

THE MID-TUDOR MARKET IN CROWN LAND IN KENT

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There had always been a Crown estate in Kent. As in many other English counties, lands had come and gone: estates fell to the Crown through the fifteenth-century Acts of Resumption, from the attainders of political foes and by escheat for lack of male heirs. The process was then reversed as monarchs granted out lands to political supporters, hard-working officials and royal wives. The royal estate was thus not a permanent set of lands, but a constantly changing collection of estates whose function was as much political as it was economic. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Crown lands in Kent were not very extensive, but in 1521 they were enlarged significantly by the fall of the Duke of Buckingham. The Stafford estates were spread across England and Wales, including a large concentration in and around Tonbridge. But these new additions to the Crown estate in Kent were treated in the traditional manner: many were soon granted out to successful councillors and courtiers, notably the Boleyns and the Guildfords.¹ The Stafford estates proved to be just a small foretaste of what was to come. From 1536 to 1554 – and beyond – a veritable mountain of new estates passed into the hands of the English government, and Kent

¹ Buckingham's lands in Kent included the lordships or manors of Tonbridge, Southborough, Hilden, Brasted, Yalding, Penshurst and Bayhall: an extremely low valuation puts the total at £265 per annum: Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) E 36/150 fo. 13^v sqq. All that was left of the pre-1536 Crown estate in Kent in 1542 was worth only £210 per annum, of which £61 per annum worth was ex-Stafford property, and £63 per annum worth was the remnant of Wolsey's monastic suppressions of 1525: British Library, Additional MS. 32, 469 fos. 120–121. The Crown had much larger pre-dissolution holdings in other counties: see e.g. K.S.H. Wyndham, 'The Royal Estate in 16th Century Somerset', *Bull. Inst. Hist. Research*, lii (1979), and in general B.P. Wolfe, *The Royal Demesne in English History*, (1971).

was no exception. The massive increase in the royal estates from the late 1530s was qualitatively different from previous experience, so much so that a new bureaucratic department, the Court of Augmentations, had to be established to administer the new lands and supervise their disposal. The subject of this article is the Crown estate in Kent and what happened to it, from the mid-1530s to the accession of Queen Elizabeth in 1558. It will describe briefly the build up of Crown lands from various sources, and then demonstrate what became of them. It will also consider the consequences of the changes in landownership resulting from the mid-Tudor market in Crown lands.

i

The Henrician Reformation brought in its train extensive changes in English life. Not the least of these was the suppression of hundreds of religious houses and the immediate acquisition of their lands by the Crown. The estates of the twenty monasteries and two preceptories of the Hospitallers in Kent, and those of about two dozen religious houses outside of the county which also lay in Kent, were worth about £7400 per annum in 1535. Kent's six friaries had little landed estate, but the four colleges of priests dissolved between 1539 and 1547 brought in an additional £550 per annum worth of lands.² Undoubtedly, the lands of the dissolved abbeys made up the largest group of lands in Kent which passed into Crown ownership during this period, but in these same years about £3000 per annum in *non-monastic* lands also came to the Crown. These included extensive estates by way of exchanges between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the government, about £500 per annum in lands held by Thomas Cromwell at the time of his fall, lands received in exchanges and by outright purchase by the Crown from the Wyatts and others, and finally the estates of Sir Thomas Wyatt the younger and a few of his co-rebels in 1554. But as the Augmentations receivers' accounts graphically demonstrate, the Crown estate in Kent did not simply grow larger and larger from 1536 to 1554. The total revenues of the ex-monastic lands were never at any one time within the purview of the Court of Augmentations. The same may be said of other large units of land

² *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (Record Commissioners, 1825–34), i, 1–120 *passim*. References to other contemporary valuations, mainly in PRO classes SC 6, 11, 12; E318, E315, are noted in the author's unpublished Ph.D thesis, 'Church and Gentry in Reformation Kent, 1533–1553' (University of California, Los Angeles, 1974), 263–6.

which came to the Crown between 1540 and 1554. While new lands were coming in, lands acquired during the preceding few years were already going out, either in the form of gifts, exchanges or sales. It is for this reason that any 'total' of Crown lands would be a rather meaningless number, especially in view of the fact that many estates became Crown land more than once. A given parcel of monastic land may have been granted out first in the late 1530s, only to return to the Crown through an exchange or the attainder of the first grantee. As likely as not it would within a very few years be granted or sold once again. Looked at in this way the Crown estate was larger than it seems, with many manors available for rewarding royal servants or for sale to raise revenue more than once within as short a period as ten years. The constant fluidity of the royal estate is one indication of the chops and changes in government policy during the Reformation period as well as a symbol of the insecurity in the careers of mid-Tudor courtiers and officials.

The new Crown land, especially the ex-monastic lands, was by no means evenly distributed throughout Kent. Aside from the Stafford lands and a few Westminster Abbey manors in the western Weald, and the former archbishopric lands in the upper Medway valley, the bulk of the estates lay in the northern half of the county. The wealthier Kentish monasteries had all been situated within a broad corridor between Canterbury and the outskirts of London, and the majority of their lands, too, lay north of the Downs. The geographical distribution of much of the Crown estate reflected the pattern of early medieval settlement in the county. There were few monasteries in the Weald (none of them wealthy) and many of the Wealden estates owned by monasteries located outside that region – like St. Augustine's, Canterbury and Battle Abbey in Sussex – were relatively low in value, being composed for the most part of numerous pieces of land held for small ground rents. In short, there would in the mid-sixteenth century be more property in some regions of the county than in others for eventual disposal by the government as and when it chose to do so.

