, really wishes for his advancement ... he should be willing to sacrifice something to obtain them". In relation to improvements such as slating farmhouses, installation of windows, chimneys, draining, fencing, planting, he recommended that when plans for improvement had been sanctioned by the Office, they should be subsidised to the tune of 50% of the cost. Indeed he seems to suggest that windows should be provided gratis for well-intentioned tenants on condition that other improvements are undertaken.

Trench's plan was an astute and well-thought out strategy, which he claimed had

moral as well as economic advantages. The sanction of the estate office would ensure that properly laid-out improvements were put in place and having the tenant execute the work would secure his commitment to its future upkeep. Shirley, in a sceptical marginal note on the capacity of the tenants to carry out the work effectively, reflected some contemporary upper-class perceptions of the Irish population as being feckless, idle or lazy, a view probably also informing parts of Trench's *Realities* and his novel *Ierne*.¹³ In his confidential report, however, Trench was strongly of the opinion that the tenant had the capacity to be given this work. His views are interesting and reflect his conviction about the long-term responsibility of the landowning and 'respectable' classes to encourage the moral well-being of the populace through education in work and careful husbandry of their affairs. Ever conscious of the practical lessons to be learnt too, he points out (p16) that "cleanliness and decency within ... will induce it to be extended further, and you will seldom see a man who has his house and homestead decent who will leave his Land in weeds and neglect".

If the good tenants are thus treated, Trench is convinced that the second group of ill-disposed characters will be restrained, if not improved, by the example and presence of those who have experienced some demonstration of the landlord's interest in their welfare. Having a stake in the future of the estate they will "stand as so many rocks to stem the popular tumult". The third category - those overcome by poverty due to mismanagement or misadventure, with no visible means of support or paying the rent - should be helped to emigrate. It may seem odd that he did not express an interest in 'emigrating' the second group of what he termed 'reckless and desperate' tenants. This may, however, reflect his anxiety to win over Shirley to the emigration proposal. The third group, Trench notes, may be able to contribute towards their emigration by, for example, selling the good will to their farms and so will only require partial subsidy of their passage. But in the next sentence he hints broadly that "many landlords go to the whole expense of exporting those who are willing, but unable, to emigrate off their properties". The subsequent emigration scheme carefully balanced the estate's subsidy with the tenant's resources.¹⁴ In 1848 and '49, for example, any contribution which the tenants could make, or help they could obtain from relatives, was taken into account. In some cases, individual emigrants were given all their expenses "as an experiment" to see if they would later provide assistance to other family members left at home.¹⁵

Investment required

Trench proposed that a fixed amount of the annual rental income, beginning with less than 5% and increasing gradually to 10% be set aside for reinvestment. He explains that this apparently large financial commitment was necessary because the estate had been so niggardly with such investment in the past. In the previous year, for instance, a total of £16-14-11d (out of an income of £22,954) was expended in allowances for improvements, apparently on three tenants' houses. Before the Famine, in comparison with England, Irish estates had a low level of reinvestment in their prop-

13. *Ierne* was aimed at an English readership

14. P J Duffy, 'Assisted emigration from the Shirley estate 1843-54', in *Clogher Record* (1992)

15. Mary Hamilton of Clontrain, Margaret McCaffrey of Corduffkelly and Bridget Hand of Knocknecran were given the whole passage and 'all necessaries' on these conditions. D3531/M/6/1

erties. Trench appeared to think that the Shirley estate had a low rate even by Irish standards. The sums he quoted for allowances contrast with the lavish outlay on the landlord's new mansion and demesne in Lough Fea in the previous decade.

To make his proposal more palatable to the estate, Trench pointed out that it would represent a capital investment and secure the future income from the estate. The easier option of reducing rent would be wasted and soon forgotten. In keeping with the spirit of improvement which constantly informed Trench's outlook, he recommended that a portion of the money set aside by the estate should be invested in the establishment of farming societies, the employment of agriculturists to instruct the tenantry and demonstrate good farming practice, the initiation of farming meetings and prizes for agricultural improvements - all in the spirit of improvement which characterised writing on Irish agriculture from Arthur Young onwards.¹⁶

Following the submission of his report and presumably in reply to some of Shirley's responses, Trench appended an even more outspoken indictment of the running of the estate, leavened occasionally with suggestions that Mr Shirley may not have been fully *au fait* with the situation (which in itself was a rebuke to the proprietor). He selected the particular case of turbary charges on the estate for a sharply worded critique, suggesting that they were exceptional and ill-advised in terms of estate practice. He asserted that he had never heard of such charges anywhere else in his experience and that it was a poor reflection on a landowner of Shirley's standing to oppress his tenants to this extent. There appears to have been some peculiarity in relation to tenants' access to turbary in Shirley's estate which went back at least to the 1770s, when the then agent (James Goldtrap) said that large numbers of the tenantry had complained to him about it. His predecessor (Taylor) seems to have managed the letting of the land badly particularly with regard to turbary rights.¹⁷

In response to an impression on Mr Shirley's part that the tenants were not especially badly off, Trench asserted that he had spent four months visiting every part of the estate, as he said, "entering minutely into details not merely of the appearance of their houses, but of their social and domestic habits" and in his most devastating summary concluded that "even in Ireland it has never fallen my lot to witness destitution to the same degree and over such a large extent as I have seen it on this property".

