

THE BELVOIR ESTATE

THE DUKE OF RUTLAND'S HISTORIC SALE AT MELTON MOWBRAY

MANY PROPERTIES RETAINED BY THE TENANTRY

When, in the late autumn of last year, the definitive announcement was made that his Grace the Duke of Rutland had decided to dispose of the major portion of the Belvoir Estate, it aroused, as was most natural, feelings of the deepest interest and concern, because of the knowledge that such a course meant, after long centuries of the closest ties and associations as between landlord and tenant, hallowed by sentiments of the warmest affection and regard for the successive representatives of the Ducal House, that a severance, at any rate, of business relations must be brought about, though certainly not a cessation of those friendly associations which have existed for so many years. And not only among the hundreds of tenants themselves did the announcement of the intended sale create much interest; it was sufficiently momentous to make the event of such historic significance that every single person acquainted with Belvoir, either personally or through its repute, could not fail to be more or less attracted by the same. It was indeed, a “parting of the ways”, and by none more than the Duke of Rutland himself was the pang of having to take such a step felt and realised, for reasons of the same deep personal affection for, and the same historical appreciation of, both the people and the places they inhabit. It was early in November last that His Grace made a public statement of the reasons which had compelled him to make such an epoch-marking departure, when at the opening of a Village Club at Woolsthorpe, under the shadow of Belvoir Castle, he said that never in his life had he taken a step which was so hateful to him. He felt it terribly, and nothing but the actual force of circumstances could have made him do what he was about to do. A consequence of the war, he continued, the pressure of taxation, and the great increase in expense in countless ways, had left no option to many landowners; it was simply impossible to go on. He was not grumbling, he observed, but those were the facts, and so after many months of anxious consideration with other members of the family, he decided to part with a portion of the Estate, in order that he, and those who came after him, might still continue to live at Belvoir. He gave the assurance that, in future, as in the past, he should always be happy to do what he could for the welfare of every man and woman in Leicestershire, and for his friends in that corner of Notts and Lincolnshire.

In a subsequent press interview, the Duke of Rutland stated he had been receiving sometimes, and at best, 1 ½ to 2 per cent on his money; very often nothing. The cost of repairs, of estate management, hedging, ditching, building, and the rest having grown so that it ate up the occasional 1½ per cent, and added to the minus quantity. He was selling because he could not carry on without doing so. The law which entails Belvoir does not permit of its enormity being reduced. It must retain that amplitude that it received at the completion of its rebuilding about 1550 AD. Here we have the sole reason for decision to part with the greater part of the Estate, by which yeoman farmer succeeds the Ducal owner, and practically the whole countryside embraced in Belvoir's famous Vale changes hands. It has long been a matter of tradition that many of the farms which have been sold under the auctioneer's hammer have passed from father to son through many generations, and it was characteristic of the consideration of His Grace that in the arrangements for the sale, not only these, but every occupier on the Estate, was first given the option of obtaining security of tenure by acquiring their holdings or other property. This was taken advantage of to a considerable extent. So that, prior to the public auction, something like 30 per cent of the whole had changed hands in this way. A feature of the Belvoir Estate which should not be overlooked is the excellence of the housing generally, the cottages themselves being substantially built and have been well maintained – a tribute to the solicitude for the welfare and comfort of the tenantry as a whole.

With exception of a few villages and the land immediately surrounding the Castle, which have been retained, the whole of the Ducal estate in this portion of the country came into the market. The parishes of, Waltham, Thorpe Arnold, Goadby Marwood, Eastwell, Eaton, Stathern and Hose were sold practically in their entirety, as well as the major portion of the parishes of Granby with Sutton (Notts), Plungar, Muston and Bottesford, with lots at Melton Mowbray, Wycombe with Chadwell, Harby, Redmile, Stonesby, Sedgebrook, Barrowby and Ancaster. The latter three places being in Lincolnshire.

Some historic interest attaches to the village of Goadby Marwood, for it was here that George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham (who was assassinated by Felton, at Portsmouth, on Aug 23rd 1628) resided, Goadby Hall with the park and home farm, the residence of Capt. R. B. Sheriffe, was as announced last week, sold privately to that gentleman.

The whole estate which embraced almost every conceivable variety of property from mansions to cottages, from the large farm to perches of garden ground extended to an area something like 13,300 acres and it was divided into no less than fully 635 lots.

