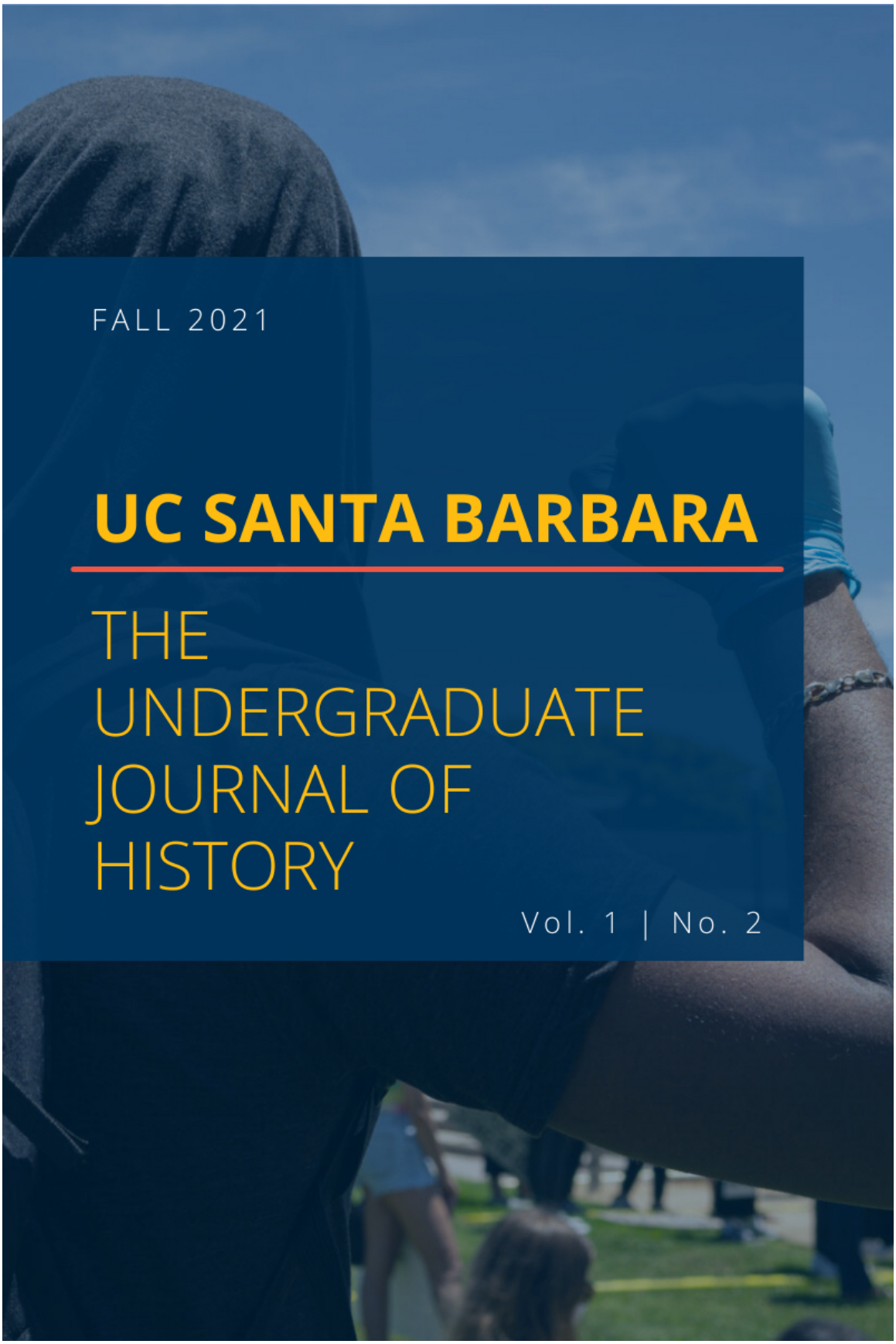

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Website
https://undergradjournal.history.ucsb.edu/

Email
Undergrad.journal@history.ucsb.edu

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Cover Image

On the cover, a protestor wearing nitrile gloves and holding his fist, 31 May 2020.
Credit: Sicheng Wang | Daily Nexus.

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Articles

The Interwoven Nature of the Changing English Aristocracy and their Country Houses, 1700-1890

John Young

Upon visiting the famous Mentmore Towers[1] in Buckinghamshire in 1880, poet Henry James famously remarked that "the house is a huge modern palace, filled with wonderful objects... All of them are precious and many are exquisite."[2] Mentmore Towers belonged to the Rothschild family. It was a typical example of a nineteenth-century country house residence of a 'new' English aristocracy member, who rose to power and often unsettled those older landed elite families who had established their wealth and displayed their prestige through the country house.