Never one to yield easily to criticism, he also defended himself vigorously against the suggestion that the tenants' wretchedness was self-imposed. They were no different to tenants anywhere else in the south of Ireland - he conceded that they did differ from the population in the 'North' (where the linen industry had transformed the economic base of the rural population). His opinions, he insisted, were scientifically based - on observation of the tenants, study of the office records and his own experience of the 'unerring marks of destitution'. On this basis he categorically concluded that "the tenants generally speaking on this estate ... are in a state of poverty and depression which would make it wise in point of interest, and just and humane in point of morality, that the Landlord should consent to share with them the burthens by which they are unavoidably overwhelmed". His final sentence is a sweeping condemnation of the justice and morality of the oppression of Shirley's tenantry.

16. A Young, *Tour in Ireland*, 1770; also William Blacker, *op. cit.* with which Trench was probably familiar. See also *General Report on the Gosford Estates in Armagh 1821* by William Greig published by PRONI, Belfast 1976, which captures the spirit of the age and probably informed much of Blacker's work.

17. D3531/A/5, 31



Carrickmacross 1835

Conclusion

Trench's long report on the Shirley estate is important for many reasons. It obviously provides a good deal of information on this estate in the immediate pre-famine years. It adds to a series of reports on the estate running well back into the eighteenth century coinciding with the appointment of new agents. It serves to illustrate many of the problems which were encountered by landowners and tenants on this type of non-resident property in Ireland in the nineteenth century. It fits into a pattern of writing and practice on estate agency and estate management in the economically depressed years after the end of the European war. Much could be said about its relationship with

the ideas written about by William Greig and William Blacker: indeed many of the sentiments in both are repeated in Steuart Trench's analysis of the Shirley estate.

Although Trench claimed that he resigned the agency because the recommendations in his report were not accepted, in fact subsequent experience on the Shirley estate suggests that most of his proposals were in fact implemented. His emigration proposal was followed through before he resigned, with hundreds being sent off. It would seem that Trench instituted a systematic upgrading in the estate office's administration, which allows us to actually see the extent of changes through the 1840s. Aside from the emigration subsidies, an Estate Improvement Book was instituted in 1844 which contains hundreds of applications and grants for improvements of houses and farms throughout the forties and fifties. Hundreds of windows were installed, kitchens lofted, houses and outhouses roofed and slated, fields drained and tens of thousands of thorn quicks were planted. All were given 100% subsidies by the estate it seems. While much of this occurred under George Morant's agency, most of the changes were instituted before Trench departed or may be traced directly to suggestions made by Trench in 1843. At least one agriculturist was employed and a model farm was established in Derrylavin before Trench resigned. Agricultural shows were initiated and premiums awarded for cattle and tillage.

Trench's report shows elements of idealism but also a strong practical streak. It was outspoken in its attack on the nature of the estate management. It is little wonder that it was not well received by Shirley, who in referring to the publication of *Realities of Irish Life* noted that Trench always had a penchant for claiming credit for more than he should have. The subsequent adoption of many of Trench's recommendations by the estate points to the possibility of a clash with Trench's assertive personality rather than any profound disagreement by the landlord with his proposals. Perhaps the availability of George Morant, an English kinsman of Shirley's, provided an excuse to terminate Trench's appointment.

Finally, although there are continuities in Trench's attitudes from 1843 until his book was published more than a quarter of a century later, his analysis of the Monaghan estate is interesting because of its contrasts with his later more hostile and embittered views. Undoubtedly the upheavals of the famine years tested Trench's administrative ingenuity to its limits. His application of root-and-branch policies in estate management leading to evictions and emigration led inevitably to a rise in his notoriety as an agent. Together with growing tenant aggression and radicalism in the post-famine land troubles, all these factors undoubtedly led to bitterness and disillusionment in Trench's attitudes. By the later 1860s he was living in a virtual fortress in south Monaghan.

Acknowledgement

Trench's Report is reproduced here by kind permission of Major Shirley and the Deputy Keeper of Records, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

Causes of Complaints stated, and certain alterations suggested in reference to the Management of the Shirley Estate

[Figures in square brackets refer to manuscript page numbers. Footnotes, identified alphabetically by letters in the original manuscript, here follow the usual numbered sequence.]

