

‘For Want of Reparations’: Tenants and the Built Environment on the Estates of South-West Lancashire, 1750–1850

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Studies of Lancashire’s housing stock have largely had an urban or an industrial focus. From studies of handloom weavers’ cottages and rural industrial communities through to various studies of housing and public health in single towns, the built environment of the working class, both domestic and commercial, has received a relatively high degree of attention.¹ However, apart from the halls of the gentry and the polite architecture of country churches, which have been relatively well documented by an earlier generation of architectural historians, little is known about Lancashire’s building stock *per se* before the early nineteenth century, particularly rural vernacular building.² Watson and McClintock’s study of the Fylde

¹ G. Timmins, *Handloom weavers’ cottages in central Lancashire* (Lancaster, 1977); G. Timmins, ‘Healthy and decent dwellings: the evolution of the two-up and two-down house in nineteenth-century Lancashire’, in *Lancashire local studies*, ed. A. Crosby (Preston, 1993), pp. 101–32; N. Morgan, *Vanished dwellings: early industrial housing in a Lancashire cotton town*, Preston (Preston, 1990); N. Morgan, *Deadly dwellings: housing and health in a Lancashire cotton town, Preston from 1840 to 1914* (Preston, 1993); A. White and M. Winstanley, *Victorian terraced houses in Lancaster* (Lancaster, 1996); E. Roberts, ‘Working class housing in Barrow and Lancaster, 1880–1930’, *T.H.S.L.C.*, CXXVII (1978), pp. 109–32; I. C. Taylor, ‘The court and cellar dwelling: the eighteenth century origin of the Liverpool slum’, *T.H.S.L.C.*, CXXII (1971), pp. 67–90.

² See, for example, P. Fleetwood-Hesketh, *Murray’s Lancashire architectural guide* (London, 1955); N. Pevsner, *The buildings of England: south Lancashire* (Harmondsworth, 1969); N. Pevsner, *The buildings of England: north Lancashire* (Harmondsworth, 1969); K. Eyre, *Famous Lancashire homes* (Clapham, 1973); J. Champness, *Lancashire’s architectural heritage: an anthology of fine buildings* (Preston, 1989);

and Pearson's book on east Lancashire are exceptions.³ However, neither book judges the housing stock in terms of its own contemporary social and economic setting. They rely largely on extant buildings, which for any period before the late nineteenth century are likely to be unrepresentative of the housing that the majority of the people occupied.

This article aims to redress this balance and draws on a variety of plans, estate accounts, correspondence, and memoranda, drawn mainly from three south-west Lancashire estates. The Molyneux family, earls of Sefton, were second in importance only to the Stanley family, earls of Derby. The Molyneux seat was at Croxteth, north-east of Liverpool, although they owned a substantial part of the land between Liverpool and Southport. The Hesketh estate was centred on Rufford, about five miles north-east of Ormskirk on the south-west Lancashire plain, although the estate stretched into several neighbouring townships. The estate of the Scarisbrick family was centred on Scarisbrick, on flat low-lying land approximately half-way between Ormskirk and Southport. However, they had land scattered throughout south-west Lancashire and the Scarisbricks were among the wealthiest and largest landowning families in Lancashire. The source material is unavoidably biased, and few surveys focus on the positive aspects of the housing stock.⁴ The early Censuses hint at congestion in houses in certain areas, indicating an inadequate housing supply, but they are silent on building quality. The estate papers used here were usually generated only when concern over the condition of the housing stock had arisen. This concern arose for a number of reasons. Tenants who were in arrears, and outgoing tenants, found their maintenance of buildings under scrutiny.⁵

R. G. Dottie, 'Four eighteenth-century buildings at Halton', *T.H.S.L.C.*, CXXXV (1986), pp. 37–59.

³ R. C. Watson and M. E. McClintock, *Traditional houses of the Fylde* (Lancaster, 1979); S. Pearson, *Rural houses of the Lancashire Pennines, 1560–1760* (London, 1985).

⁴ The main exception being a survey of farms c. 1831: Lancs. R.O., DDSc 79/1 (Scarisbrick of Scarisbrick papers).

⁵ For instance, in 1841, a tenant who was in arrears gave up possession of a 30-acre tenement. The steward noted that 'the house and buildings are in a sad state of dilapidation and will require heavy repairs probably £200 or £250': Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/48, William Eaton Hall to the earl of Sefton, 30 May 1841; see also DDM 6/110, R. Ledger, Croxteth, to the earl of Sefton, 6 July 1844 (Molyneux of Sefton papers).

Housing quality might also become significant when stewards were attempting to increase rents and strike bargains with tenants who had capital to invest in agricultural improvements. Much of the housing in south-west Lancashire was of insufficient quality to attract capitalized tenants in the early nineteenth century. But the sources identify only those cases where the buildings were found wanting. Tenants petitioned estates requesting assistance or permission to carry out improvements that were beyond general maintenance, but these cases also focus on the perceived inadequacies of the housing stock, although the nature of the proposed improvements and the estates' responses to such petitions are of interest. Much of the evidence presented below is descriptive, and extensive quantification of investment in house-building and maintenance is not possible.

In the early nineteenth century pressure on the rural housing stock was intense. Across much of rural south-west Lancashire, the number of people per house increased between 1801 and 1831 as population increase was not matched by investment in housing.⁶ In industrial south-west Lancashire average household size was generally between 4.5 and 5.5, while a central core of the Molyneux estate, north of Liverpool, was more congested, with typically between 6 and 6.5 people per house in 1801. By 1831, houses in south-west Lancashire in general were more congested, with many townships showing an average household size of more than 6.5 people. House-building on the large estates and in more 'open' parishes did not keep pace with population growth in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. In the north of the county, however, congestion was much less in evidence and many townships contained, on average, fewer than four people per house. Moreover, the housing stock of some communities in the north of the county was becoming smaller in the early nineteenth century as out-migration depleted the population.⁷

⁶ A. J. Gritt, 'The "survival" of service in the English agricultural labour force: lessons from Lancashire, c. 1650–1851', *Agricultural History Review*, L (2002), pp. 25–50.