To understand the complicated and interwoven nature of the English aristocracy and the country house, one must first grasp the ancient institution of the country house and the political power tied to it under the feudal system. Country estates were initially established under the feudal system when a monarch would give a tract of land and a title to a family, who then built themselves a seat of power on that land, often known as a country house. Traditionally, the country house was owned and lived in by members of the old "landed gentry" class, referred to in the context of this paper as the "old aristocracy." This meant that nearly every occupant of English country houses before 1750, save for domestic staff, had a title such as Earl or Duke and belonged to a historic English family. For instance, the Earls of Carlisle lived in "Castle Howard," on their landed estate, using it as their ancestral seat for generations.[3] Under the feudal system, owning a country estate gave members of the old aristocracy incredible political power. John Martin Robinson argues that "For many centuries, from the Middle Ages onwards, the ownership of land was the only sure base of power and influence in England."[4] As the sole landowners, landed elites rented out portions of their country estates to feudal villagers to use collected rents as passive income. This gave them tremendous political power over villagers who did not own the land. Unsurprisingly, in *A Plea for a Constitution*, John Austin, Esq. wrote that throughout English history, "A large and important section" of landed elites were either themselves members or connected "by various family relations" to "members of the upper house" of the English government.[5] As expected, landed elites used their country houses as direct symbols of this political power. David Cannadine and Jeremy Musson suggest that landed elites used their country houses as political "powerhouses," furnishing rooms such as great halls designed explicitly for rent collection and other political functions in a direct physical manifestation of their political power.[6] Under this feudal system, since "the only capital" was land, so long as this remained a constant, "the territorial aristocracy were the exclusive masters of the country."[7] However, few things in history remain constants. Once Britons became fed up with the prestige, political power, and estate-based laws of the landed old aristocracy, this all started to change through the Reform Act of 1832 and new economic opportunities leading to the rise of the new, untitled aristocracy. As time-shifted, so too did the English aristocracy as a whole, and with it, the uses, forms, and occupants of the country house also shifted.

I seek to answer two broad questions: What were the political, social, and economic changes to the aristocracy in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and how did they affect the traditional English country house? I answer these questions by intertwining historical developments in the English aristocracy with histories of the changing nature of the country

house through the use of two main forms of primary sources. First, a myriad of period and contemporary sketches, designs, images, floorplans, and descriptions of specific country houses are used to establish the norm for country houses during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and how these norms changed over time. These images and sketches were created either to display the country house to the broader public or act as a manual for those purchasing or constructing country estates. They are found in both contemporary and original magazines and books. Second, books, periodicals, and political pamphlets from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are used to contextualize changes to the aristocracy during this period. These primary sources were often created as part of the nineteenth-century political reform movement or by English commentators to track developments in the English aristocracy. In the context of this paper, these sources were found primarily using the Hathi Trust database. By melding these two distinct types of primary sources together, one can effectively track how changes to the nature of the English aristocracy caused and assisted modifications to the English country house and vice versa.

Historians and researchers have studied the changing nature of the country house and the changing nature of the English aristocracy as individual topics. I add to that work by suggesting that many trends seen in country houses were directly linked to changes within the aristocracy itself. John Martin Robinson argues that the country house gave one "power and influence, economic security, independence, and an established position in society."[8] So much so that "anyone who made money by whatever means" always "invested the proceeds in a country estate and country house."[9] David Cannadine and Jeremy Musson have argued that the landed elite used their mansions as a "prodigious canvas for further ornamentation" to show their political power and wealth.[10] Regarding the changing nature of the English aristocracy, Cannadine and Musson claim that the "shifting sands of agricultural depression, inflation, and taxation of inherited wealth" led to the downfall of traditional landed families.[11] Here I assess changes to the country house through a socioeconomic lens, focusing on the rise of the 'new' aristocracy and how their presence transformed it.