In entering upon any statement of the causes of complaint of the Shirley Tenantry I should wish to premise that 3 months' experience and observation have fully confirmed me in the impression which I received on arriving in this locality - and which I stated in my letter to Mr Evelyn Ph Shirley dated April 7/43; namely "that a very general discontent was all at once brought to a crisis by the death of the late Mr Mitchell" - but that "in every step I could plainly trace the one unbending principle which guided the conduct of Mr Shirley's late Agent, namely a single eye to what he considered Mr Shirley's interest, but in carrying out this principle it did appear to me that he was sometimes led away by his extensive attachment to Mr Shirley and that to increase the Landlord's means of enjoyment he did in many *apparently* minor points lay a greater burthen upon the Tenants than the latter could perhaps be expected very long patiently to bear".

I remain of the same opinion still, but since I wrote the above, I have observed additional sources of discontent. All these may be individually small, and to each of them an employer might be disposed to say "surely [2] this was no cause for such a serious outbreak",¹ but when taken in the aggregate, and when considered in reference to the general spirit of putting every thing up to the highest it would bear, of making a profit on every trifling transaction which should have been considered as entered upon *only* for the benefit of the Tenant, and that at a time when bad seasons were reducing the *whole farming population of Ireland* to a state bordering upon bankruptcy, I cannot feel in the least degree surprised at the conduct of the Tenantry when not given to understand that there was an immediate likelihood of relief.

I will proceed to an examination of some of these apparently petty grievances, offering such observations thereon as may appear to me to be called for.

I am aware that the Tenants very strongly object to the strict system of espionage which was exercised over them. Certain keepers were, it seems, appointed over the several Townslands, and it was their duty to see that the Tenants were punctual in the payment of their rents. This might be all very proper, but it becomes a question of degree how far it is advisable, or how far a tenantry will bear this system to be carried - and I have heard all persons connected with the office admit that this system of watching was carried much too far. Mr Smith the Clerk expressed himself strongly of this opinion.

The Keepers used I understand to call frequently upon the backward tenant, used

1. Let any man look to the present disturbances in South Wales and he will see a strong instance of the lengths to which a system of petty hardship will drive a naturally peaceful community. These disturbances tho commencing with turnpike gates have become most formidable, and have not yet been brought to a conclusion.

to go through his entire premises, to watch all his dealings, to know all his stores, and to make himself perfect master of all his circumstances. Besides which the tenant [3] had to pay the cost of this Keeper.²

Now I well know their pride and that nothing could possibly be more offensive to them than this, they will bear their poverty with unexampled patience, but they do not wish, and in fact cannot bear, that any neighbour should know its full extent. An acquaintance of mine built a large shed for his workmen to eat their dinners in, instead of eating it as they used, lying under the ditches. After its completion he was surprised to find it was scarcely used at all. He made enquiries from his Steward who informed him that they were ashamed to eat their poor dinners of dry potatoes *before each other*,³ that tho' each knew well the other had nothing else yet they could not bear publickly to show it, but each preferred eating his humble fare where no one else could see him.

The same principle exactly applies here, a proper knowledge should no doubt be kept of the circumstances of each defaulting tenant, but from all I can understand there seems no question but the watching system was carried to an extent which *deeply wounded* the feelings of the Tenantry.

No doubt it was most successful in obtaining rent, because the Tenant sooner than have this Keeper upon him, (for whose services he was afterwards obliged to pay) would make any sacrifices, or sell his pig or his crop at any loss, to get rid of him. Thus the rents were kept up, little or no arrear accumulated, but the Tenant as times grew worse was rapidly becoming [4] poorer and poorer, his capital was going to keep up the rent, the Keepers were unremitting in their exertions, and at last the Tenants stock becoming almost exhausted, he determined on running restive.⁴

It is upon this position of affairs that we have now lighted, the rents have certainly been kept well up, but in consequence of depressed prices, pigs and corn being not much more than half their former value, it must have been, and has been, at the expense of the Tenants capital; and as these small holders have no fund to fall back upon except their land and labour, it cannot be expected that they should all at once reproduce both rent and capital.

I therefore was strongly of opinion that a *temporary reduction* should at the *very first* have been made to give the tenant heart and to enable him to recover himself a little.

This was not approved of. But whether the system of espionage was a good one or not, and as exercised I maintain it was not, I feel perfectly certain *it could not now*

2. The Bailiffs and Managers in connexion with the Office are my authorities on this head. I read what I have written concerning it to Mr Smith the Clerk and he said it was all correct. I never at any time have spoken to a Tenant concerning these things, I did not choose to admit grievances which I was not certain of having the power of redressing - when in the hands of the multitude however I heard many complaints of this as of other hardships. [ref to April 43]
3. I understand instances also of the same kind occurred in this neighbourhood
4. Since these observations were written John McEneny informed me that on the occasion of Mr Mitchell's making up the half years rent account, a year ago, finding the arrears so small, he turned to him saying "now John you see what exertions in the Keepers will do". His reply was "very true sir, but wait a little and see how it will be, the tenant is selling now to pay the rent what it will be impossible for him to go on managing his farm without". I think McEneny even at that time took a just view of the case.

be continued. The tenants would not endure it, they would inevitably beat or murder any man who should attempt to act in this way as formerly, *and yet if this check be not kept up,* I feel pretty certain that an immediate arrear will be the result.