⁷ Nether Kellet, for instance, had 62 houses and a population of 300 in 1801; by 1841 the numbers had been reduced to 52 and 279 respectively. Halton had returned 160 houses and a population of 823 in 1801; by 1841 the numbers had been reduced to 126 and 694 respectively: *1801 census: abstract of the answers and returns: enumeration* (P.P. 1801, VI (140)); *1841 census: abstracts of the answers and returns: enumeration* (P.P. 1843, XXII (496)); see also J. D. Marshall, 'The Lancashire rural labourer in the early-nineteenth century', *T.L.C.A.S.*, LXXI (1961), p. 93.

Increasing congestion placed pressure on the housing stock, and during the period of agricultural expansion from the late eighteenth century, many pre-existing buildings were divided up into smaller individual units. There is widespread evidence for activity of this kind from the 1780s onwards.⁸ Outbuildings were also being converted into domestic use. In 1815 R. W. Dickson observed that

Prodigious barns for containing the whole of the grain and hay crops, almost everywhere present themselves, even on the very small farms, and commonly confine the rest of the buildings, which are generally of ten times their importance to the intelligent farmer . . . To see farms of fifty or sixty pounds a year with conveniences of this kind for those of three or four hundred, constantly excites the idea of a prodigious waste of money.⁹

The barns were very large indeed. A survey of the Molyneux estate in 1697 showed that many farms had outbuildings of between five and ten bays, when most houses were of only one to three bays.¹⁰ Clearly, those that were still standing by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were prime targets for conversion when pressure on the housing stock intensified.

If there were not enough houses and cottages in rural south-west Lancashire, then the quality of those that were available cannot have helped matters. In 1795 John Holt observed that 'some of the old built farm-houses are ill constructed, and (which may appear extraordinary, in a county where slate abounds, and straw sells at an advanced price) are still thatched, and the preparation of the straw for thatch is but ill managed'.¹¹ Early nineteenth-century reports from across south-west Lancashire detail the poor physical condition of farm buildings. Whereas in industrial east Lancashire stone for building purposes was readily available, and housing quality consequently acceptable, 'in the less improved parts' cottages were made 'of wattled studd work, plastered or wrought in with tempered clay and straw'.¹² Large numbers of such houses and

⁸ See various memoranda and notes contained in Lancs. R.O., DDM 12, estate rentals; DDM 6/127, R. Ledger, Knotty Ash, to Lord Sefton, 23 Mar. 1845.

⁹ R. W. Dickson, *General view of the agriculture of Lancashire* (London, 1815), p. 96.

¹⁰ Lancs. R.O., DDM 14/9, Altcar survey, 1697.

¹¹ J. Holt, *General view of the agriculture of the county of Lancaster* (London, 1795), p. 16.

¹² Dickson, *General view*, pp. 101–4; J. C. Loudon, *An encyclopaedia of agriculture* (2 vols, London, 1825), p. 1119; Watson and McClintock, *Rural houses*, p. 15;

cottages were still occupied, unmodified, until the early nineteenth century, and anecdotal evidence suggests that living conditions and the domestic environment were worse in rural than in urban areas.¹³

Rural houses in south-west Lancashire were rarely built by craftsmen. Rather, large numbers were erected by the tenants themselves, and the quality of such structures was seemingly adversely affected.¹⁴ The usual practice was for the estates to allow materials while the tenants provided the labour.¹⁵ In the early eighteenth century this was an important part of the Blundells' paternalistic style of estate management. In 1728 Nicholas Blundell wrote, 'Be kind to those whom make good buildings upon their tenements, and not by using them better in their fines but by giving them timber, slate or some materials towards their building which will be long remembered by the tenants and more obvious to the rest of your tenants'.¹⁶ Some of these arrangements were sealed through lease agreements, while others were more informal agreements between landlord and tenant. However, this system was probably an efficient way of managing the built environment. The materials cost the estate very little and were not dependent upon capital-intensive processes. The labour, if carried out by the tenants, was essentially free to the landlord.¹⁷

Not all houses in rural south-west Lancashire were of 'wattled studd work'. Improving landlords, such as Basil Thomas Eccleston of Eccleston near St Helens, were building stone or brick houses with slate roofs for their tenants as early as the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Eccleston records details of many buildings that were being repaired or rebuilt during the second half of the eighteenth

W. Rothwell, *Report of the agriculture of the county of Lancaster* (London, 1850), p. 109; C. Greenwood, *Thatch, towers and colonnades: the story of architecture in Southport* (Preston, 1990), pp. 9–13.

¹³ M. E. Seebohm, *The evolution of the English farm* (Wakefield, 1976), p. 307; J. Black, *A medico-topographical, geological and statistical sketch of Bolton and its neighbourhood* (London, 1837).

¹⁴ Lancs. R.O., DDBl 54/42, tenants' book, 1728–1805 (Blundell of Crosby papers).

¹⁵ This was the usual practice in other counties also: J. E. C. Peters, *The development of farm buildings in western lowland Staffordshire up to 1880* (Manchester, 1969), p. 210.

¹⁶ Lancs. R.O., DDBl 54/42.

¹⁷ Lancs. R.O., DDBl 54/42; DDSc 127/2–3, estate memoranda books, 1757–89; DDHe 82/8, case for opinion, 1816 (Hesketh of Rufford papers).

¹⁸ Lancs. R.O., DDSc 127/2–3; see *The memoranda books of Basil Thomas Eccleston, 1757–89*, ed. A. J. Gritt and J. M. Virgoe, R.S.L.C. (forthcoming).

century, not only houses but industrial cottages, barns, shippens, mills, pigsties, and other buildings. Where materials are mentioned, stone, brick, or slate dominate. There are also accounts for making bricks on the estate, including one for 48,900 in 1765.¹⁹ There are many extant examples of pre-1750 buildings in south-west Lancashire that are built of stone or brick.²⁰ However, the surviving physical evidence and the documentary evidence from the early nineteenth century suggest that these are unrepresentative, and indicate that Eccleston was at least a generation ahead of his time in the construction and maintenance of buildings. When his son Thomas Eccleston replied to a Board of Agriculture enquiry in the 1790s as part of the preparation for John Holt's *General View* he claimed that in south-west Lancashire 'for the size of the farms, the buildings are remarkably good'.²¹ This was contrary to the opinions and experience of most of his contemporaries, as well as to some of Holt's own published comments. For instance, the description of the cottages for the poor at Birkdale c. 1815 shows that they were clearly unsatisfactory as dwellings:

There are four in number—joined together. Each cottage consists of two apartments (i.e.) a house part 4 yards long by 3 y[ar]ds broad—The other a bed-chamber 4 yards by about 2 yards—both upon the ground floor and open to the roof. There are no flags or boards, on the floors only the native earth—(except in one House part) there are a few broken bricks about the fire place. The walls are nearly without plaster—and almost as black as soot. Three of the chimneys smoke. The windows are nearly all out—and broken. The roof or thatch is bad & rains in. The familys residing in these cottages, are William Roughley—a day labourer—his wife and five children . . . Only one bed (if it can be called)—the room quite dark. Has no weekly pay from the Township—allow the cottage only. 2[n]d Cottage—Two old women . . . Smokes and in the same condition as the last—no weekly pay—allow three & this cottage. 3[r]d Cottage. John Wright a day labourer his wife and three

¹⁹ Lancs. R.O., DDSc 127/2; *Memoranda books*, ed. Gritt and Virgoe, entry for 22 June 1765.

²⁰ E. Mercer, *English vernacular houses* (London, 1975), pp. 179–85. This volume contains several references to seventeenth-century brick farmhouses in south-west Lancashire, but in each case these houses are described as being two-storey, multiple-cell dwellings, which would make them substantially larger and of better quality than many of the more typical houses that have failed to survive.

²¹ Lancs. R.O., DDSc 19/37, answers to the enquiries of the Board of Agriculture, n.d. [c. 1795]. I am grateful to John Virgoe for alerting me to an error in my thesis regarding the authorship of this document.

children. The cottage as the others. Has no weekly pay from the township—allow the cottage only. 4th Cottage. William Bradshaw his wife and seven children. Only one bed and that in the house part. The chamber is fitted with a pair of looms and lumber—The bedding was wet when I saw it by the rain coming through the roof. They enlarge the bed at night by placing chairs and stools on two sides of it. No pay from the township allow the cottage.²²

While the housing occupied by the poor would normally be the worst in the vicinity, with the exception of the occupants of the second cottage at Birkdale, their residents were not marginal members of the community. They were clearly in employment as they were not receiving parish relief. Moreover, it would seem likely that the two 'day labourers' were in fact agricultural labourers. The very fact that these cottages were inhabited at all is suggestive that pressure on the housing stock was acute.

Parochial management of the built environment of the poor is perhaps a special case and not directly comparable with estate buildings, yet there is sufficient evidence to suggest that many estate buildings were little better. Until the late eighteenth century the Molyneux estate and most others in south-west Lancashire were much less generous and less concerned about building quality, styles, and materials than the Ecclestons. The Molyneux estate did expend some money for the purposes of improvements during this period, but they were not large amounts, nor were they frequent. In 1801–2, for instance, the estate spent £1,440 on all aspects of building work, including materials, labour, carting, and taxes, out of a gross rental income of £14,573. However, while this represents some 9.8 per cent of gross rental, higher than Holderness's estimate of capital expenditure of Norfolk landlords between 1796 and 1805, over 40 per cent went on repairs and new buildings at Croxteth Hall, Altcar Hall, and Stand Park.²³ Croxteth Hall was the seat of the earl of Sefton, while the other two were large demesne farms that were let to tenants. They were hardly representative. The remaining 60 per cent of the expenditure on buildings was limited to a handful of tenants, most of whom were the larger farmers recognized by the estate as agricultural improvers. Even in these cases, however, expenditure

²² Lancs. R.O., DDIn 45/14, report on the town's cottages for the poor on Little common, Birkdale, c. 1815 (Blundell of Ince Blundell papers).

²³ B. A. Holderness, 'Landlord's capital investment in East Anglia, 1750–1870', *Econ. H.R.*, XXV (1972), p. 439.

was often confined to materials, and little labour was provided by the estate.²⁴ Moreover, 1801–2 appears to have been an exceptional year. In 1798–9 expenditure on building repairs was about £100; in 1788–9 it was £163.²⁵ Generally, the Molyneux estate was spending considerably less than its East Anglian counterparts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The contrast reveals major differences in estate management and the nature of the built environment, as well as fundamental differences in agrarian social relations. Average farm size on the Molyneux estate in south-west Lancashire stood at around 35 acres in the late eighteenth century. On the Heydon estate in Norfolk's northern heathlands average farm size stood at 153 acres.²⁶ This fundamental difference in the distribution of land caused significant variations in social structure. Certainly, the rural proletariat did not dominate the Lancashire countryside as it did further south. Rural living conditions in the southern arable counties were often harsh, but there was a material difference in the domestic environment of farmers compared with the cottages of the proletarian labourers. Indeed, John Broad's recent study has shown that the quality of housing for the rural poor was often seriously deficient.²⁷ Nevertheless, estate investment in farm buildings was at a higher rate in southern counties than in Lancashire, where agriculture faced fierce competition from industry for fixed capital investment. The small farmers of south-west Lancashire probably had lower expectations of domestic comfort than their larger southern counterparts, who clearly expected visible distinctions to be made between themselves and their social inferiors. The higher investment in buildings in East Anglia was a direct consequence of the social and economic aspirations of tenants. In south-west Lancashire, however, the social structure was decidedly more 'peasant', and tenants were expected to provide their own labour for house repairs, labour which is not quantifiable through estate accounts. Similarly, building materials that were freely available on the estate, such as clay,

²⁴ Lancs. R.O., DDM 1/186, Molyneux estate accounts, 1801–2.

²⁵ Lancs. R.O., DDM 1/167, Molyneux estate accounts, 1788; DDM 1/182–3, Molyneux estate accounts, 1798.

²⁶ S. Wade Martins and T. Williamson, *Roots of change: farming and the landscape in East Anglia, c. 1700–1870*, Agricultural History Review Supplemental Series, II (1999), pp. 79–80.