This paper shows that changes to the English country house and developments to the English aristocracy were intimately linked. The article discusses how negative attitudes toward the landed elite in the first decades of the nineteenth-century set the stage for the Reform Act of 1832, which shifted political power from solely landed elites, forcing them to share power with the ordinary people. This meant that by the mid-nineteenth century, country houses were no longer used as the political power bases they had once been. Second, starting in the early eighteenth century, new economic opportunities led to an increase in "new" and untitled members of the aristocracy occupying country houses for the first time. I further explore the rise of this "new" aristocracy as an important development in the third section. Here, I show that by the mid-to-late nineteenth century, these families altered the country house to suit their own specific needs and lifestyles by creating more personal and private spaces to display their wealth. The paper concludes with a discussion of how the rise of the new aristocracy led to either indifference or emulation from the old aristocracy in the late nineteenth century. We see some members of the old aristocracy attempting to remodel their country houses in accordance with the tastes of the new aristocracy, often leading to financial ruin.

A Political Shift

The Reform Act of 1832 caused the political power of landed elite families to dwindle by affecting the institution of the country house that, as seen above, was a mainstay of the old aristocracy's political power. This, in turn, caused families to use the country house in more ceremonial ways and less as a physical manifestation of political power for conducting

governance. We can observe this in changes made to the interiors of houses and a decrease in country houses with feudal lands attached to them. Ultimately, the Reform Act of 1832 was passed as a part of declining attitudes by the ordinary people towards the prestige, political power, and estate-based laws of landed elites in the early nineteenth century.

Declining attitudes of the ordinary people towards the landed aristocracy set the stage for the Reform Act of 1832 to cause a shift in political power that affected the country house. Many people increasingly started to dislike the claims of prestige and superiority made by the landed aristocracy. Nineteenth-century author, William Mitchell, penned an article in the *Yorkshire Tribune* entitled "Our Aristocracy," where he claimed that the landed elite imagined themselves as "shrouded in the darkness of the Middle Ages." And that their claims of descent from nobility was one of the most "incomprehensible absurdities" of modern times.[12] Mitchell claimed that the old aristocracy should be replaced with "an aristocracy of merit" that exuded "patriotism, devotion, and capacity", not claims to noble birth.[13] Mitchell's worlds illustrate people's frustration with the idea that traditional landed elites were somehow better than ordinary people because they were born with a specific name. This was not the only thing people began to dislike about landed elites, and their political power also angered many.

At the same time, many English people also became disenfranchised with the political power and overwhelming legislative participation of the landed elites. A series of translated works by French authors in 1844 talking about the English nobility includes essays with titles such as "The great Proprietors, having the control of legislation, devised laws which tended to their aggrandisement" and "Additional Acts Parliament passed" to "exempt themselves from taxation."[14] The same authors expressed their hope that the aristocracy might "resign their noxious privileges."[15] These authors demonstrate the widely-held attitude that people were tired of landed elites' political power. Other than political power and claims of nobility, many people increasingly started to attack the very rules that had allowed landed elites to keep their country houses for so long.

As part of declining attitudes towards the landed elite class, English people attacked the estate-based laws of landed elites. This included the laws of entail[16] and primogeniture.[17] Primogeniture was designed to "preserve large estates in aristocratic England"[18] while entail "supported a landed aristocracy" by ensuring that estates stayed within the same family for generations. In 1844, French authors published a series of translated essays entitled "The Aristocracy of Britain and the Laws of Entail and Primogeniture," where they claimed that "not only the law of entail but the law of primogeniture" should be "abolished," and that the abolition of these laws would "turn the scale of legal right."[19] Without these laws, landed elites' ability to keep their estates and use them for political power would be in danger. So, those who increasingly disliked the aristocracy attacked these laws in the hopes of disenfranchising the landed aristocracy from their large estates. Ultimately, these attacks provided the context of the Reform Act of 1832. This catalyst directly caused the political shift away from landed elites and changed how they used the country house.

The Reform Act of 1832 was the catalyst that took political power away from landed elites through the disenfranchisement of 'rotten boroughs' and its damage to the feudal system. In 1847, Auguste Laugel wrote in *England, Political and Social,* that after the passage of the Reform Act, "the lords have felt their political power slipping slowly from them."[20] To accomplish this, the Reform Act disenfranchised 56 boroughs known as "rotten boroughs."[21] Laugel remarked that post-Reform Act, "a great lord" could no longer give rotten boroughs "to a poor relative or sell to a rich one."[22] This loss damaged the ability of landed elites to control who represented them in Parliament, as they no longer "governed the house of commons indirectly" by sending their "creatures" there as elected members.[23] The Reform

Act also increased who could vote in elections by expanding property ownership to "tenant farmers and shopkeepers."[24] Land ownership had been "the only sure base of power and influence in England," as it ensured voting rights before 1832. As a result, many people who had become directly opposed to the prestige, political power, and estate-based laws of the landed elite class in the mid-nineteenth century were now able to vote for their demise in the Reform era.[25] This damaged the feudal system, as due in part to the Reform Act, many tenant farmers and shopkeepers who lived on feudal estates found themselves now in the ownership of their lands. Since much of the political power of landed elites was drawn from the feudal system, many landed elites found themselves losing their political power. The effects of this directly correlated to their uses of the country house.