Under these circumstances my advice would unquestionably be to use forbearance in getting in this arrear, to let the Tenants recover themselves [5] a little both in their temper and their substance, and I have little doubt unless some extraordinary change takes place generally throughout Ireland, in consequence of Repeal agitation etc, that all will yet come round, cheerfully and quietly.

If distraining and other harsh measures were now to be extensively adopted, I do not doubt but that the very worst possible consequences would issue *both to Landlord and tenant,* the combination is now on the decline and I think and expect by Harvest there will be no serious traces of it as touching the rent, except an arrear which I really believe *cannot* be helped.

Another source of complaint is concerning the bogs. The tenants not only complain that the bogs have gradually been raised in price from 3d to 4d and from 4d to 6d and from 6d to 8d per perch, but they complain that if a man has what is termed "green bog" that he pays a "double rent" for it, one rent for it as land, and another as bog.

Now strictly speaking this is not the fact. It is true he pays full rent for it as land, it is also true he pays for it as bog, but when he uses it as bog, a surveyor is employed to make out how much he uses of it as bog, and that amount is deducted from his land rent.

Now this is undeniably just, but at the same time there is a degree of what may be termed "close shaving" in it, that in my mind is quite unworthy of a large and opulent proprietor. I think it were much better that the same land were not charged twice over in any way, even tho' the amount of one charge be fairly and fully deducted from that of the other.

I am not quite prepared to say how I would recommend this to be managed, as I have not had sufficient opportunity of examining the particular localities, but I would strongly recommend that some change be adopted, so as to leave no reason whatever for a charge of this nature. I shall gladly make it my business to enquire into and report on it hereafter.

While upon the subject of the bogs I think it advisable to state, that Mr Griffith in his instructions to the valuers desired them not to value bog or turbary, by itself, on *account of its product as fuel,* as its convenience would be taken into account when setting the Land. This may in a considerable degree account for the apparent lowness of Mr Shirley's lettings, as contrasted with the Ordnance Survey, Mr Griffith including turbary, Mr Shirley charging for it separately.⁵

5. Mr Griffith in his instructions to his valuers gives them the following directions concerning the valuation of bogs - "all uncultivated bogs and mosses or turbaries are to be valued as pasture and no price is to be set upon the turbary *on account of its product as fuel.* The vicinity of turf banks being one of the local circumstances to be taken into consideration as tending to increase the value of the neighbouring Land". Thus it appears that Mr Griffith in valuing the Land *included* the value of the turbary, *as an easement* to the Tenant, but Mr Shirley charges all his Tenants for it in addition to their Land rent, consequently to ascertain what Mr Shirley's real total rental is, that is, what his Estate really produces in the shape of, rent, as compared with the Ordnance Survey, the *bog rent should be added to the Land rent.*

The next grievance I would notice is "the raising of the copper" as they call it. I need not dwell upon this, it could not under any circumstances be defended. The amount of increase was trifling, about £50 per an. *but the spirit of it was extensively felt* [7] coming as it did in addition to, and in connexion with, other rises in small things, *bog, Lime* etc⁶

It was not considered by the Tenants as a mode of relieving the accounts, but as an opportunity of an increase of their burthens - I remember a man in the crowd shouting out almost in a frenzy, "Its not the *pence* we care for but its the *principle* we can stand no longer".

This impost has been removed, as also the charge of 6d upon permission Tickets to cut turf, but their sting still remains, and one cannot expect these sores will be instantly healed, the moment the cause of them is removed.

There is another practice prevalent upon the Estate which tho' I am not *as yet* quite prepared to say how it can be remedied, yet I think it so prejudicial to the general interests of the Estate, that I ought not to omit notice of it. I allude to the practice of obtaining decrees against the Tenant for rent, and sending him to Monaghan Gaol if it were not paid in time.

The unfortunate tenant who through any cause might be back in his rent, was in the first place subject to the cost of the decree, 7s-6. He was then charged 11s-0 for his fare and that of the Bailiffs to Monaghan, 5s-6 for conveyance of [8] the Bailiffs back,

The yearly land value of the Shirley Estate is	£22,962 - 15 - 0
Bog rent according to last return	1663 - 1 - 11
	£24,626 - 2 - 11
Deduct Hadsors fee farm included in the rental, but not in ordnance valuation as below	18 - 9 - 2
Total rent (Tithe included)	£24,607 - 13 - 9
Yearly value of Estate according to Ordnance Survey	£24,607 - 9 - 2
Add, according to Mr Griffiths direction, half OS value of Carrickmacross houses	£342 - 18 - 0
Add also extra charge for accommodation Land in Town parks 75 acres at £2 per acre	£150 - 0 - 0
Deduct Ordnance valuation	£20,372 - 7 - 2
Remainder	£4,235 - 6 - 7

Thus showing Mr Shirley's total rental of the Estate to be *higher* than the Ordnance valuation by the sum of £4235 - 6 - 7 or, according to Mr Smith the Clerk's calculation, the rental to be *21 per cent over the Ordnance Valuation*.