²⁷ J. Broad, 'Housing the rural poor in southern England, 1650–1850', *Agricultural History Review*, XLVIII (2000), pp. 151–71.

stones, and reeds, are not encountered in estate accounts. The cost of building and repairing housing became significant only when the materials themselves had a higher cost (brick and slate as opposed to wattle and daub) and when skilled, specialist labour was needed (bricklayers, slaters, and glaziers).

It is not clear how much capital was invested by tenants on behalf of the estates. Some leases included covenants that compelled tenants to erect new buildings. While some tenants were given financial assistance to aid this construction work, others were not. A lease between the earl of Sefton and John and William Balshaw, for instance, included the clause that

they the said John Balshaw and William Balshaw . . . shall and will within the space of sixe years from the date hereof at their own expence build and erect a good dwelling house on the said premises called Seftons sufficient for the said premises and the walls to be built of good brick and lime mortar and to be well timbered throughout with good oak or foreign Dale timber and well slated and finished throughout in a good workmanlike manner.²⁸

The Balshaws were acquiring land in the late eighteenth century and were typical of a select group of more prosperous tenants who were contributing to the increased social polarization of the tenantry. Yet the Molyneux family apparently gave them little assistance. In 1794 another improving tenant wrote to the Molyneux steward to explain that while he had been covenanted to spend £300 on brick buildings on his tenement, he had already laid out over £500. He furthermore felt that it was necessary to spend a further £150 to £200 on brick buildings but was inclined to do this only if his heirs would reap some of the benefit of his investment. He was prepared to invest the money himself, but did not want to pay for his own improvements a second time by seeing the rent raised after the improvements if the lease was renewed.²⁹

The Molyneuxs expected to receive increased revenues from improved property, yet they were also eager to place the financial burden of constructing and maintaining houses and farm buildings firmly on the tenants. For those tenants who were fortunate enough to receive financial assistance from the estate, this often amounted to

²⁸ Lancs. R.O., DDM 19/264, printed lease between the earl of Sefton and John and William Balshaw, 3 May 1788.

²⁹ Lancs. R.O., DDM 12/54–121, Molyneux estate rentals, 1755–1844.

nothing more than a loan on which interest was payable. Thus, in 1788 John Arnold of Crosby paid the estate £24 2s. 9*d.* interest for house repairs. Other tenants were paying interest to the estate for new agricultural buildings in 1798.³⁰ After it had assumed greater responsibility for the construction and maintenance of buildings the estate probably expended a larger proportion of gross income on buildings. However, no estate accounts survive for the period after 1811 and it is not possible to quantify this expenditure.

The evidence for the inadequate quality, maintenance, and supply of buildings in south-west Lancashire is overwhelming. A survey of 1806 from the Hesketh of Rufford estate of the state of repair of farms held for one life is nothing more than a catalogue of material decay.³¹ Some farms were in excellent condition, such as that of Lawrence Dobson, who held a 19-acre farm in Mawdesley of which it was said: 'house in very good repair'; and Catherine Walton who held a 7-acre farm in Longton: 'house & barn in very good repair & very decent except some little thatch wanting'. But these are the exceptions. The more typical condition was that reported for Henry Blackburn of Shevington, who held '5 cottages shamefully out of repair & uninhabited', or Thomas Hawshead, also of Shevington, 'a cottage, wants thatching & every sort of repair very much'. This situation was not confined to cottages: John Bretherton held a 6-acre farm in Mawdesley that was 'much out of repair barn, house &ca, has been shamefully neglected'. Similarly, James Johnson of Tarleton held a 12-acre farm with a 'house & cottage at the end, totally out of repair, clay & thatch', and on James Such's tenement, also in Tarleton, the house was said to need 'daubing, new windows & thatch, barn new doors, daubing & thatching, altogether out of repair'.

In the late eighteenth century the system of tenure in south-west Lancashire was undergoing transition as three-life leases were being replaced by rack-rents. Three-life leases involved the payment of a heavy entry fine and low annual rent, and the lease was secure for the duration of three 'lives' who were nominated in the original lease. As 'lives' died, or as individuals married or had children, there was scope to change the 'lives' on the lease for the payment of a further fine. However, from the last third of the eighteenth century three-life

³⁰ Lancs. R.O., DDM 1/167, 182-3.

³¹ All quotations in this and the next paragraph come from Lancs. R.O., DDHe 110/7, state of repair of farms now held by one life, June 1806.

leases were gradually being phased out and tenants were increasingly less likely to be able to add new lives to their existing leases or renew them. Estates began to favour rack-rents, whereby tenements were leased to farmers for terms of years frequently varying from seven to twenty-one years, without payment of an initial entry fine, but the rent was based on the commercial value of the produce of the land. Rack-rents were clearly favourable and more profitable to the landlords.³²

Under the system of three-life leases, many tenants had neglected house maintenance, particularly when tenements were in their last life and the leases unlikely to be renewed by the estate, but the building materials and construction techniques were also to blame. There had certainly been a general neglect of buildings during the eighteenth century. For instance, 'the buildings in Longton, made of clay & thatch, are all very old, it is almost impossible to repair them except daubing them now & then'. Houses and outhouses were constructed from the same materials. Edward Jackson's 17-acre farm in Penwortham, for instance, showed that the 'house, barn & pig-coats want thatching & daubing. Chimney wants rebuilding, house is entirely built of Daub & but a poor one'. In general, however, the outhousing was in a worse condition than the housing, as when capital for improvement was short, tenants had prioritized domestic buildings over and above agricultural buildings.³³

The failure of tenants to maintain their property adequately had reached such a level by 1815 that the Hesketh estate sought legal advice on its right to compel tenants to observe the covenants in their leases. The estate could not, or would not, bear the full expense of the repairs, but many tenants, after failing to maintain property for a number of years, did not have the capital to carry out the extensive repairs that were necessary. Consequently, the estate served a notice on all leasehold tenants instructing them either to repair their property or face eviction, but it was claimed that 'in general, they have seemed ill disposed to conform'.³⁴

It is hardly surprising that the tenants were not willing to

³² On the operation of three-life leases and the transition to rack-rents see A. J. Gritt, 'Aspects of agrarian change in south-west Lancashire, c. 1650–1850' (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Central Lancashire, 2000), chapters 3–4.