The rhythm of lands falling to the Crown shows a pattern familiar to historians. The surrenders of the eleven smaller religious houses in 1535 and 1536 brought in estates worth about £920 per annum, already far greater in value than the existing Crown estate in the county. After a lull, seven other, wealthier, abbeys and the six friaries were dissolved in 1538–39, with lands worth about £2850 per annum. By 1539, too, the lands of non-Kent monasteries with holdings in Kent had come into the hands of the Crown, amounting to a further £1400 per annum worth. Then in 1540 the two cathedral priories of Rochester and Canterbury were dissolved, bringing in

estates valued at £348 per annum and £1858 per annum respectively.³ But even before this final act of the Dissolution, other lands swelled the income of the Augmentations in Kent. The first three of a half-dozen exchanges between the Crown and Archbishop Cranmer (between 1536 and 1547) occurred before 1540, bringing in to the Crown large parts of the archbishopric's bailiwicks of Otford and Maidstone. Later exchanges would result in the transfer to the Crown of the bulk of the archbishop's traditional estates in Kent and out, and in return grants to the see of extensive ex-monastic lands in Kent and elsewhere.⁴ Also in mid-1540 the lands of Thomas Cromwell were taken by the Crown. His estate included substantial properties in Kent, in many cases lands which had only been recently received into Crown hands. Cromwell had been among the earliest recipients of ex-monastic lands, but one of the first to lose them as well.⁵

Contemporary with the exchanges between Cranmer and the Crown, were several exchanges with Sir Thomas Wyatt. The first, in June 1540, brought in Wyatt lands worth £239 per annum, while an equivalent amount of ex-monastic lands was transferred to Wyatt, this time lands mainly of Boxley Abbey.⁶ A second exchange in 1542 increased the Crown estate in Kent by about £220 per annum, while in return Wyatt received mainly West Country estates.⁷ Later in the same year the Crown purchased lands in Kent worth £177 per annum from Wyatt for over £3500. Just twelve years later the whole Wyatt estate would fall to the Crown after the younger Sir Thomas's unsuccessful revolt; at that time the Wyatt lands in Kent were valued at about £425 per annum.⁸ In fact, throughout the 1540s and early 1550s, a steady stream of lands held by both laymen and churchmen was transferred to the state in exchanges, usually for

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ F.R.H. Du Boulay, 'Archbishop Cranmer and the Canterbury Temporalities', *English Hist. Rev.*, lxxvii (1952). The first major exchange, of November 1537, produced lands worth £503 per annum for the Crown: *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (ed. J.S. Brewer, J. Gairdner and R.H. Brodie, 1862-1932) (hereafter *LP*) xiii.i.1519(68); Lambeth Palace Library, Cart. Misc. xii, nos. 23, 23a; PRO, SC 6/Hen. VIII/1698. The 1542 exchange: *LP*, xvii.443(15); 1546-7 exchanges: *LP*, xxi.i.149(6), *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (hereafter *CPR*), 1547-8, 36-9 and particular at PRO E 318/7/235.

⁵ Cromwell's lands at PRO, LR 6/97/5 or SC 6/Hen.VIII/1757 m. 50.

⁶ *LP*, xv.942(49) and valor at PRO, E 315/156 fo. 6 sqq.

⁷ *LP*, xvii.220(98) and particular at PRO E 318/23/1264.

⁸ Enrolled at PRO, E 164/33 fos. 1-2^v. Accounts of lands of Thomas Wyatt and other rebels attainted at PRO, LR 6/97/9 mm. 8-10. Sir Henry Isley's lands, worth over £230 per annum, were the only other significant rebel estate.

equivalent value.⁹ To add to this pool of lands, already in the process of being drained, came the Maison Dieu at Dover (lands worth £166 per annum) in 1544, and in 1547 the four colleges and the landed endowments of all the chantries.¹⁰

Compared to the Crown's estate in Kent before 1536, its holdings during the 1540s and 1550s were vast. To see these amounts in perspective, it might be remembered that an acre of arable land in Kent fetched anything from 6*d.* to 10*d.* per annum in this period. Thus £1000 per annum in lands represents between 25,000 and 40,000 acres. In the year ending Michaelmas 1542, for example, the Crown's receiver reported receipts, excluding tenths and reserved rents, of about £2700 from ex-monastic lands and £1760 from non-monastic estates; in all about £4460.¹¹ Two years later the income from both sources came to £3865.¹² The nadir of royal income from lands in Kent came in the year ending Michaelmas 1547, when after years of war, the total income, excluding reserved rents, was only £3100.¹³ After 1547, Crown estate income recovered somewhat. Receipts were over £5000 in 1548, over £5300 in 1549 and almost £4800 in 1551.¹⁴ Certainly the royal estate was much smaller than it might have been had no ex-monastic or other lands been sold or granted away. But that possibility is no more than hypothetical. The value of estates to the Crown was never solely to produce a steady income. The Crown's financial policies in the mid-Tudor period – just as in the later Middle Ages – were never limited to the aim of simply accumulating and hoarding more and more manors. Thus, even without the fiscal crisis brought on by the aimless wars of the 1540s and even without the stresses of the reigns of Edward VI and Mary Tudor, there would have been significant alienations from

⁹ Some examples are the exchanges with Sir Thomas Poynings (1540): PRO, E 318/18/903; Sir Henry Isley (1540): *LP*, xv.831(61); George Lord Cobham (1541): *LP*, xvi.878(60); Sir Walter Hendley (1547): *CPR*, 1547–8, 157; Edward Lord Clinton (1552): *CPR*, 1550–53, 364–8; William, Earl of Pembroke (1553): *CPR*, 1553, 177.