Mr Griffith in writing to Mr Gibson concerning the Shirley Estate, May 6/43, says, "From the comparision I have had an opportunity of making throughout the Northern counties, of the proportion which exists between the general valuation and the ordinary rentals of small landed proprietors, I have ascertained that the *valuation is nearly 25 per cent under such rentals*, but I have frequently found that the rentals of *great landed proprietors* who deal liberally with their tenants are *nearly at, or very little above the scale of the general valuation*". But it has been proved above, that the tenantry on the Shirley Estate pay 21 per cent over the ordnance valuation, therefore they can scarcely be considered as having any advantage in point of rent over the ordinary small proprietors in the North of Ireland.

6. In my mind it was these and such like which produced the convulsion, not the rent, as other Tenantry are doing and have done, have struggled through the difficulties of bad seasons, depressed prices, and borne all hardships with patience, but these irritating sources of discontent brought the boil to a head and a deeper and more extensive cure must be applied.

and 3s-6 for maintenance of the Bailiffs whilst there, in all £1-7-6 - add to this *the loss of the tenants time* whilst in Gaol, his family's sufferings and expenses when deprived of the assistance of their protector, and I think there is no man of common sense, not to speak of humanity, who when made acquainted with such a practice could sanction it. And yet this is the usual cause - a Notice is put up in the office that if the rent be not paid against a certain day, decrees would be taken out at the ensuing quarter sessions, and if the Tenant did not pay immediately the process of arrest, imprisonment etc, and consequent ruinous expenses and loss were carried into effect, whilst the rent sued for might be but £2 or £3.⁷

I am not as I said prepared to say at once how this can be immediately remedied, and an *arrear at the same time be avoided*, but this I am prepared to say, that no estate can really *thrive* whilst such a practice is adopted.

I know not whether this course be the general practice in this country or not, but of the many estates with the management of which I am acquainted, whether extensive properties or otherwise, I never knew one on which I ever heard of such a practice being pursued as a general means of obtaining the rent. It may up to a certain point be successful, but it *must* [9] eventually be ruinous to the Tenantry, and I have long held and still hold that anything which is ruinous to the tenant can never be advantageous to the Landlord.

In enunciating those things which appear to me to be prejudicial to the general principles upon which I consider an estate should be managed, you will perceive I have not in any case alluded to the charges as being *too high*. I have not stated the Land, nor bog, nor lime, as being over charged; this may be, or may not be; at present I am unwilling to offer any decided opinion. I have confined my observations to those points on which I conceive I am now a fair and competent judge, namely whether certain practices ought or ought not to be continued,⁸ whether they are such as will lead an extensive and *shrewd*, tho' perhaps ignorant tenantry to place confidence in their Landlord that he is *really anxious* for their welfare, that he has *their* interests at heart as much as *his own*; whether these practices, and the *spirit* in which they were conducted were such, as would lead to that good understanding between Landlord and tenant without which Society becomes as it were unhinged, and without which it is impossible that each can render to the other that mutual assistance which they are respectively capable of affording.

But the subjects to which I have above alluded are not the only important changes [10] which I would recommend. There are others also which it appears to me are absolutely necessary to be adopted. The system of punishment has certainly been liberally used, the Tenants have been kept well and tightly to their traces, and so perfect in all their details have been the arrangements for keeping them so, that they must needs go steadily forward, or else by some violent plunge break through all restraint.

This tho' meditated for some time past they have unexpectedly had an opportuni-

7. My authority on this head was Mr Smith. I asked him was this the regular cause, his reply was "certainly"
8. There are several other practices which have been sanctioned as the rule of the Estate, which I would wish to take an early opportunity of laying before Mr Shirley, for his consideration - as however though in my mind most prejudicial, these have been considered in the light of hardships upon the Tenants (perhaps their *alteration* would rather be considered as such) I think it unnecessary to allude to them at present.

ty of doing, and their pent up feelings have been vented in the wildest manner.⁹

I do not hesitate to say it will require very nice handling to get them again to work kindly in harness, and I am thoroughly convinced that harsh measures such as distraining, processing etc, will not and cannot succeed, or prove advantageous to either *Landlord* or *Tenant*. Fairness, decision, and occasionally *severe punishment on individuals* will no doubt be necessary, but the general harassing of the multitude I conceive most destructive to good government.

But we will now suppose that the Tenantry have fully returned to their duty; that they have evinced a disposition to do their utmost to meet their Landlords demands, [11] doing at the same time ordinary justice to themselves and families in food and clothing - and I then ask, how are they to be retained there and led on to progressive improvements.

Will it be enough merely to remove the causes of especial complaint, and then to suppose that matters will resume their ordinary course? I answer, decidedly not - were this attempted in the present condition of the tenantry, taking into consideration the state of their houses, their food, their clothing, and their comforts or rather their *absence* of comforts, I have not the least doubt but that tho' things might for a while go on quietly, yet that at no very distant period another and perhaps more formidable movement, because better guided, and thus more determined, would take place, against the landlords rights, which could not be quelled but at a tenfold greater loss than can be incurred by the present outbreak.

