1
An introduction

So very narrowly did he cause the survey to be made that there was not a single hide nor a rood of land, nor - it is shameful to relate that which he thought no shame to do - was there an ox, or a cow, or a pig passed by, that was not set down in the accounts . . .

Thus were recorded the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's 1085 complaints of the far-reaching investigations of the original Domesday Book, that William had shamelessly let nothing escape notice in his survey. In an extraordinary throw-back, the Land Union complained in matching rhythm in 1910 that: 'not one acre of land throughout the country, not one house or barn, or fence or wall or pond or ditch, or tree or shrub, but what must be assessed and valued.'

The triple connotations of Domesday - judgement, reckoning (i.e. accounting) and disaster - seem almost to run together in the Anglo-Saxon psyche, and any extensive governmental survey in England has tended to be so branded that, despite any obvious utilitarian function, enormous suspicion is immediately aroused amongst those who own property or other wealth.

Great Britain has no real cadastral history despite its long development of bureaucratic government and relatively early and successful establishment of internal local government. Despite the antiquity of land enquiries in England, from the Domesday Book onwards through an early concern with estate mapping, the central government has been remarkably deficient in establishing land records. This may reflect the fact that Great Britain has traditionally had a lower level of state control in land tax and rent collection. One-off surveys such as the 1086 Domesday Book, or the tithe surveys c. 1840, were

2 The Land Union, The Land Union's Reasons for Repeal of the New Land Taxes and Land Valuation (London 1910), 32. The pro-legislation journal Land Values pointed out in a rather po-faced way that, of course, 'the modern enquiry does not concern itself with the individual property or livestock which the holder may have upon the land' (in 'Our old brown mother', Land Values (November 1910), 115).
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complete neither in spatial coverage nor in thematic detail. It has therefore become commonplace to state that we have no cadastral surveys in this country which can compare with those of continental Europe, as in France or Sweden or Iceland. In 1979, a significant year in the public deposition of the Lloyd George records, the Northfield report noted that: ‘It is disturbing that so little is known about the pattern of acquisition, ownership, and occupancy of agricultural land and that governments should have to take decisions with far-reaching consequences on the agricultural structure, on the basis of incomplete or non-existent data.’\(^4\) Many types of survey do however exist in Europe for periods before the nineteenth century, mostly for purposes of taxation, and mostly without accompanying maps. But in 1807 Napoleon I instituted the French cadastre with its parcel numbers, area, land use and land values for each owner, based on surveys of each parish, and this format was copied in much of Europe outside England.\(^5\)

Proposals have from time to time been put forward for a more comprehensive land data base to cover Great Britain. Soon after the launching of the Land Valuation procedures outlined in this book, for example, a scheme was proposed for the formation of a ‘Domesday Office’ which would amalgamate the Land Registry, the Land Values Department and ultimately also the Ordnance Survey. The proposal came to nothing, and although schemes to promote comprehensive surveys of landownership and value have been put forward from time to time since, nothing has yet emerged.\(^6\)

The background to the present author’s interest in the records herein described is straightforward and probably replicates the circumstances surrounding initial work on many other records. These particular records were first encountered during research for material in the mid-1980s for a study of a Sussex rural community.\(^7\) Nothing was known about them at the East Sussex Record Office, and little could be gleaned from any secondary writing. Informal soundings were made, casual investigations were implemented at the PRO and at various local repositories whilst the author was involved in other researches, and eventually, as a clearer picture emerged of the possible importance of the material, research grant applications were submitted. In 1985 the Leverhulme Trust agreed to fund a project to investigate the coverage and significance of the material, and during the academic year 1985–86 the author

\(^6\) PRO LAR 1/107 Undated scheme for the formation of a Domesday Office in the records of the Land Registry.
\(^7\) B. Short (ed.), *Scarpfoot Parish: Plumpton 1830–1880* (Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex 1981). Further plans to investigate the history of the parish of Plumpton between 1880 and 1914 included the meeting of a local studies group at Plumpton which investigated the 1910 material in more detail.
was very fortunate to secure the services of Mick Reed as a Research Fellow at the University of Sussex. Great strides were made in the understanding of the magnitude and complexity of the material, thanks in large measure to Mick Reed’s assiduous research, and the attention of fellow academics as well as archivists was in various ways drawn to its potential.