¹⁰ Cobham College surrendered to Lord Cobham before 1539 (PRO, E 318/8/293 and statute, 31 Hen. VIII, c. 13); Wye, dissolved 1545 (E 318/6/199); Maidstone and Wingham, dissolved 1547 (E 318/26/1492, 27/1523 and 33/1837). Although the chantry returns (*Kent Recs.*, xii and supp., 1936, 1934) suggest chantry lands worth over £400 per annum, the Crown seems to have obtained – and then sold off – much less than that. Some chantry lands appear as 'concealed' in Elizabeth's reign.

¹¹ PRO, LR 6/97/7. These accounts do not cover the Kent lands of non-Kent monasteries until after 1547.

¹² PRO, LR 6/97/8.

¹³ PRO, SC 6/Edw. VI/233.

¹⁴ PRO, SC 6/Edw. VI/723; LR 6/113/1 pts. 1, 3.

the newly-enlarged estate, if past performance is anything to go on. The sales and gifts of ex-monastic lands, just as much as the grants of other Crown lands, were motivated by two clear purposes: to raise funds for immediate political and military needs, and to purchase the political and ecclesiastical allegiance of important classes of Englishmen. Kent, and the other Home Counties, were of particular concern to any Tudor government, and the re-distribution of lands to loyal subjects who lived in the county reflected the Crown's perception of the link between loyalty and rewards.

ii

In considering the re-distribution of Crown lands, we must of necessity deal not only with the ex-monastic lands but with all Crown property. The question of what happened to the abbey lands on its own is of little historical relevance. In sixteenth-century reality, little distinction was made between monastic and other Crown lands. Potential buyers were interested in particular properties which would be advantageous to them and not concerned about the monastic or non-monastic origins of the lands. Purchases frequently included Crown lands of varied provenance. Whatever the origin of Crown lands, and notwithstanding the stiff terms specified in the early commissions for sale, there were many who wanted to buy as well as those who sought special favour. Which is to insist that the enlarged Crown estate in Kent did not in itself create the demand for Crown land sales: the would-be purchasers were already on the scene, anxious to increase their landholdings. Wider social and economic developments over the preceding generations had produced families with both the incentive and the ability to buy, when the government discovered its need to sell during the 1540s.

From the time of the dissolution of the smaller monasteries until 1539 the government had no systematic policy or procedure for giving away or selling Crown lands. The only guidelines for permanent alienations were in the act which set up the Court of Augmentations in 1536. It specified that a yearly rent of one-tenth the current annual value should be charged on lands granted 'in inheritance', and that they should be held in knight's service and therefore carry all the traditional feudal incidents.¹⁵ The lack of a Crown policy for the sale of its new estates did not restrain men from requesting properties which they desired. During the same

¹⁵ Statute 27 Henry VIII, c.27, sec. 8.

month in which Christ Church Priory was suppressed, Thomas Cromwell received a request from William Culpeper in Kent for help in obtaining the grant of a barn and houses lately owned by the priory. He added that he would be pleased to enter Cromwell's service as he was a younger son.¹⁶ A few years earlier Sir Thomas Neville had begun a campaign to obtain the lands of Malling nunnery which was near his 'poor house' at Mereworth. Neville's suit was carried personally to Cromwell by his son-in-law Robert Southwell. In February 1538, Neville assured Cromwell that Southwell's offer of 500 marks for his 'labour and travail' would be paid, if the grant was made. In this case the petitioner was unsuccessful, and the Malling properties went to the archbishop in exchange in 1540.¹⁷

By no means all of the Crown's landed acquisitions were in practice available for sale or gifts to individuals. The largest single block of lands, in the main made up of ex-monastic properties, was granted as endowments to the newly-erected chapters of Rochester and Canterbury cathedrals. Both were set up in the spring of 1541 to replace the old cathedral priories. Rochester got estates worth £668 per annum, and Canterbury's grants of 1541 and 1545 were worth just over £1500 per annum.¹⁸ In addition ex-monastic lands worth about £1170 per annum (along with other properties) went to the archbishopric in exchanges between 1536 and 1547. In this way almost half the total of all the monastic lands in Kent did not become available for transfer to laymen, who were therefore as likely to be bidding for non-monastic lands as for abbey estates.

Seventy different persons received one or more grants of Crown lands between 1536 and January 1547, which appear on the patent rolls. That number of course represents only the names inscribed on the letters patent, the initial grantees, and does not take into account purchases by agents for second parties, nor re-sales of lands by the initial grantees. During the 1540s there was a number of large grants which included lands in many counties. These bulk purchasers, usually London merchants, occasionally figures at court, quite frequently re-sold portions of their purchases to less wealthy, local buyers. There were very few grants, and no sales, of Crown lands in Kent between 1536 and 1539. For 1537 and 1538 there are only eight enrolments of grants or exchanges which included Kent

¹⁶ PRO, SP 1/158 fo. 151 (calendared at *LP*, xv.434).