And how is this to be avoided? I see no means but by doing what other extensive proprietors are doing all over Ireland, namely by meeting those tenants who are inclined to improve half way, by making them [12] liberal allowances *in aid* of substantial improvements, and by assisting those who are so sunk that they cannot rescue themselves, to emigrate.

If the tenant who is in these hard times scarcely able to hold his head above water, be not given heart and encouraged in his exertions by the *substantial* approval of his Landlord, if he be not given some proof and plain token that his Landlord desires he should have a stake as much as himself in the wellbeing of society, in short if he be not given something to *fight for*, he will inevitably join the enemy's ranks whenever a row comes, and fight *against* the existing order of things.

A remarkable instance of this was lately brought to my notice. During the riots in the manufacturing districts of England in 1842 one gentleman (manufacturer) who employed largely kept all his men with him, not one turned out - nor did he suffer from them in any way - His people were asked to join the rioters but would not. What was the secret? They had all neat houses and gardens furnished them. They were tolerably well off, and had something to lose, they therefore remained quiet.

Every day convinces me more and more of the necessity of treating the people as human creatures, and enabling them to live as human [13] beings might. If the gentlemen of Ireland do not quickly do something for the poor of Ireland, no long period will elapse ere they will do something for themselves.

I will now suppose the necessity of this admitted. I will suppose that the Landlord considers it his interest, independent of all *moral* feeling upon the subject, that the tenant should be placed in a better position than that which he now occupies. How is this

9. Perhaps Mr Shirley is not aware that positive resistance was offered a little time before Mr Mitchell's death, to the Bailiffs when driving for rent along the County Cavan border. Mr Mitchell was I understand extremely uneasy about it.

to be managed? "If we give them money", say some objectors, "they will only squander it upon tobacco and such like, and if they get a reduction of the rent even to one half, in a year or two they will be just the same". This has often been said, and I admit is partly true, but I do not ask for this kind of relief. The plan I would recommend would certainly require funds from the Landlord, to a considerable extent, but in my mind it would be better laid out than if he got 6 per cent for it upon the best landed security. This as I said before is my opinion as a point of *interest*, independent of all moral feelings upon the subject.

The plan I would suggest is this, that the Landlord should in the first instance arrange a certain percentage on the receipts of his [14] property which he would be willing to lay out in permanent and substantial improvements amongst his tenantry - and from which he should not at present expect any direct money interest. Having settled this sum, I think he should then let it be gradually understood by his tenantry, that every tenant of good character and sufficient means who was willing to build or make other substantial improvements upon his farm, would be met by the Landlord *half way*, that is provided the Tenant previously gave notice and plan of the improvement to the Agent and that it obtained his sanction and approval. For instance suppose a Tenant wished for a decent slated house *suited to his Farm* and premises. The Agent might then say to him "well if you will give me a plan such as I on examination will approve of, or if you will build one on the plan I will suggest, your Landlord who is anxious for your comfort will go to half the expense". Then the Tenant would be convinced the Landlord felt an interest in his welfare, he will exert himself to improve when he knows his Landlord will bear & share with him. The Landlord will have a check that all improvements to which he [15] subscribes are of a *well laid out* and proper description whilst the Tenant being left to the sole *execution* of the work will retain that interest in what he has himself executed which will secure its being afterwards taken care of.

[Marginal note in different hand]: Query - Is the Tenant fit to be treated with the sole execution of the work?!! Would not much money be thrown away by bad management?

The moral effect of a system such as this would of course be valuable, I think it would *pay well*, and I feel sure it would be fully appreciated.

The same plan should I conceive be adopted in all permanent improvements such as *draining, planting* and perhaps occasional *fencing* - also with regard to windows, chimneys, and other improvements of a cheaper nature when the tenant might be unable to build anew.

I look upon a decent habitation as one of the first steps towards civilisation, and yet on this property there are *hundreds of* [struck out] many tenants houses where there are neither windows, bedsteads, tables nor chairs, and hundreds destitute of one or more of these comforts, I might rather call them necessaries. How can they then have any idea of the value of comfort and decency. It is true they are accustomed to no better, but still they feel their misery; and being destitute, without any prospect of alleviation, and without knowing how to remedy it, they are servile and fawning whilst under [16] restraint, and wild and reckless and savage whenever that restraint be from whatever cause removed.

A decent habitation cannot be had without windows, diet will not appear detestable unless there be good light in the house to point it out. Windows should I think be given to all proper well-conducted tenants, on condition that other improve-

ments be made, one improvement will suggest another, cleanliness and decency within, even of a moderate character, will induce it to be extended further, and you will seldom see a man who has his house and homestead decent who will leave his Land in weeds and neglect.