Thus, in one conference paper, the present author compared the amount of information available in the 1910 survey with that available in the 1086 Domesday survey and the 1840s Tithe surveys. The Tithe surveys, with the tithe files, present us with about 1.8 million items of data, but were by no means complete in spatial or information coverage, as demonstrated by Kain and Prince. The original Domesday survey was, of course, less precise, and covered a very much smaller geographical extent. The English translation of the Domesday Book runs to 1.1 million words. The survey of ownership taken in 1873 (the ‘New Domesday’) was not concerned with the actual delineation of property boundaries, and merely gives an indication of the numbers of owners, the amount of land owned by them in each county, and its value. The 1941–43 National Farm Survey is being evaluated as these words are being written, but it is already clear that this too will revolutionise our thoughts about wartime farming in particular, and about the state of Britain’s farmland after years of agricultural depression. That survey has something in the order of 250 pieces of potential information per holding, for about 300,000 holdings over 5 acres in size, or about 7.5 million pieces of information overall. It is unlikely however that any one farm will have information on more than perhaps two-thirds of these items, but this would still leave an estimated 5 million items.

By contrast, the survey under consideration here covered both urban and rural England and Wales. The Lloyd George survey has several different, linked records, each containing many items of information (all of which are explained in the following chapters), for about 13 million hereditaments! Even if each record did nothing more than to name the owner and occupier, this would yield 26 million pieces of information, and the further multiplications of material become almost too daunting to contemplate! Each of the 95,000 Field Books for England and Wales alone contained four pages of information on each hereditament, with up to 100 hereditaments per book! We may well be dealing with something in the order of 40 million items of information. And this is excluding the information for Scotland for which another


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1.3 million hereditaments were included, and Ireland for which 190,000 forms of return, mostly for urban areas, had been issued by 31 March 1912.10

This volume is intended to provide a source of reference, and hopefully a source of stimulus, for work on the 1910 material. In what follows, I have attempted to ascertain its availability, check its accuracy, and suggest avenues of interpretation. It takes the form of two main parts, one dealing with the processes of the survey and the context of political legislation, and one demonstrating the potentials and problems of the source in a series of contrasting thematic and regional settings. In Part I the preliminary chapter deals in the first place with the political and conceptual background to the 1910 survey and attempts to contextualise the development of the legislation by foregrounding it against the broader sweep of the many movements pressing for land reform in Great Britain as a whole at the end of the nineteenth century. The text then proceeds to examine the national structure of the ensuing valuation process which was set in train by Lloyd George’s eventual triumph over the Lords in 1910. The survey procedures and the resulting multiplicity of documents are then discussed, and a critical view of the modern archival practices and policies in handling the 1910 material is presented. In Part II the significance of the material is explicitly addressed, together with likely problems that will be encountered by future scholars working with the relatively complex documentation. In order to demonstrate more forcefully what might be possible, four chapters are devoted to case studies which deal successively with urban social area analysis 1909–14, rural society and economy 1909–14, rural industrial communities on the eve of the Great War, and finally contrasts and comparisons which can be drawn with contemporary or near-contemporary primary sources and with secondary accounts of particular localities. And whilst much of the case study material is drawn from England and Wales, it should also be noted that the legislation applied equally to Ireland and Scotland, where its administration was in a modified form; attention is therefore devoted to the context and application of the 1910 material there.

The nature of the volume is that of an overview and an evaluation. It is not intended that any of the case studies should be seen as definitive historical accounts of particular localities, and it is to be hoped that the frustration which will inevitably be felt by specialist historians of those chosen localities will be balanced by the recognition of the splendid potential released by the 1910 records. Both pattern and process are addressed here. The pattern of the records themselves as they exist in varying degrees of completeness in repositories around Great Britain is related to the processes which brought the

10  8th Report of Commissioners of HM Inland Revenue, Year ending 31 March 1912 (BPP 1912–13 (C 6344), XXIX, Chapter 3, 155); Select Committee on Land Values 1920, evidence of Mr C. J. Howell Thomas, 13.
records into being, and those which have latterly sought to cope in an archival sense with their huge bulk. And directly related to the pattern of the extant records is the pattern that can be reconstructed of the British Isles at the very end of the Edwardian period: its geography, economy and society as seen through one particular instrument of fiscal and ideological legislation.