¹⁷ PRO, SP 1/143 fo. 156 (*LP*, xiv.i.360; mis-dated to 1539); *LP*, xiii.i.808, 1228, 1251; *LP*, xv.613(32).

¹⁸ *LP*, xvi.878(59), 947(42), xxi.i.504(17).

property, all but one of which went to notables at court. Cromwell received tiny Mottenden Priory; Thomas Culpeper was given Combwell Priory and Sir Thomas Cheyney got St. Sexburg nunnery in Sheppey in exchange for other lands. Sir Christopher Hales was granted a manor worth £40 per annum for the nominal price of £120, and there was the first of the exchanges involving the archbishop.¹⁹ This last bargain accounted for the bulk of the Crown lands which were alienated in the period up to March 1539. By the middle of 1539 – with the great majority of monastic lands in Crown hands – the mechanics of regular sales seem to have been perfected. The first grants which appear to be normal sales at the prevailing market rate of twenty times the annual rental value of the property occurred in July 1539. Early in 1540 the government issued a special commission to certain officials to sell Crown lands. It specified tenures in knight's service, the reserved rent of a tenth of the value, and prices of twenty years' purchase for agricultural land, fifteen years' purchase for urban property. In Kent as elsewhere the significant sales of Crown lands did not begin in earnest until spring 1540.²⁰

During the 1540s the numbers of grants varied widely from year to year. In purely numerical terms, sales were steady in 1540 and 1541, decreased in 1542 and 1543, then rose to a steep peak in 1544, and finally levelled out somewhat lower in 1545 and 1546.²¹ Considering the military and financial difficulties of the Crown during these years, the sales trend seems reasonable, except for the exceptionally small number of transactions in 1543. It should be recalled that contemporary with these land sales, the government was raising unprecedented sums of money through parliamentary taxation, by loans of various types and by debasing the coinage. The government's financial crises carried on well into the reign of Edward VI, but a glance at Table I will indicate how during the last seven years of Henry VIII's reign the Crown estate in Kent was utilised most intensively to raise immediate cash. In Edward VI's reign, with the government in the hands of an insecure and disunited collection of nobles and high officials, the tempo of alien-

¹⁹ *LP*, xiii.ii.967(54); xii.ii.1150(31); xii.ii.1311(16); xiii.ii.1182(30); xiii.i.1519(68); Lambeth Palace Lib., Cart. Misc. xii, nos. 23, 23a.

²⁰ Sales to Thomas Spilman and Thomas Grene: *LP*, xiv.i.1354(40, 62); *LP*, xiv.ii.301(36). Cf. Joyce Youngs, 'The Terms of the Disposal of the Devon Monastic Lands', *English. Hist. Rev.*, lxix (1954), 23.

²¹ Grants by letters patent: 1537(3); 1538 (5); 1539 (11); 1540 (15); 1541 (10); 1542 (7); 1543 (7); 1544 (28); 1545 (13); 1546 (9); calendared in *LP*, passim.

ation slowed somewhat, but more importantly, the share of grants which were in the form of sales at market rates diminished markedly. The number of beneficial grants rose, as did the number of exchanges. The exchanges involved properties allegedly of equivalent value, but the identity of the grantees suggests that they were most likely obtaining the better part of the bargain. Four of the exchanges involved John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, four were with Lord Clinton and another involved William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. Equally suggestive, the fee-farm grants during Edward VI's reign all went to men closely identified with the Duke of Northumberland, while less surprising, the recipients of outright gifts were all closely connected to either Protector Somerset or John Dudley.²² Notwithstanding these numerous transactions involving powerful men at court, no single grantee obtained, either through gifts or sales, a really enormous estate in Kent based on former Crown lands. During the early 1550s, it began to appear that John Dudley was doing just that, but towards the end of the reign the majority of his lands in Kent obtained through earlier grants returned to the Crown in one of the exchanges referred to above. In fact at no time during the mid-Tudor period did any one family dominate the Crown land market in Kent.

With Mary Tudor on the throne, financial retrenchment – which had begun towards the end of the previous reign – shows its effect on Crown land dealings in Kent. The overall number of grants fell considerably in the reign as a whole, while the share of grants which involved sales at market rates of twenty-four and twenty-six years' purchase rose once again. In purely numerical terms the share of outright gifts among grants as a whole rose, too, but for rather different reasons than would explain the beneficial grants made in the preceding reign. Three of the nine outright gifts went to the queen's re-established religious houses, and a fourth was a gift of seventeen Kent rectories to the archbishopric. One went to the widow of Sir Thomas Wyatt, making good her dowry, and three were gifts to local gentry who had remained loyal during the Wyatt rising in 1554. Finally, one of the gifts was of concealed lands throughout England, of which less than a pound's worth was in Kent.²³ Absent are the exchanges and gifts to great nobles and

²² Fee-farm grants: *CPR, 1549–51*, 197, 337–8; *1550–53*, 267, 345; *1553*, 285. Gifts: *CPR, 1547–8*, 27, 170; *1549–51*, 341; *1550–53*, 13, 56, 180, 358.