After the landed elite class lost their political monopoly, most country houses no longer had feudal towns attached to their grounds, which had been directly tied to the political power of the old landed aristocracy. Before the Reform Act, most landed elites used their country houses to collect rent from peasants living on their land. Since the Reform Act gave "tenant farmers and shopkeepers" ownership of their property, many of these peasants suddenly found themselves free of feudal bonds. In 1847, Auguste Laugel wrote that Parliament had "facilitated as much as possible the complete enfranchisement of ancient village tenures," meaning that many feudal villages were now on common land.[26] This made practices like tenant farming in feudal villages "a relic of ancient servitude."[27] It was increasingly impractical for landed elites to rent out their lands to feudal peasants. Parliament also adjusted tax ratios to hurt those owning large feudal style estates, further decreasing the profitability of feudal lands.[28] This led to many older country houses no longer using their land in a feudal sense. In 1870, William Wilkinson wrote *Practical Treatise on House-building*, a book with dozens of old country houses that no longer contained any sort of feudal villages or tenures on their grounds.[29] Country houses built post-Reform Act rarely included the attachment of feudal lands. Ernest Newton's 1882 book *Sketches for Country Residences* lacks examples of houses built post-Reform Act with feudal lands attached to them.[30] The cessation of country houses being used for feudal land ownership also had implications extending into the interiors of the homes.

Because many landed elites lost the majority of their political power after the Reform Act of 1832, they increasingly used their country houses for ceremonial purposes instead of symbols of political power. Landed elites once used rooms like "great halls" and "state dining rooms" to exude political power in their country houses. Seventeenth-century houses including "Stokesay Castle" in Shropshire and "Birtsmorton Court" in Worcestershire all contained rooms and features distinctly related to political power, such as moats, parapets, and great halls for receiving feudal vassals.[31] "East Barsham Manor," another typical pre-political shift country house, was built entirely around a "great hall" that took up over half of the house's lower floor, a feature which would have explicitly been used under the feudal system for practices such as directly governing tenants.[32] Houses like Barsham were specifically built and designed to govern and show off one's political prestige. Country houses remodeled and built post-Reform Act were used more ceremonially. In the 1880s, architect J.J. Stevenson claimed that the "great hall and single chamber of the middle ages, with which even kings were content" had been replaced by "public rooms," not designed for political power.[33] Architect William Wilkinson's 1880 description of the country house of the landed noble "Honourable Lord Southampton" include rooms such as a "parlour," "sitting room," and "office," where once there would have been a great hall or medieval style dining room for feasting vassals and subjects.[34] Wilkinson describes a total of forty-five "recently erected" country houses, none of which contain rooms designed for direct political power in the feudal sense.[35] Since landed

elites had lost much of their political power, there was little point in continuing their country houses as bases for their political influence and prestige.

More Opportunities, More People

Starting in the first decades of the 1700s and extending until the mid-nineteenth century, a series of economic changes and opportunities created a 'new' class of English gentry known as the 'new aristocracy.' The new aristocracy affected the country house by investing the fortunes that they had accrued in country houses and estates. For the first time in English history, untitled persons who did not belong to historic English families occupied and built country houses. The economic changes which fostered the rise of the "new aristocracy" were most often the Industrial Revolution, the proliferation of the African slave trade in the 1700s, and Britain's abolishment of slavery in 1833. As seen above, before 1750, country houses were almost exclusively under the hold of titled members of the old aristocracy who had received their estates under the feudal system. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, works including William Wilkinson's 1870 book *Sketches of English Country Houses* depicted increasing numbers of country houses owned by untitled people.[36] These untitled people were the 'new aristocracy.'

The untitled nature of the new aristocracy made them a distinct group from the old landed gentry. By 1874, author Auguste Laugel called the new aristocracy "the aristocracy of money," citing them as a different group from the "aristocracy of birth," which had traditionally occupied country houses.[37] Indeed, the new aristocracy was an aristocracy based on wealth, not a title. While members of the old aristocracy were born into wealthy and landed families, many members of the new aristocracy came from humble backgrounds, making their fortunes in their lifetime. One of the main ways that members of the new aristocracy secured their fortunes was through the Industrial Revolution.