Good advice on these points will never do, the tenant must have some proof that his Landlord really wishes him to live in comfort, really wishes for his advancement, and the only plain common sense proof that the Landlord really wishes for these things is, that he should be willing to sacrifice something to obtain them.

I have thus stated my opinion as to the treatment of the better class, the better disposed and better circumstanced of the Tenantry. What I conceive they want most is kindness, encouragement, some substantial [17] proof that the Landlord is anxious for their amelioration, that they will be left to enjoy the fruits of their exertions, and that everything will not be raised upon them the moment they increase its value by their industry. I allude not only to the rises which took place upon their land some time ago, but to the several rises which have since taken place upon smaller articles which they were obliged by their position to consume - such as Turf, Lime etc. The principle of this seems to have broken their confidence that their welfare was really studied, and they seem to have no heart to do anything or make any improvement lest advantage might be taken of it, and they be considered as being able to bear an additional rise in some form or other.

I now turn to the idle the indolent and the illdisposed, [Marginal query: what number of these) those who from misconduct or misfortune having now nothing to lose, have become reckless and desperate, and who are the chief movers or at least actors in the late and present disturbances.

This does not appear to me to be nearly so difficult a question as the former, give me the good and well disposed tenantry on my side, let me enlist the large majority of those who have something to lose [18] and show them that they are cared for, encouraged, and that a real interest is taken in their welfare, and improvement, and we shall easily keep the ruffians at bay. They may annoy us, perplex us, and perhaps even attempt to murder those who pursue them with punishment for their ill conduct; but we shall have no popular or universal rising, no general outbreak and combination. Such at least are my opinions - We thus act upon the principle of "divide and conquer". The slated houses dotted over the property, the individual substantial tenants who have each of them felt some proof of the Landlord's kindness, and perhaps hope to feel more, stand as so many rocks to stem the popular tumult, each has something to lose, and each for his own sake keeps the immediate district around him, over which he possesses influence, quiet and well disposed.

There is however a third class to which it is necessary particularly to advert. I allude to those, and they are very numerous, who tho' perhaps well disposed, are overcome by poverty, who by various chances, mismanagement on [19] their own part, going security for others, loss of crop or cattle by bad seasons or otherwise, have become completely broken down, and who have no visible means by which they can be enabled to meet their demands, to support their families, and to pay their rent. For these I see but one remedy, namely, to meet them also in what may be considered the only thing for their benefit, that is, emigration.

Most of them have some Land and consequently could get something for their interest or good will, and if this were helped out on the part of the Landlord, I am sure it would be taken extensive advantage of, and be a cheap and great improvement to the property.

Many Landlords go to the whole expense of exporting those who are willing, but unable, to emigrate off their properties.

I have now stated my general ideas and particular plans, not only of what I think advisable but of what I think necessary in this Estate. The question now arises as to what amount might be sufficient to carry out these general views. I have thought much over this, and am of the opinion that a percentage varying between 5 and 10 per cent upon the yearly income of the Estate would be [20] required. This may seem a large sum where so little has hitherto been spent, but the unusual smallness of the sums which have been devoted to such purposes form the very reason why liberality now be used.

I am well aware that many Landlords with less than half what this estate produces, spend annually greater sums than I name on similar improvements; but notwithstanding the vast size of this estate I think the sum I have above named, beginning at the smaller and increasing gradually, would in a very few years produce a sensible and visible change - and in the meantime a good feeling and spirit be sustained. Any smaller would I conceive be almost lost when we consider the great extent over which it would have to be spread.

Money given in this manner would, under ordinary circumstances be much more advantageously laid out, than five times the amount given in reductions of rent. The one would stand as permanent capital laid out upon the Estate, thoroughly secured, the other would be wasted and forgotten as soon as given without any general advantage to the property. [21] I am also strongly of the opinion that farming societies should be established, and especially one or two agriculturists obtained, who could devote their entire time to the practical instruction of the Tenantry in a better system of management, who could show them how they were to go about effecting improvements, lay out drains, explain the different localities and qualities of soils which were suited to particular crops, and practically instruct them how these crops should be got in so as to secure their ultimate success.

Farming meetings and premiums thereon for the best articles of produce would also be of the utmost value; they would increase the knowledge and skill of the Farmer. He would thus see what other people did, and were doing, he would hear farming matters discussed, and made an object of general interest and conversation amongst the rich as well as the poor, and the knowledge and information acquired by these things would ultimately teach him how to produce more out of his Land, and consequently to live more comfortably out of a given portion of Land and at a given rent.

These things would also tend to turn [22] the minds of the tenantry by the spirit of emulation and competition which they would excite from the one engrossing subject which at present occupies their minds, namely a reduction of rent. Of course the expenses of agriculturists, premiums, and such like would all be included in the Estimate I have above given.

Perhaps I might also say that during the first year 2.5% on the income of the Estate would be sufficient to carry out those or such like plans of improvement which appear to me to be necessary for its future welfare.

I do not say that my plans must all necessarily succeed, we have many and peculiar difficulties to cope with, but I do say that something must be done, and I believe I have suggested those measures which are most likely to succeed, and to which I earnestly entreat Mr Shirley's most serious attention.