²³ Gifts to Westminster Abbey, the Hospitallers and the Dominican nuns of Langley Regis (*CPR, 1555–7*, 348–54; *1557–8*, 313–15, 417); gift of 17 rectories to the archbishopric in 1558 (*ibid.*, 450; to Jane Wyatt née Hawte, 1555 (*CPR, 1555–7*, 159); concealed lands to Sir George Howard, 1558 (*CPR, 1557–8*, 411–14).

courtiers of the Edwardian period, perhaps due partly to the stricter financial regime, but possibly also to the fact that few Marian councillors or nobles lived in Kent. As far as Kent was concerned, the Marian government was decidedly less open-handed with grants of Crown land than its predecessor, although rewards for Crown servants and loyal local landowners were to be had in the form of leases of Crown lands in Kent.²⁴

Who then were the men and women who had not only the resources but also the connections which enabled them to obtain Crown lands? The great majority of Crown lands, which did not go directly to the new cathedral chapters, were granted out by way of purchase and exchanges. The small number of gifts, almost invariably to courtiers and politicians, must be explained as a function of high politics at the centre. In the period up to 1547 the significant gifts which included Kent lands went to Sir William Fitzwilliam, Sir Anthony Brown, Sir Anthony St. Leger, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Sir Christopher Morice, Thomas Culpeper, Sir Thomas Cheyney, Sir John Gage and Thomas Cawarden. In the long run, gifts to persons of this order had a much greater tendency to return to the Crown through political ill-fortune than lands which were granted or sold to less illustrious persons. Besides the small number of outright gifts, there were a few grants which were partial gifts, usually noted on the particular for the grant as such. One-half the purchase price was deducted from the grant of town properties to Canterbury Corporation in 1542; the council awarded Sir George Blagge a £12 per annum deduction in his purchase of lands worth £30 per annum in 1550; and Walter Buckler, the queen's secretary, was sold the possessions of Wye College, worth over £100 per annum, for a flat fee of £200 in 1545.²⁵ A reduction in the standard number of years' purchase rate could be the form of a partial gift. In 1550, when most rural properties were selling at about twenty-four years' purchase, Sir Thomas Cheyney was sold lands worth £67 per annum at the bargain rate of twenty years' purchase.²⁶

Gifts and part-gifts aside, the great bulk of Crown lands was *sold*

²⁴ CPR, *Philip and Mary, passim*. For a general analysis of Crown land policy from the 1530s to Elizabeth's reign see K.S.H. Wyndham, 'Crown Land and Royal Patronage in mid-sixteenth Century England', *J. Brit. Studs.*, xix (1980).

²⁵ PRO, E 318/7/236, 25/1425, 6/199.

²⁶ PRO, E 318/26/1493; he was given the same favourable rate in 1553: E 318/26/1495. The five other part-gifts: Robert Darknall, 1551 (E 318/28/1569); Percival Hart, 1540 (E 318/12/550); Walter Hendley, 1539 (E 318/12/563); Thomas Moyle, 1544 (E 318/16/794); William Petre, 1545 (E 318/17/858).

to purchasers or exchanged for other properties of equal value. An examination of the patent rolls produces one immediate generalisation about the initial buyers: the largest purchasers were Kent residents who either held a full-time office under the Crown or who had some other personal link with the court or the bureaucracy. The prime case was Sir Thomas Cheyney, long a member of the royal household and from 1536 the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. By the mid-1550s, he held more Crown lands than any other grantee in the county, with the exception of the archbishop of Canterbury: in fact over £500 per annum worth. And most of this property had been purchased, through a long string of transactions in 1537, 1540, 1546, 1549, 1550, 1553, 1554 and 1556.²⁷ He bought Crown lands first in the area of his family estates, in Sheppey. The bulk of his later purchases was also in north-east Kent, around Faversham and Canterbury. The only exception was the large manor of Cheyne Court in Romney Marsh, purchased in 1553.²⁸

Other large buyers also tended to concentrate their purchases geographically, for example Anthony Aucher in south-east Kent, and Sir John Baker in the Weald, near his manor of Sissinghurst. The London merchant magnates like Sir Martin Bowes and Sir John Gresham bought lands for the most part in north-west and west Kent. The general tendency among large and small alike was to buy lands in the region of one's existing holdings. No better example of this can be found than the Wyatts, father and son, who purchased or took in exchange or fee-farm several hundred pounds per annum in lands near Maidstone and their seat at Allington.

The record of purchases and grants of land in Kent renders questionable any clear-cut distinction between local gentry and royal office-holders. The categories overlap more often than not. Many of the most active purchasers of Crown lands among royal officials were themselves part of the early Tudor Kentish squirearchy. One can distinguish easily the transactions of office-holders who were not Kent residents. Sir Edward North, for example, while he was chancellor of the Court of Augmentations in 1546 paid over £7000 for a large collection of properties in several counties which included one manor in Kent. It was re-sold in subsequent years.²⁹

²⁷ *LP*, xii.ii.1311(16), xv.436(44, 45), xvi.379(58), xxi.ii.200(10); *CPR*, 1548-9, 311, 1549-51, 43, 342-3, 1553, 135-6, 1554-5, 196, 1555-7, 126.

²⁸ *LP*, xiv.ii.619(49), xv. 942(49), xvii.220(98); *CPR*, 1549-51, 337-8.

²⁹ *LP*, xxi.i.149(6); *CPR*, 1550-53, 240. The only non-Kentishmen who held onto significant amounts of Crown land after 1558 were the two Londoners, Martin Bowes and John Gresham.