Britain's nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution was a critical economic change that assisted in the rise of the new aristocracy and their proliferation into country houses. In 1874, century commentator Auguste Laugel remarked that "In modern times, machinery, industry have created new wealth."[38] Laugel wrote that the Industrial Revolution produced "fortunate parvenus" who would have never become members of the aristocratic class "50 years ago."[39] Surveys of English Country houses such as *Beautiful Britain* detail many examples of country houses bought or built by members of the new aristocracy who secured their fortunes in the Industrial Revolution. Taplow Court was bought by "Mr Pascoe Grenfell," who was "of the great firm of tin and copper dealers."[40] Grenfell, who was not a member of the old landed gentry, bought Taplow Court from the Earl of Orkney after Grenfell made his fortune during the Industrial Revolution.[41] Titans of industry like Grenfell were not the only members of the new aristocracy who minted their fortunes due to the Industrial Revolution. Many members of the new aristocracy were bankers or merchants who owed their wealth to the Industrial Revolution.

As part of the Industrial Revolution, members of the new aristocracy rose to fortune as bankers, merchants, or businessmen. They then purchased or built country houses, affecting the nature of those who lived in country houses. "Tring House" was bought by an unnamed "head of a prominent banking family" in 1804.[42] The Rothschild family earned enough money from banking to build lavish country residences, including Mentmore Towers and Waddesdon Manor.[43] David Mlinaric and Derry Moore argue in *Great English Interiors* that there was a "rapidly expanding and very successful merchant class in London" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[44] As part of this, the Dutch merchant Vanneck family built and occupied "Heveningham Hall" in 1777.[45] Although originally from the Netherlands, the

Vanneck family emigrated to England, made their fortune as merchants, and became members of the 'new' aristocracy, using their newfound wealth to build and occupy a lavish country estate. While members of the new aristocracy like the Rothschilds and the Vannecks made the fortunes that put them in country houses as hard-working business people, other members of the new aristocracy turned to more sinister forms of income.

Profits from the proliferation of the African slave trade in the eighteenth century increasingly allowed many members of the new aristocracy to build and occupy country houses. In their book *Slavery and the British Country House*, Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann argue that "wealth deriving from the trade in and labour of enslaved Africans did affect the erection, renovation and occupation of a significant number of Britain's stately homes."[46] Dresser and Hann acknowledge that some members of the older landed classes could increase their declining fortunes through slavery. Still, it was mainly the New Aristocracy who solely used slavery-derived profits to elevate themselves into country estates for the first time. "Jones Views," an 1829 manuscript of English country houses, describes "Allerton Hall" as being purchased by "two opulent merchants" named James and John Hardman in the 1740s.[47] Searching the "Slave Voyages" database shows that James and John Hardman were not truly "opulent merchants," but owners of slave voyages.[48] At least two slave voyages originating in Liverpool, the site of Allerton, were owned by "John Hardman" and conveniently took place a few years before the Hardman family bought Allerton Hall.[49] The Hardman family had no landed title, used profits from slave voyages to procure enough wealth to purchase and live in Allerton Hall. Hugh Pringle built "Summer Hill," a country house seen on an eighteenth-century map of Liverpool,[50] after over profits from owning 14 confirmed slave voyages.[51] Pringle and the Hardman's would not have been members of the new aristocracy without profits from African Slavery. They used their payout to purchase and live in country houses, transforming who lived in country estates. After Britain abolished slavery in 1833, even more members of the new aristocracy used slave money to build and purchase country houses.

After Britain abolished slavery in 1833, some members of the new aristocracy used the massive payouts that they received to both construct and remodel country houses. When Britain abolished slavery, they gave some £20,000,000 in restitution to the owners of registered slaves. Many who received payouts quickly became members of the new aristocracy and invested their fortunes in country houses.[52] Using University College London's "Legacies of British Slave Ownership" Database, one finds numerous examples of this. The untitled Andrew Arcedeckne was awarded around 8,300 pounds from two large plantation claims in 1835.[53] In today's money, Arcedeckne received a sum of over 1 million pounds.[54] In the same year that he received this sum, Arcedeckne greatly "enlarged" his house "Glevering Hall" from a modest home to a small palace.[55] William John Bankes, another untitled slave owner, made claims to receive a payout from a plantation at St. Kitts.[56] It is unclear how much money Bankes personally received from this claim. Still, it is likely not a coincidence that Bankes commissioned an architect to overhaul his house, "Kingston Lacy, completely," only two years after slavery had been abolished and he had submitted his claim.[57] Arcedeckne, Bankes, and many others were not titled members of the old aristocracy. Yet, they used their slavery payouts to rise to wealth and engage in constructing and remodelling luxurious country houses.