³³ The same was also true of the Scarisbrick estate survey in the early 1830s, despite the overall better condition of buildings: Lancs. R.O., DDSc 79/1.

³⁴ Lancs. R.O., DDHe 82/8.

conform, as the estate wanted them not only to rebuild the structures, but also to rebuild them to better specifications:

In order that you may not plead ignorance of the extent or nature of the repairs required of you by the covenant of your lease I inform you, that you are to take down and rebuild all walls, either of your house or outbuildings, that may be decayed or out of the perpendicular, to take out and replace with new all main timbers either of the roof or floors, all wall timbers, spars, joists or battens, floorings, doors, easings, window frames, bostings, stalls, racks, mangers, and all other woodwork whatsoever, that is or may be in the least decayed or broken. To take off and replace with new all decayed or broken slates or thatch, and all flags of the floors &c. To new glaze all windows that are broken and to repair all iron work locks and bolts; you are to paint the doors, door checks, window frames and casings of every description with three coats of oil paint; to yellow or whitewash the whole of the walls of the inside of the house, and also of such outside thereof as has been done before . . . To new pave or repair all your pavements, courts, folds and floors of buildings . . . every year until the end of your lease.³⁵

These were expensive repairs. One example cited was a 14-acre farm held by James Low which had recently fallen out of lease and required repairs to the cost of £180. The steward noted that 'it frequently happens that in the falling in of life leases the heirs of the lessees are so poor that they are unable to bear any great expence'. Even in the less substantially built house, the estate resented the cost of repairs:

Many of the buildings upon the estate are constructed of clay and thatch only, and many of these have been built by the lessees. These buildings are in many cases so decayed and ruinous that they cannot be repaired in any way whatsoever, and must eventually be taken down and rebuilt. In numerous cases when the leases have expired, the landlord has been obliged to do this ere he could relet the farm, and this ruinous expence he must still be subject to upon the expiration of the leases, if he has no remedy against the lessees to compel them to take them down, in all cases in which they cannot be substantially repaired.³⁶

In general, the estate buildings were in a very decayed state. The building materials were either very old or of inferior quality, and natural decay had taken its toll. Inadequate maintenance by the tenants exacerbated this decay, and most estates were unconcerned with maintenance until they realized that there was a major financial

³⁵ Lancs. R.O., DDHe 82/8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

and environmental problem. The Hesketh estate then found it difficult to compel tenants to repair their buildings, and the legal advice which it received was not what it wanted to hear.

I think that an outgoing tenant under a covenant of this sort is not bound to leave his premises in that perfect state of repair in which an incoming tenant might require to find them. Neither is he bound to substitute a new house for an old, if the old is still capable of being repaired, so as to last some years longer. I think there may be cases where a tenant under such a covenant would be bound to take down & rebuild walls, or to put in new main timbers, as when the former have so far declined from their perpendicular as to be unsafe, or when the latter have become so broken and decayed as not to be able to support the weight without danger. These however I consider to be rare cases, because in general I think that a tenant, under covenant to repair, is not liable to make good the gradual deterioration, to which by reasonable wear & tear all things are liable. I think that the tenant is not liable to flag floors which were not before flagged, nor to floor with boards rooms which were formerly floored with mortar or composition.³⁷

The system of tenure was a problem. By the late eighteenth century, three-life leases were 'generally regarded as a perfect method for ensuring that land and buildings were allowed to decay and rot'.³⁸ Although life leases were being phased out in favour of rack-rents, many continued in being into the early nineteenth century.³⁹ When Thomas Dalrymple Hesketh inherited his estate in the early years of the nineteenth century, it was said to be 'very much incumbered with leases for lives', many of which had been in existence for 'upwards of 50 years'.⁴⁰ Under such circumstances, it was not possible to know the condition of buildings at the start of the lease, and correspondingly more difficult to prove neglect by tenants. It is clear that neglect was a major factor, but the covenants were believed not to be legally enforceable, and a charge of neglect was therefore unsustainable. The new rack-rent tenants were not under the same obligations, however, and were 'only bound to fair and tenantable repairs and not to substantial and lasting ones, such as new roofing &c'.⁴¹ The system of tenure in south-west Lancashire,

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ F. M. L. Thompson, *English landed society in the nineteenth century* (London, 1963), p. 229.

³⁹ See Gritt, 'Aspects of agrarian change', chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Lancs. R.O., DDHe 82/8; see also Gritt, 'Aspects of agrarian change', chapter 3.

⁴¹ Lancs. R.O., DDHe 82/8.

therefore, was also in part responsible for the poor state of housing. The old life-lease covenants were not apparently enforceable, and the new rack-rent tenants were under different obligations. Either way, it placed most of the responsibility firmly with the estate, certainly for the more expensive repairs.

This situation was not confined to the Hesketh estate. The Scarisbrick estate had an extensive and expensive programme of repairs throughout the early nineteenth century. The scale of the maintenance programme can be assessed from the estimates of the cost of repairs wanting on the estate. In January 1825 the estimated cost of carrying out all necessary repairs in Shevington was £157. In nearby Wrightington it was £1,254. It is not known how many of these repairs were actually carried out, but by January 1826 the estimate of repairs in Shevington had risen to £222, while that for Wrightington had increased to £1,312. No contemporary rentals of these townships have survived, so it is not possible to calculate the percentage of the gross rent that was spent on building repairs. However, a survey of Wrightington in 1827 valued the Scarisbrick interest at £1,527.⁴² The estimate of the repairs wanting to buildings, therefore, was almost equal to the annual value of the Scarisbrick interest in the township. In all, for eight townships on the estate, the estimated repair bill for 1826 was £2,863.⁴³ On the Hesketh of Rufford estate, the carpenter's accounts for repairs to estate buildings in 1833 amounted to £663, or 5.5 per cent of the annual gross rental.⁴⁴

On the Molyneux estate the situation was no better. John Latham of Tarbock was threatened with eviction in 1785 as the two messuages and tenements he held were said to be 'very ruinous and out of repair for want of reparations'.⁴⁵ Five years later Richard Wainwright took a one-year lease on part of a tenement in Maghull. He was ordered 'to put all premises in repair & build a stable at his own expense and leave all in good repair at year end'.⁴⁶ Subtenancy was also said to be a cause of inadequate maintenance of farm buildings. 'Embery's undertenants have at length quitted and the

⁴² Lancs. R.O., DDSc 126/30, survey and valuation of Wrightington, 1827.