But Sir Anthony St. Leger, for much of our period Lord Deputy in Ireland, purchased lands in Kent, where he lived, and held on to them. In the cases where royal officials of Kentish background bought or were granted non-Kentish estates, the tendency was the reverse, to re-sell them. The Kentishmen with the best connections in the capital were, besides Cheyney and St. Leger, John Baker at the Exchequer and Court of First Fruits and Tenths; Thomas Moyle, one of the General Surveyors; Christopher Hales, Attorney-General and then Master of the Rolls; and Anthony Aucher and Walter Hendley of Augmentations. Besides these men, the Wyatts, Lord Cobham, Ralph Fane and Percival Hart all had positions at court at one time or another, and all bought Crown lands. All these official and court-connected grantees, with the exception of Robert Southwell, who became Master of the Rolls, sprang from Kentish families.³⁰

The purchases of Crown lands in Kent by local gentry and office-holders was often only the first stage in the process by which lands passed to their eventual owners in the 1550s and 1560s. Almost all the Kentishmen who had substantial grants of land in the late 1530s and 1540s re-sold some of them, either back to the Crown in exchange, or more often, to other local men. Thomas Culpeper, for example, received lands in an exchange in 1541, a purchase in 1544, and in a series of purchases from the co-heirs of Christopher Hales in 1549-51. He re-sold at least part of the lands from each transaction, between 1543 and 1557.³¹ Like the royal estate as a whole, Thomas Culpeper's estate was never static. He was actively consolidating his holdings and many of the parcels he sold off were in parts of Kent distant from his home base at Bedgebury in the Weald. Men like Culpeper and Baker were involved continually in the local land market, and dealt in lands of Crown and non-Crown origin side by side. In fact the survival of so much evidence about the market in Crown lands tends to overshadow what may well have been an equally active market in lands which had not been recently held by the Crown, even if most of the properties traded were not as valuable as some of the large manors which passed through Crown

³⁰ Although Southwell was Norfolk-born, he took up residence at Mereworth in 1535 after his marriage to the daughter of Sir Thomas Neville. Elsewhere, too, 'the people closest to the centre of power fared best': K.S.H. Wyndham, 'In Pursuit of Crown Land: the Initial Recipients of Somerset Property in the mid Tudor Period', *Proc. Somerset Arch. & Natural Hist. Soc.*, cxxiii (1979).

³¹ *LP*, xvi.678(37), xix.ii.690(36); *CPR*, 1547-8, 331, 1550-53, 65. The re-sales: *LP*, xxi.ii.332(91), xviii.i.66(c.37); *CPR*, 1547-8, 143; 1555-7, 432, 331.

hands in the 1540s and 1550s. Some helpful insights into the estate-building methods of Tudor gentlemen can be drawn from the magnificent survey of the Wotton estate composed about 1560, and now in the British Library.

Thomas Wotton's surveyors noted every individual parcel or manor, its acreage and the manner by which it passed into Wotton hands. Much of the estate, based around the manor of Boughton Malherbe, was in family hands by the middle of the fifteenth century. Other parcels were bought in the later decades of the fifteenth century, and some had been acquired through several successful marriages over the preceding hundred years. But the largest number of parcels had been purchased by Sir Edward Wotton during the reign of Henry VIII. The great majority of those transactions was made in the local land market and not with the Crown, though Wotton had easy access to influence at court. Sir Edward made only one purchase from the Crown, in 1548, of six separate parcels totalling about 700 acres of land, which were valued at £33 per annum. But he also purchased 28 other parcels of land during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI not from the Crown, nineteen of which were bought after 1536. Most were bought from local yeomen or husbandmen, although some lands came from gentlemen like Anthony St. Leger and Thomas Moyle. There were several purchases from initial grantees of Crown property, in 1544 and 1550.³²

Like the on-going market in non-Crown lands, the majority of transactions involving Crown lands was made up of relatively small properties, both in the countryside and in the towns. As early as 1540, the Canterbury merchant William Coppyn bought directly from the Crown the 'Old Park' and the 'New Purchase' along with some other Canterbury tenements (all late of St. Augustine's Abbey) for a total price of £49 10s. Most of these lands were already occupied by him as the abbey's tenant.³³ Another, larger, slice of St. Augustine's extensive Canterbury holdings passed into municipal ownership in 1542: the majority of them was concentrated in the parishes of St. Paul, St. Andrew, St. Peter and St. Alphege. The Grey Friars in Canterbury was sold to Thomas Spilman in 1539 for

³² The survey: Brit. Lib. Add. MSS. 42, 715-716. Crown purchase, for £749: *CPR*, 1547-8, 402 and *PRO*, E 318/39/2099; from St. Leger and Moyle, in the survey, fos. 62-5, 272-3'; from initial grantees Sir John Gage, Richard Monins and Thomas Watton, in the survey, fos. 144-54, 206-9.

³³ *PRO*, E 318/8/311 and *LP*, xv. 613(37).