It is now clear that the twentieth century will yield enormous riches of documentation to the scholars of the future. At present we are somewhat restricted by codes of confidentiality which ensure that various classes of record are kept locked away for periods of between 30 and 100 years. The 1910 material presented here will become of great significance when the 1911 census enumerators’ books become available, as they already have in the Republic of Ireland, and as scholars patiently discover what records from within local authority archives will bear comparison and sit alongside these sources. Historians and historical geographers have not worked extensively on twentieth-century records and there is not the same tradition of scholarship that has been established by workers on Victorian and earlier periods. This will change, and it is to be hoped that the evaluation of the 1910 material presented here will go a little way towards the establishment of a corpus of work on twentieth-century records.\footnote{B. Short, ‘The twentieth century’, in D. Hey (ed.), The Oxford Companion to Family and Local History (Oxford 1996), 456–62.}
PART I

Processes and representations
2

Lloyd George, the 1909 Budget and the land campaigns

In 1906 John Galsworthy published *The Man of Property*, the first volume in *The Forsyte Saga*, an appropriate book to mark the spirit of an age which set great store on the possession of wealth and influence, appearing in the year which marked the halfway point of the short Edwardian age and the one in which the Liberal government came to power. The Britain of the Edwardian age, seen from the perspective of nearly a century, was outwardly exuberant, hopeful, confident. And yet changes since the height of the Victorian ‘Golden Years’ had been mostly for the worse, at least in the macro-level terms of society and economy. Urbanisation had now reached a point where 79 per cent of the population were classed as urban in the 1911 Census, bringing pollution, overcrowding and a poor standard of living for huge numbers in the inner cities and a desire to escape the masses which brought undistinguished (yet nevertheless nuanced) suburbia into former rural landscapes. Attracted by the hopes of employment and by a desire to escape the drudgery and intrusiveness of much rural life, many young people had joined friends and relatives in the growing towns, only to find unemployment and squalor beneath the veneer of prosperity. The agricultural depression hit landed incomes and rural jobs alike from the 1870s, as foreign imports of food undercut British producers, with something of an upturn only appearing in the opening decade of the twentieth century.

Thus, many have characterised the period as one of crisis, as mounting social and economic problems joined with darkening foreign relations. A general European war loomed; the threat of civil war in Ireland grew; constitutional crisis brought ‘the peers versus the people’; the suffragette issue threatened to break through an assumed patriarchal dominance; and a wave of strikes and industrial unrest started in 1910.1

Behind many of these problems was the rise in the cost of living. Up to the end of the previous century real wages had risen but now they were stagnant or falling. Exports had become less competitive although they were still contributing 30 per cent of the United Kingdom’s national production, and London remained the world’s financial capital, but the ‘new’ resources of rubber, tin, oil or copper had to come from abroad, and Britain now slipped behind her rivals with newer industrial economies, Germany and the United States, in the production of steel. Much of the UK’s industrial strength remained concentrated in sectors with little growth potential but the Empire still gave scope for investment and career paths abroad – to the detriment of investment at home. In fact investment overseas had exceeded net capital formation at home since 1870 and was at double the rate of home investment by the beginning of World War I. Elegant Edwardian stockbroker houses in the Home Counties were thus just the outward sign of financial dealings that depended on what Hobsbawm referred to as a ‘parasitic rather than a competitive economy’.\(^2\) Financiers and industrialists came to join the traditional elites, whilst industrial, mining and urban properties increased their importance within their portfolios. At this juncture of two great Kondratieff Cycles in the 1890s, at the transition from manufactures based on machinery to industries managed on scientific principles, the British economy began to look distinctly less healthy than hitherto.

It was immensely significant that this was happening at the same time that an expanded electorate was becoming a more working-class body – perhaps 75 per cent being working-class by 1906 – and local government was becoming more democratic and less dominated by the landed elites. A real vote for change could now be expressed, and if the electorate was now largely composed of the urban working class, suburban dwellers, the rural smallholder and the working men of Scotland, Wales and Ireland, the future for the traditional squirarchic would be limited. As the Earl of Meath had warned in 1899, a large poor and hungry stratum would, ‘driven to desperation and beguiled by the honey words of Socialists and Anarchists, endeavour to improve their miserable lot by the general destruction of society’.\(^3\)