⁴³ Lancs. R.O., DDSc 79/1, estimate of repairs wanting, Scarisbrick estate, 1826.

⁴⁴ Lancs. R.O., DDHe 62/11, carpenter's account book; DDHe 99/33, Hesketh estate rental, 1833.

⁴⁵ Lancs. R.O., DDM 12, Molyneux estate rentals.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

repairs of the premises can be proceeded with. They are left in a shameful condition, the certain result of underletting.⁴⁷ Eleven inhabited houses were said to be out of repair in Altcar in 1803, whereas the 1801 census had recorded only 62 houses and none uninhabited.⁴⁸ The tenement held by Mr Potter in Toxteth Park was said by the estate steward to require eighteen different repairs including new doors, windows, and floors, and the roof retiling.⁴⁹ This was more than just run-of-the-mill maintenance. Once a tenant fell into arrears, it would be difficult for him to find the money to carry out essential repairs, and, in the war years, the Molyneux agents were not charitable towards tenants who fell behind with rent payments. John Littler of Knowsley, for instance, was over £66 in arrears in 1800 for a tenement in Kirkby with an annual rental of £38. After the agent had failed to extract any rent payment, he set about a valuation of the tenement with a view to recovering the money. He reported that the

Barn was an old one stone set in clay & thatch, the back wall began to bulge, I gave him notice to set a butment to it or it would fall, he promised to do this as he is to repair &c. This he neglected and the barn fell down wholly on the back side with all the roof, the front wall stands . . . The house is very old stone & daub walls. Through old age walls & timber perished. Dangerous to go on to it to thatch in so very bad condition.⁵⁰

Before the late eighteenth century, most landlords were not concerned with the architecture of their estates, whether in terms of methods of construction, materials, architectural styles, or the general condition of the houses. By the early nineteenth century the procedures for maintaining housing were, necessarily, changing. In 1815 R. W. Dickson observed that

The custom of repairs was formerly in most cases left to the tenant, under certain stipulated covenants; but they were in general so badly performed under such regulations, as to be no security to the landlord. It was likewise a custom with some proprietors to provide their own materials, and for the tenants to engage to convey them to the places where they might be wanted; which was, perhaps, the only way in which they could be of any real utility.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/135, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 13 June 1845.

⁴⁸ Lancs. R.O., DDM 12/54–121.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Dickson, *General view*, p. 102.

In response to the housing crisis, the estates embarked on a much more systematic maintenance programme in order to protect capital assets. As houses were increasingly constructed of durable materials by craftsmen, the buildings themselves became an important part of the capital assets of the estates. Whereas the old clay structures were mostly 'of no value', the fixed capital investment in brick and slate buildings needed a degree of protection.⁵² By the 1830s the Molyneux estate, like others in south-west Lancashire, employed a clerk of works who was responsible for overseeing repairs to estate buildings.⁵³ All petitions to the estate steward regarding buildings were referred to him, regardless of how trivial they were. Often assistance was limited to providing materials for repairs, with tenants remaining responsible for the labour. However, new-built constructions relied more heavily on tradesmen, and all building work was more closely supervised. The estate began to exploit locally available resources more fully, both for building repairs and for new buildings. Although locally available materials had always been used for houses, it was only on an *ad hoc* basis, and although estates retained rights to timber, stone, and clay, a system of managing these resources better developed from the later eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, brick and slate had become the standard materials for new buildings, with the limited stone that was available locally also being exploited (though not exclusively for use on the estate).⁵⁴

Finding building stone was a problem in much of south-west Lancashire. Extensive, good quality quarries were not numerous in the Liverpool hinterland, and most were beneath the ground rather than in exposed cliff faces, and thus liable to flooding.⁵⁵ The tenant of Kirkby quarry in 1806 took the lease in May but had to leave in November due to floods, despite having paid £15 rent for the year.⁵⁶ Even after drainage machinery became available, stone still posed a

⁵² Lancs. R.O., DDHe 110/7, state of repair of farms now held by one life, June 1806.

⁵³ See Lancs. R.O., DDM 8/1, Molyneux estate memoranda book, 1834. The Hesketh estate employed a carpenter and other workmen who repaired the tenants' houses and charged the estate for the same: DDHe 62/11, carpenter's book, 1835–6.

⁵⁴ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/40, William Eaton Hall to the earl of Sefton, 29 June 1840; DDM 6/38, William Eaton Hall to the earl of Sefton, 4 Aug. 1840.

⁵⁵ Fleetwood-Hesketh, *Murray's Lancashire*, p. ix.

⁵⁶ Lancs. R.O., DDM 12/54–121.

problem, as several references in the estate correspondence and memoranda books testify.⁵⁷

The Molyneux agents were also managing the estate's timber reserves.⁵⁸ The most easily exploitable building material on the estate, however, was clay. Rather than being used in its unbaked form, as in earlier decades, by the 1840s it was increasingly being moulded into bricks and drainage tiles.⁵⁹ Mr Hull, for instance, contracted with the Molyneux agent in 1843 for a 21-year lease on a small plot of ground. He proposed to build a single-storey cottage for around £150, for which he was allowed 20,000 bricks.⁶⁰ In 1835 Edward Rogerson was allowed 1,200 bricks.⁶¹ Early the following year it was recorded that 200,000 bricks were to be made on the estate, sufficient to build ten single-storey cottages.⁶² During a period of agricultural improvement, the exploitation of clay for the manufacture of tiles for drains and floors was also extensive.⁶³

The opportunities for bricklayers were favourable during this period of rebuilding and investment. When James Bradshaw of Altcar was recommended for a notice to quit in 1845 (for being £79 in arrears on a rent of only £49 a year), the estate steward remarked, 'Your lordship will probably remember that he is a bricklayer there and might have done well but for his old drunken habits.'⁶⁴ By April 1846 a strike of building workers in Liverpool threatened to involve the construction workers employed on the Molyneux estate. In a period of heavy investment in buildings they were confident of securing a bargaining position. However, the Molyneux agent persuaded all building workers on the estate to sign a declaration that they had no involvement with the 'monstrous evil' of the union and the strike.⁶⁵ Later in the same year it was noted that 'I am afraid we shall not get on with the cottages as is desirable.—Baker cannot

⁵⁷ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/155, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 30 May 1846.