To dispose of such an aggregate four days of the present week- Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and today Saturday are required for the sale taking place at the Corn Exchange, Melton Mowbray, and each day, so far, the building has been thronged, each parish contributing its quota of prospective purchasers or others interested in the proceedings. While from the town of Melton and other places in the district and from further afield the attendance has been considerable. The sale is being conducted by Messrs Escritt and Barrell of Grantham. The auctioneer being Mr. C. F. Barrell.

As stated earlier some properties have been sold privately but despite this there was a formidable list to be got through each day, but Mr Barrell lost no time in submitting the lots and so expeditiously was his task performed that each day so far, the catalogue for that day has been disposed of in less than three and a half hours.

There was much spirited competition, albeit there was general inclination where tenants were bidding for their own particular occupations or dwellings not to over bid to any extent, and in most cases, they had the satisfaction of seeing the hammer fall to their final bid. Often this was greeted with applause, and, although the auctioneer enjoined the company to reserve the display of feeling to the end, in order to expediate business, there were occasional spontaneous outbursts.

On Wednesday promptly at the appointed hour, Mr. Barrell, commenced the sale accompanied on the platform by Mr. A. P. Payne-Galway, estate agent to the Duke of Rutland, the firm of solicitors acting for his Grace being Messrs Dawson and Co.2, New-Square, Lincolns Inn London, W.C.2.

Mr. Barrell said this was one of the most important sales ever in the Eastern Midlands, and the few remarks he had to make concerning it would be at the beginning, after which he would proceed with the sale without any other observations than were absolutely necessary. After pointing out one or two corrections relative to the sporting rights, the timber on various properties &c. Mr Barrell said that had he, or any other man, ten years or even five years ago, suggested that the Duke of Rutland would be selling a portion of the Belvoir Estate he would have been looked upon as a lunatic and been sent to an asylum but it had come about, and the Duke of Rutland had explained his reasons for doing so. As they knew recent events - the extraordinary expense of the war with the enormous amount of money required to pay for it, also the onerous amount for the payment of officials created during and since the war, who were more or less useful, and some, perhaps, more or less useless -(laughter) had rendered it necessary that the taxation of the country should be very considerably increased, and therefore, those people who were at one time rich had become poor; on the other hand, people who were poor before the war, had, through the making of munitions and other things necessary for the war, now became rich. This did not alter the fact that the Duke was obliged to sell the property because

of recent events. Even before the war started the trend of legislation was for land to be divided up into smaller holdings, and, as they were aware, a very large number of estates were cut up. Thus the natural order of events was that big properties should pass into smaller occupations. In this particular case, they were selling all sorts and conditions of properties. There were farms, smallholdings, hunting boxes, residences, accommodation land, building plots and every kind of property anyone could possibly wish to have. He wanted to point out there might be, in submitting an estate of this character, certain hardships on people who had been in occupation a good long time, but with the endeavour to avoid these as far as possible, the Duke had shown every consideration that he could, and he (the speaker) was quite certain that everybody would agree his Grace had been the best landlord that could possibly be, and all regretted he was selling the property. (Applause). As the Duke pointed out at the meeting at Woolsthorpe nobody regretted it more than he did himself, but although some of the property would no doubt pass into the hands of other people, the Duke himself would be amongst them, and he was sure there would be the same kindly feelings amongst those who were formerly the tenants of their occupations, and had become the owners as when it was the Duke's own property. (Hear, hear).

There were over 160 lots submitted on Wednesday, about that number again on Thursday, upwards of 140 yesterday, leaving 60 or more lots to be sold today (Saturday). Up to yesterday the highest single price made in the auction was on the first day for the residence and farm, with fox covert, Stonesby Gorse, in occupation of Mr Freestone, the bidding starting at £2,000 and quickly advancing to £9,500, at which figure a well-known local agriculturist, Mr. T. Wilson, of Freeby, became the purchaser. On Thursday Mr. W. Newton, the tenant, gave £6,500 for Casthorpe Lodge Farm at Barrowby, while Mr. G.E. Marsh paid £6,100 for Mr. G. Goodson's farm at Bottesford, and also £6,000 for another farm at Bottesford, in the occupation of Mr. Hedley Miller. £5,600 was given by Mr. A. Hubbard for a turnip and barley farm (Mr. W. Wood) at Goadby Marwood. Numerous other farms made excellent prices, while the small holdings generally sold well. For numerous enclosures of pasture land, there was often very keen competition, bids up to sixty, seventy, and eighty pounds an acre being readily forthcoming. The ordinary village properties, houses, cottages and shops and also garden ground, went comparatively cheaply, for, as stated, with a few exceptions their occupiers were left with a pretty clear field,

Appended is a full list of the transactions at each days sale so far held:-