£100, but he probably sold it again by 1544.³⁴ In Maidstone, lands formerly in ecclesiastical hands passed to a variety of new owners, although the tenants would have remained *in situ*. A substantial share of property in the town and the parish of Maidstone was retained by the Crown in its manor of Maidstone, once owned by the archbishop. A block of Maidstone College lands was sold to Lord Cobham for more than £1000 in 1549, while the town properties of the suppressed Corpus Christi fraternity in Maidstone were purchased by the mayor and jurats at the time of their formal incorporation in 1548.³⁵

Re-sales of Crown lands by the initial grantees significantly increased the number of persons who gained as a result of the state's disposal of land. At least forty additional people obtained Crown lands in the years up to 1558, as a result of local re-sales, and this number is based only on the licences to alienate enrolled on the patent rolls. As more and more of the Crown land grants tended to be made in socage tenure (whose owners would not have required a royal licence to sell their new properties), it becomes more and more difficult to track down re-sales of former Crown property. The indication from the few surviving books of particulars for small chantry lands and obit rents, grants which were frequently not enrolled on the patent rolls, is that dozens more men purchased small parcels of Crown lands during Edward VI's reign.³⁶ The numbers would be appreciably higher if re-sales could be followed into the 1560s and 1570s. Through re-sales of Crown lands by the major grantees who were Kent residents, and by grantees from London and outside the county who probably never intended to retain all the parcels in various counties which they had of the Crown, men who had no connections at Westminster were able to increase their own local holdings. The indigenous land market was undoubtedly stimulated by the addition year by year of Crown lands.

In the first instance at least, a small number of influential families obtained relatively large blocks of former Crown land, but at the same time a wider group was composed of individuals who had

³⁴ City: PRO, E 318/7/236 and LP, xvii.881(23); Grey Friars: LP, xiv.i.1354(40), xix.i.443(10).

³⁵ Manor: PRO, SC 6/Hen. VIII/1756 m. 67, and a full survey at LR 2/219. College: E 318/27/1523; CPR, 1548-9, 311. Town: E 318/37/2019; CPR, 1548-9, 174-6.

³⁶ E.g. there are at least 20 particulars for two six-month periods alone in Edward's reign: PRO, E 36/258-9; LR 2/65.

acquired lands worth between £10 and £50 or £60 per annum. In addition, small bits of ex-Crown lands were held in the late 1550s by dozens of local yeomen and minor gentry, some of whom are barely identifiable. Without doubt the wealthy and well-connected received a very large slice of all Crown lands which had not gone to ecclesiastical bodies. Over half of these lands, by value, were in the hands of about a dozen families at the end of the 1550s.³⁷ But given the important fact that the majority of Crown lands was sold at contemporary market rates, it is hardly surprising that those with the most access to fluid wealth acquired the largest share of the lands available. Most of these major grantees had close ties with the central government. They were more likely therefore to have information about available land, favour at court and capital in the form of cash profits of office. Since most sales transactions for Crown lands specified payment in hand or within one year, available cash was a *sine qua non* of entry into the market for Crown lands in the first instance. Even for a grant of lands worth £20 per annum, four or five hundred pounds in cash would be necessary, as well as the inevitable fees.

Undoubtedly, Kentishmen who held office in the state converted their profits of office into lands in their home county. But it must be recalled that almost none of these large buyers was a 'new man' in the conventional sense. Most were scions of existing Kent gentry families, who prospered further through attendance at court or their tenure of office in the expanding Tudor bureaucracy. No new gentry families in Kent were established solely by the purchase of Crown lands. Minor gentry families occasionally became very wealthy gentry families. Those few cases involved Kentish gentlemen who held office in the royal administration, the best example being the Bakers of Sissinghurst. Yet, even the greatest accumulations of new lands were often transitory. The huge estates collected by Thomas Cromwell, John Dudley and the Wyatts all returned to the Crown through attainders. Lord Clinton sold off his Kentish estates before the end of Mary's reign. And the greatest lay estate of all, amassed by Sir Thomas Cheyney from the late 1530s to the 1550s, was dispersed by his son, Henry, Lord Cheyney, in the early years of Elizabeth's reign. At the same time quite a few of the major gentry

³⁷ Headed by Cheyney with over £700 per annum, Lord Cobham (about £300 per annum); Sir John Guildford, Anthony St. Leger, John Baker, Anthony Aucher and the heirs of Walter Hendley (each about £200 per annum); the Culpepers (about £175 per annum); John Gresham, Thomas Moyle and the Sidneys (each about £100 per annum); Robert Southwell (about £80 per annum).

families in Kent – like the Wottons – maintained or increased their wealth and estates without massive transfusions of former Crown lands. The profits of agriculture in mid- and late-sixteenth century England were at least as lucrative as the Crown land market. Established gentry families clearly did not all rush to buy Crown lands simply because they were available. Many potential buyers would inevitably find that there was no Crown land for sale where they wanted to add to their existing estate. Few bought merely for speculation.

Small estates based on Crown lands could be unstable as well. At least one moderate accumulation of newly-purchased lands returned to its source in the early 1550s under rather grisly circumstances. Thomas Arden, who was murdered in February 1551 at the hands of his wife and her lover, was memorialized in an anonymous tragedy, *Arden of Faversham*, first printed in 1592 (but based on earlier chronicle and ballad accounts). Arden was first a servant of Sir Edward North, of the Court of Augmentations, around 1540. He had also acquired a post as Commissioner of Customs for the busy port of Faversham, a fine house near the old abbey, and had served as jurat and mayor of the town. Before 1550 also, he had purchased lands worth about £40 per annum, most of which were ex-Faversham abbey properties in Faversham and in the neighbouring area. But by 1549, he had alienated the good burghers of Faversham by procuring the profits of the annual fair for himself, and his wife had taken up with another man. According to the chronicle, at least two of the men who conspired with Mrs. Arden to slay her husband had grievances against him over his high-handed land dealings in Faversham.³⁸ The play itself makes much of Arden's newly-granted estates. The closing speech recites the gruesome executions suffered by the conspirators, and the local legend which had grown up about the patch of ground behind Master Arden's house:³⁹

But this above the rest is to be noted
 Arden lay murdered in that plot of ground
 Which he by force and violence held from Reede
 And in the grass his body's print was seen
 Two years and more after the deed was done.