⁵⁸ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/134, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 7 June 1845.

⁵⁹ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/38, William Eaton Hall to the earl of Sefton, 29 June 1840.

⁶⁰ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/137, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 1 July 1845.

⁶¹ Lancs. R.O., DDM 8/2, estate memoranda book, 1835.

⁶² Lancs. R.O., DDM 8/3, estate memoranda book, 1836.

⁶³ See, for example, Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/38 and DDM 6/40, William Eaton Hall to the earl of Sefton, 29 June and 4 Aug. 1840.

⁶⁴ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/140, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 20 July 1845.

⁶⁵ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/145–7, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton 25 Apr., 7 May, and 9 May 1846; see also the signed declaration, DDM 6/148, 8 May 1846.

at present let us have a single bricklayer. What are employed at the hall [*sic*], there are no others to be had.⁶⁶

By 1840 large-scale investment in new buildings, as well as the substantial maintenance programme for existing buildings through the previous decade, had materially improved the housing stock of the Molyneux estate. Part of the reason for the heightened activity may have been that the earl of Sefton was taking a personal interest in improvements. Plans for new cottages, and some of the larger alterations to existing structures, were subject to his approval, not simply as proprietor, but in effect as an architectural consultant. He considered the economics of different designs, their functionality, and their aesthetic qualities. The estate steward attempted to influence his decisions, but he did not always sway his employer's mind.⁶⁷

These changes were taking place in a period when the agricultural system of the county was changing in response to the stimulus of growing urban markets. Rural society was becoming more socially polarized as the number of farmers occupying more than 100 acres and less than 20 acres increased at the expense of the medium-sized farmers. A large body of farm servants came into existence who had no early-modern counterpart in Lancashire.⁶⁸ Drainage programmes and reclamation improved the productivity of the land, and farm produce became increasingly specialized as farmers geared their output to the demands of the market. Innovations in the transport network facilitated ready communication between the towns and the rural hinterland which was mutually beneficial. Town markets were supplied with food while farmers were provided with an abundant supply of organic waste material from humans, animals, and industry.⁶⁹ As the agrarian economy changed, the new demands placed on buildings forced the estates to adopt new policies. Architectural styles had to change, and different types of buildings

⁶⁶ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/155, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 30 May 1846.

⁶⁷ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/145, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 25 Apr. 1846; see also DDM 6/105, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 1 June 1844; DDM 6/149, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 16 May 1846; DDM 6/150, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 18 May 1846; DDM 6/151, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 20 May 1846; DDM 6/152, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 24 May 1846; DDM 6/158, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 15 Aug. 1846.

⁶⁸ A. J. Gritt, 'The "survival" of service'.

⁶⁹ See Gritt, 'Aspects of agrarian change', chapters 5–7.

were required. The inadequacy of the existing stock of farm buildings was apparent:

Among the old farmeries of this county there is nothing of utility, either in the plans, or combinations of the different parts: no regard whatever has been paid to the convenience of inspecting or overlooking the business constantly going on in them; not the least attention bestowed in the view of economizing the labour to be performed; or the smallest respect paid to the progressive destination of the various articles of cattle fodder. Everything appears to have been a sort of chance or random work, without order, method, or design.⁷⁰

This is not a comment on the condition of available buildings, but on their suitability to modern farming needs. The incidence of stall-feeding cattle was very much on the increase in the first half of the nineteenth century, leading to greater pressure on the existing ranges of farm buildings.⁷¹ Hay was a very important crop, and was becoming more so as urban demand grew. New storage buildings were required to accommodate the harvested crops and their processing. As more horses were required for traction, more stables were required too. More trade with Liverpool in hay and other crops meant that more carts were needed, along with more cart houses. Although the numbers of pigs kept is difficult to assess, architectural evidence seems to suggest that pig-keeping was also on the increase. On the other hand, it may simply have been the case that pigs were being provided with better accommodation. Cattle were certainly better housed, partly in an effort to preserve dung, partly to separate animals from the domestic buildings, and partly due to new (economic) concerns over animal welfare.⁷²

Large numbers of buildings had to be enlarged, altered, or built anew to cope with this new farming system, and many of the petitions to the Molyneux estate requesting assistance with building were for new or extensive alterations to agricultural buildings rather than houses. Some were inevitably repairs to old decayed structures, such as James Fazakerly's pigsty, which was said to be 'in very bad repair—heavy flags breaking down the walls'.⁷³ But others point to a more systematic rearrangement of farm buildings that were needed to accommodate changing agricultural practices. Thus there are

⁷⁰ Dickson, *General view*, pp. 95–6.

⁷¹ Rothwell, *Report*, p. 97.

⁷² Rothwell, *Report*, appendix, p. 67.

⁷³ Lancs. R.O., DDM 8/4, estate memoranda book, 1837.

regular references to the flooring of barns and the raising of barn walls, the provision of new cart houses, an instance of dairy walls being lowered in order to better control the atmosphere, new pigsties being built, alterations to stables to accommodate more horses, and so on.⁷⁴ There are regular references to the manufacture of tiles for covering barn floors.⁷⁵ Animal welfare was also receiving attention that it had not received in earlier decades; even if welfare concerns were economically motivated, it still indicates a changing attitude. A stable referred to in a letter of 1846 was believed to be 'too low for the perfect health of a horse'.⁷⁶ The proposed solution was to raise 'the roof . . . and [rearrange] the ground plan'.⁷⁷

The new social aspirations of some farmers are also indicated by major changes to the domestic environment. House alterations often included the addition of upper floors and staircases, parlours, and sitting rooms. New houses contained bay windows, and decorative architectural features became more common. The rural buildings of the 1840s, both agricultural and domestic, had altered very substantially from those of only a generation earlier. However, the manifestation of social aspirations through architectural refinement was criticized on the grounds that 'an elegant house will produce nothing, and of course there can be no return on it'.⁷⁸ William Rothwell criticized the policy of the Clifton estate in the Fylde of 'building the farm houses for these new tenants, on too large and expensive a scale . . . A plain, substantial, and convenient house, is all that a farmer requires'.⁷⁹

Despite the large-scale building activity that went on in the first half of the nineteenth century, there was still much to be done. Although generations of neglect had been reversed to some extent, investment was still not heavy enough, largely due to an apparent

⁷⁴ Lancs. R.O., DDM 12/54-121; DDM 8/1-9, estate memoranda books, 1834-42; DDM 6/135, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 13 June 1845; DDM 6/136, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 18 June 1845.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/38, William Eaton Hall to the earl of Sefton, 29 June 1840; DDM 6/40, William Eaton Hall to the earl of Sefton, 4 Aug. 1840.