Wm Stuart Trench
July 11 - 1843
Shirley House

[23]

The above observations were written previous to Mr Evelyn Philip Shirley's arrival in Ireland and read by me to him. Since then I have thought right to add some notes [footnotes] and further observations, chiefly in confirmation of the opinions expressed above.

Addition

There is another matter connected with the general management of the Estate which is in my mind a very decided hardship but to which I feel some delicacy in alluding - Mr Shirley having already expressed his opinion concerning it.

As however, in a document of this kind it is but right that my opinion be fully known, I have determined to mention the matter in full. I refer to the charge made upon the Tenantry for Turbary -

I object to it on 3 grounds:

- 1st Because it is an unusual charge.
- 2nd Because it is an onerous charge.
- 3rd Because it is an impolitic charge.

As to the 1st I need not dwell upon it. I am not acquainted with any instance in which the Tenants on an Estate on which there are bogs, and who have land in the neighbourhood of these bogs, have [24] been charged for turbary. Bogs near Towns are sometimes let, and in many cases where there is a superabundance of Turf banks for the immediate tenantry of an Estate, the remaining banks are let out to other people's tenants. But I have never heard of bogs in the country districts, which were only sufficient to supply turf to the surrounding tenantry, being charged to that Tenantry. It certainly is not the custom throughout Ireland generally, nor as far as I can ascertain throughout this country in particular.

2nd I object to it because I conceive it to be an onerous charge. I am quite sure Mr Shirley has not been made acquainted with the fact proved in my note [5] namely that so far from his Estate being underlet, so far from its being as was Sir Wm Heathcote's impression 25 per cent under Mr Griffiths valuation it is in fact 21 per cent over it. That is that this vast Estate belonging to an opulent proprietor is wound up to produce within a small sum of the full average amount per an[um] obtained by the small needy proprietors of Ireland.

I cannot think, indeed I feel certain Mr [25] Shirley has not been made acquainted with this fact, but I am ready to prove it from a comparison of Mr Griffith's public printed documents explained by himself, with the acknowledged rental of the Shirley Estate.

3rd I object to it on account of its impolicy. This follows from the other two: if it be an unusual charge, if it deserve the application of a heavy and onerous charge, it cannot be otherwise than an impolitic charge.

It is at all times unwise to press men with an unusual and heavy tax without some corresponding benefit. I can see no corresponding benefit to the Tenant in this case. If Mr Shirley was merely anxious for the good management of the bogs, that those tenants who lived at a distance from the bogs should not be charged an exorbitant price, as formerly, by those who lived near, it would be very easy and proper to tax the bogs

with the amount expended on their management. This is a totally different principle from rendering them a source of income.

Mr Shirley may of course deny that the Tenants are generally in a depressed condition. [26] It is difficult to prove poverty, that is, the absence of wealth and comfort, otherwise than by an accurate observation extended generally over the district in question, and also by entering minutely into details not merely of the appearance of their houses, but of their social and domestic habits.

I have now been upwards of 4 months on the Estate, I have gone over almost every part of it, I have visited great numbers of the Tenantry, have been through their houses and premises, having come upon them when utterly unexpected, not by way of examination into their distress but by way of a simple visit, and I must say, even in Ireland it has never fallen to my lot to witness destitution to the same degree and over such a large extent, as I have seen it on this property.

I may of course be told that I am deceived and mistaken, that they are a peculiar people and that in the midst of comparative wealth they choose to live in this wretchedness. I reply that after much attention given to this subject I cannot see this very great difference between the people of this district and the people of the south of Ireland generally. There are some marked differences, but not of that character which some [27] would lead me to suppose. They may and do differ from the general population of the North of Ireland, but they have exactly the same general characteristics with the peasantry of the South.

If then I am told that I am mistaken I can only reply that I have all my life lived in Ireland, I have lived in constant intercourse with the poor, I have made their condition for many years past a special subject of observation and attention, I am well acquainted with the unerring marks of destitution, and I believe I am not mistaken.

I beg particularly to remark that I lay nothing down to the accounts of the Tenantry themselves for I have avoided all conversation with them upon the subject. I have arrived at my conclusions from the report of those in connexion with the office, and from my own accurate and attentive observations; from the reason of the thing, that in consequence of the present depression and late bad prices it must be so, and from the facts before my eyes that it is so; that the Tenants generally speaking on this Estate, and I might perhaps add, on most subdivided estates in Ireland, are in a state of poverty and depression which would make it wise in point of interest, and just and humane in point of morality, that the Landlord should consent to share with them the burthens by which [28] they are unavoidably overwhelmed.

Upon what principle of justice the Tenant should be called upon to bear the entire loss consequent upon bad seasons, depressed prices, and an altered tariff, I confess I cannot understand.

Wm Steuart Trench
August 21. 1843

PS. The above observations were written without any reference to the present peculiar political state of Ireland.