³⁸ Land purchases: *LP*, xv.831(17), xviii.ii.241(7), xix.i.610(14), xix.ii.800(36), xx.i.465(79); *CPR*, 1548–9, 23–4. See also Edward Jacob, *The History of the Town and Port of Faversham*, (1774), 112, 197, and Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicle*, (1808 edn.), iii, 1024–1030.

³⁹ The sailor Reede was, in the chronicle and the play, one of those who cursed Arden for taking the lease of a small plot of ground. In Act V, Sc. 5, e.g. Keith Sturges (ed.), *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies* (Pelican edn., 1969), which also prints the chronicle entry.

Other estates passed back to the Crown in less dramatic ways, while even more land passed into the channels of the local land market. By the middle years of Queen Elizabeth, ex-Crown lands were being dispersed to an ever-widening circle of local families. The disposal of Crown lands had not, in fact, upset the economic balance of Kentish society, nor had a new middle class or a rising gentry become established from the remnants of the dissolved monasteries. In part this was because most of the new landlords were already well established in the county. Equally important, the initial shock of the suppression of the abbeys and the Crown's acquisition of their lands and of other estates had been mitigated by the high degree of continuity among the actual occupiers of those estates. Most of the abbey lands had been farmed to lay farmers before the Dissolution, and in most cases the sitting tenants remained in possession, even as their landlords changed. When the Crown initially leased the sites of the dissolved monasteries, and when the leases of other lands made in the 1530s fell in, local men remained the obvious choice as farmers.⁴⁰ Most lands granted by the Crown came to their new owners not only with sitting tenants, but with their rents fixed at early-sixteenth century levels. Thus, for a generation at least, much of the economic benefit flowing from the disposal of a large share of the Crown estate passed into the pockets of tenant farmers who were most frequently local yeomen and lesser gentry. The new landowners normally had to wait several decades before they could take advantage of rising prices and land values to raise rents and fines on lands they had acquired from the Crown.

By 1559 a few Londoners, many gentry and many yeomen had gained from the re-distribution of Crown lands in Kent. But the early sixteenth-century structure of landholding – an absence of dominant noble estates, dozens of large and middling gentry estates, and large numbers of smallholders in several parts of the county – remained basically unchanged as Elizabeth ascended the throne. If there was a trend towards a greater consolidation of estates in gentry hands, it was enhanced rather than created by the sudden

⁴⁰ Between 1537 and 1547 there were about 40 Crown leases of ex-monastic properties worth £10 per annum or more each, and nine of these were of monastic sites (enrolled leases in PRO, E 315/209–17). Continuity among farmers can be seen by comparing the tenants noted in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, the 1536 minister's account (e.g. PRO, SC 6/Hen. VIII/1755) and the pre-Dissolution accounts of Christ Church Priory (Canterbury Cathedral Lib., Misc. Accts. 16, fos. 102–150^v) with later ministers' and receivers' accounts and with Canterbury Chapter records (Canterbury Cathedral Lib., Reg. U and Chapter Receivers' Accts. 1 and 3). See also Zell, thesis, 233–6.

availability of Crown lands on the market. If anything, the acquisition of new estates of whatever provenance by some Kentish gentry families was a consequence of their improving economic position – not its cause.

TABLE I
Kent Crown Lands: Types of Grants¹

<i>Type of Grant</i>	<i>1536–1539</i>	<i>1540–1546 (Dec.)</i>	<i>1547–1553 (July)</i>	<i>1553–1558 (Nov.)</i>
Gifts	10 (48%)	9 (9.9%)	7 (13%)	9 (27%)
Part-gifts	2 (9.5%)	4 (4.4%)	5 (9.3%)	2 (6.1%)
Exchanges	7 (33%)	13 (14.3%)	12 (22.2%)	1 (3%)
Sales	2 (9.5%)	65 (71.4%)	26 (48.1%)	21 (63.6%)
Fee-farm grants	–	–	4 (7.4%)	–
Totals:	21	91	54	33

¹ Sources: Patent roll entries in *LP, passim*, and *CPR, Edward VI and Philip and Mary, passim*. Excluded are grants for life terms only, and restorations of lands to attainees in Mary's reign, which raised £5166. Included are grants which included much non-Kent property.

TABLE II
Initial Grantees of Crown Lands in Kent, 1536–1558¹

1. Courtiers and high officials, non-Kent residents	21 (19%)
2. Minor Crown officials, non-Kent residents	10 (9%)
3. Londoners	14 (12.5%)
4. Other non-Kentishmen	5 (4.5%)
5. Kentish yeomen and lesser gentry	20 (18%)
6. Kent gentry of families holding county or full-time Crown office	41 (37%) ²
Total	112

² This final category includes Kentish gentry families whose members have held local office (e.g. as JPs) as well as those who were full-time officials in the central government (like John Baker and Thomas Moyle). If the official group who was of Kentish background were included (as they might well be) under 'courtiers and high officials', that group of grantees would grow to over 30 per cent of the total.