As foreign competitors grew stronger, bringing depression to industry and the countryside, many began to turn away from the ideology of free trade towards a greater degree of protection. More specifically, in 1903 Joseph Chamberlain unveiled his ideas on Imperial Preference and tariff reform, causing fundamental splits in Tory and Unionist ranks which led among other


things to Winston Churchill crossing the floor of the House to join the Liberals. By 1909 a modified version of tariff reform had become Tory opposition policy. The Liberals, by contrast, could unite behind a free trade banner and proceeded to power in December 1905 under Henry Campbell-Bannerman. According to one observer, Campbell-Bannerman offered Lloyd George a seat in the Cabinet at the Board of Trade, saying ‘I suppose we ought to include him’.4

British society in so many ways was therefore ripe for political change and the Liberals swept to power in the 1906 election, moving soon into a largely uncoordinated sequence of social legislation through to 1911, for which money was to be found by increased taxation of that class which could most easily bear it – the landed elite. In 1894 Harcourt’s death duties were a precursor to the swinging attacks which were to be forthcoming in the Liberal years before the First World War. Cannadine has placed great emphasis upon the period between 1880 and 1914 as marking a catastrophic downturn in landed fortunes as ‘the demands of an increasingly hostile, predatory and intrusive state had to be met’ and even if his analysis is somewhat overdrawn and the elite moved more successfully through the twentieth century than he has claimed, nevertheless the legislation covered in this text, and the political furor surrounding it, did mark a significant moment in the loss of patrician power.5

Approaches to the land reform question

Land reform has a long history of theory but little evidence of practical application in Britain. In the latter half of the nineteenth century proposals came repeatedly from the likes of the Chartists, Cobden, Bright, Mill and Joseph Chamberlain, and ideas were particularly focussed by the Irish Land War and Gladstone’s Irish Land Act 1881. Rent strikes and violence similarly characterised the relationships of the crofters of western Scotland with the authorities, and there was Welsh unrest too at this time. Certainly in the 1880s the tackling of the concentration of ownership of large swathes of British countryside by a relative handful of people was seen as an urgent issue, with the concentration revealed in the so-called ‘New Domesday’ of 1873.6 The hold on the land by this elite was seen by many to be the root cause of contemporary social problems and of the crisis of capitalism and poverty of the British working people.

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David Lloyd George, the young Welsh nonconformist solicitor who entered parliament as a Liberal MP for Caernarfon Boroughs in April 1890, was fully aware of such opinions. He had experienced the Welsh revolt against the payment of tithes and the associated violence beginning about 1886, and in that year his first recorded public appearance contained a call for his Flintshire audience to join a Welsh Land League. He proceeded to carry a loathing for ‘landlordism’ and an advocacy of some redistribution of wealth with him into government office and into the Chancellorship of the Exchequer (an appointment about which King Edward VII had reservations) in April 1908. The conditions for turning the threat to aristocratic power over the land of Britain into material action could now be effected.7

There were three generally recognised solutions to reform of the land, amidst enormous agitation to deal somehow with the land issue at this time. The first, and least popular generally because of its draconian connotations, was the outright nationalisation of land for public or social purposes with compensation, as advocated for example by Lloyd George’s fellow Welsh Liberal, A. Williams, MP for Merioneth. Nevertheless, the Land Nationalisation Society, formed in 1881, claimed nearly 130 MPs as supporters at times after the 1906 general election. A system of vice-presidential status accorded to supporting MPs allows some estimate of their strength, and shows, for example that there were 68 such MPs in May 1906, rising to 112 by December 1909.8 Their campaign was led until his death in 1913 by the distinguished biologist Alfred Russel Wallace, whose interest in the land question was heightened by his association with J. S. Mill (1806–73) and Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), the proponent of social evolution.9 Their perceived influence on the Liberal government was enough for one practical farmer and landowner from Dorset to write in 1911: ‘Though the Liberals have no official land policy . . . they at least have an unofficial one held by an ever-increasing section of the party – the nationalisation of land.’10

Secondly there were those who wanted the taxation by the state of land values at a rate of twenty shillings in the pound, thereby taxing away the whole value of any unearned increase in values, with other taxes, both direct and indirect then falling away. These were the views of the ‘single-taxers’ following the ‘Apostle of Plunder’, the charismatic American writer Henry George, as particularly exemplified in his extremely influential *Progress and Poverty* (first published in 1880 and available in numerous later editions), and in lecture

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