⁷⁶ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/157, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 1 Aug. 1846.

⁷⁷ Lancs. R.O., DDM 6/158, R. Ledger to the earl of Sefton, 15 Aug. 1846. Jonathan Binns also commented on the inadequacy of accommodation within buildings and the detrimental effects on the health of animals: *Notes on the agriculture of Lancashire* (Preston, 1851), p. 26.

⁷⁸ Rothwell, *Report*, p. 34.

⁷⁹ Rothwell, *Report*, p. 110.

lack of capital. Landlords and tenants certainly prioritized capital investment in drainage and land improvements, transport systems, farm stock, and husbandry gear. There had been some improvement to the built environment, and by the 1830s estates had assumed much more of the responsibility for their tenants' buildings. In part this was a result of the decline in life leases and the increase of rack-rents. However, it was also because substantially built structures were capital assets, unlike their flimsier predecessors which were of little or no capital value. These improvements were recognized by agricultural writers. George Beesley, for instance, observed that 'considerable improvements have been recently made in the farm buildings, in almost every locality'.⁸⁰ In 1850 William Rothwell observed the improvements then being carried out on numerous large and small estates.⁸¹ He reserved his most approving comments for the Molyneux estate, which contained 'the most substantial, commodious, and convenient farm houses, outbuildings, and cottages, in Lancashire'.⁸² Yet Rothwell also observed that labourers' cottages were often of inferior quality, even though it was claimed that those of south-west Lancashire were better than those in the north of the county.⁸³ However, as late as 1851 Jonathan Binns found little to be praised in Lancashire's agricultural buildings. He commented that the 'arrangement is often the worst that could be contrived', and 'the house is often very inadequate'. The outbuildings were no better, and animal disease and miscarriage, as well as limited farmers' profits, were blamed on the shortcomings of the buildings. Despite the extensive maintenance programmes on several estates, some of which Binns noted, he found himself compelled to say that 'the neglect by the landowners of the comfort and convenience of their farm buildings is very general'.⁸⁴

There were marked regional differences in the quality of housing stock in the mid-nineteenth century, and there is evidence to suggest that the general improvements carried out in south-west Lancashire did not reflect a county-wide trend. In the mid-nineteenth century Rothwell claimed that in the Furness district, 'the farm houses, outbuildings, and labourers' cottages generally, are not of the best construction for convenience and comfort'.⁸⁵ He argued that 'farm

⁸⁰ G. Beesley, *A report on the state of agriculture in Lancashire* (Preston, 1849), p. 41.

⁸¹ Rothwell, *Report*, pp. 12, 108–9, 112–16.

⁸² Rothwell, *Report*, p. 115.

⁸³ Rothwell, *Report*, pp. 129–31.

⁸⁴ Binns, *Notes*, pp. 25–9.

⁸⁵ Rothwell, *Report*, p. 7.

buildings are very bad, inconvenient, and crowded together. Farm houses little better.⁸⁶ In the west and south-west of West Derby hundred the farm buildings were said to be 'good', in contrast to the 'inferior and inconvenient' farm buildings in the north-eastern part of West Derby hundred and the north-west part of Salford hundred. In Leyland hundred 'fences and buildings [were] mostly in a bad state'.⁸⁷ Labourers' cottages, too, were of variable quality, and generally speaking, 'in North Lancashire, the labourers' cottages are worse than those in the South'.⁸⁸

Although mid-nineteenth century observers found enough deficiencies in the farm buildings of south-west Lancashire to warrant harsh criticisms, there had certainly been much change and improvement in the previous half century. The demands of the critics were often unrealistic on the grounds of cost, and their plans were often elaborate.⁸⁹ Building materials and methods of construction had changed, as had the design of buildings. These changes were, in part, a consequence of the new demands of a changing agricultural system for improved farm buildings. They were also a consequence of the changed economic and social conditions of the nineteenth century. Capitalized, improving farmers expected greater domestic comfort than their mid-eighteenth-century predecessors because their social position and material expectations were higher. The change in the system of tenure brought a change in the management of building maintenance. Life-leasehold covenants had failed to secure adequate building maintenance by tenants, and estates assumed greater responsibility for the new, more durable structures. House construction and maintenance were expensive for estates by the early nineteenth century, and house-building failed to keep pace with population growth. The legacy of eighteenth-century under-investment in buildings meant that the decayed and neglected state of the building stock could not be reversed quickly. Nevertheless, the typical farmer of south-west Lancashire in the mid-nineteenth century was living in greater domestic comfort and had the use of a more comprehensive range of outbuildings than at any previous time. The domestic environment and the landscape of rural

⁸⁶ Rothwell, *Report*, p. 9.

⁸⁷ Rothwell, *Report*, pp. 12–13.

⁸⁸ Rothwell, *Report*, p. 131.

⁸⁹ B. A. Holderness, 'Capital formation in agriculture', in *Aspects of capital investment in Great Britain, 1750–1850*, ed. J. P. P. Higgins and S. Pollard (London, 1971), p. 172.

south-west Lancashire had changed within the life-span of a single generation who proved to be responsive to the demands of growing urban markets for food. While urbanization created insanitary slums, cellars, and tenements in Lancashire's towns and cities, the stimulus that concentrations of industrial proletarians gave to agricultural improvement was the cause of rural slum-clearance and intense capital expenditure on new buildings.