Whether they made their fortunes through the Industrial Revolution, slave voyages or slavery payouts, new economic opportunities in the mid-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries allowed members of the new aristocracy to amass their fortunes. These untitled members of the new aristocracy then affected the country house by increasingly building and occupying country houses, which had never before been seen in Britain's history. These

families were different from the traditional members of the aristocracy - they had no titles and often rose to wealth in a single generation.

New People, New Wants

The rise of the 'new aristocracy' by the mid-nineteenth century and their subsequent proliferation into the country house was an important aristocratic development. By the late nineteenth century, these members of the new aristocracy transformed the country house by increasing spending on country house luxuries such as servants, transforming domestic spaces, remodeling or tearing down older country houses, turning interior rooms into private family spaces, and collecting more fine art to display in their mansions. It must be mentioned that many of the new aristocracy's changes to the country house, including in the domestic sphere, influenced and were influenced by changes brought about by the burgeoning Victorian middle class, as many members of the new aristocracy who gained considerable purchasing power likely brought their middle-class sensibilities about family and space into the great houses they bought and constructed. In *The Country House Past, Present, Future*, David Cannadine and Jeremy Musson argue that "the mansions of the landed class" were a "prodigious canvas for further ornamentation."[58] As such, by the mid-nineteenth century, the new aristocracy had altered their country houses to fit their specific lifestyles and needs by forming more private and personal spaces to display their wealth. To fully grasp how the new aristocracy could accomplish these changes, one must first understand the increased levels of wealth that the new aristocracy enjoyed compared to their older landed counterparts.

Members of the new aristocracy both had and spent more money than their older landed counterparts, which allowed them to accomplish their alterations to the country house. In his 1897 memoir *Bric-a-Brac*, Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild remarked that members of the new aristocracy often had "greater means in their command" than older landed families.[59] In 1847, Auguste Laugel contemplated in *England, Political and Social,* that "the union of aristocracy and wealth has become even more intimate in our days," implying that the proliferation of a wealthier New Aristocracy made the term "aristocracy" synonymous with "wealth" instead of with landed titles. [60] Both Laugel and Rothschild recognized that, as a whole, the new aristocracy was much wealthier than the aristocracy of old. Laugel went on to comment that by the mid-nineteenth century, "however noble one may be, one must be rich."[61] Because members of the new aristocracy enjoyed much greater wealth than many of their landed counterparts, they could spend their money on transformations of their country houses. In accordance with this, members of the new aristocracy increased spending on servants and other domestic luxuries.

The new aristocracy transformed their country houses through increased spending on domestic 'luxuries' like servants. Domestic servants had always played a significant role in the country house -- the 17th century household of "the Right Honourable Richard, Earl of Dorset," a member of the old aristocracy, had a small army of around fifty staff.[62] However, statistics from 1835 provided by the London Statistical Society suggest an increase in spending of sixty-one million pounds on luxury items like carriages and domestic servants by members of the new aristocracy. Domestic servants increased in number by 18,037 between 1820-1832.[63] It was members of the new aristocracy who were responsible for this increase in spending. This spending increase took place during economic changes like the Industrial Revolution, which helped many members of the new aristocracy rise to power. The new aristocracy also had considerably more cash flow than other members of the gentry. Thus, it is not a stretch to conclude that members of the new aristocracy were responsible for increased spending on luxuries and servants, as seen in reports from the London Statistical Society. As

further proof that the new aristocracy increased spending on luxuries like servants, it must be considered that the new aristocracy often enlarged and stratified domestic spaces in their country houses.

Because they spent more money on domestic luxuries like servants, the new aristocracy transformed and enlarged the domestic spaces of their country houses. John Martin Robinson argues that the country house usually included "separate and increasingly elaborate servants' quarters by the mid-nineteenth century." Still, he fails to connect that it was primarily members of the new aristocracy and their increased spending on servants who made these changes.[64] Henry Portman, a member of the new aristocracy, enlarged the servants' quarters at Bryanston house in the mid-nineteenth century to be "very spacious and convenient". He also had his domestic spaces "contained in a separate building on the west side of the house" attached only by an enclosed passage.[65] By 1870, armaments inventor William Armstrong transformed the domestic spaces of his home Cragside into a separate building with three floors and domestic rooms such as a "still room," designed for beverage distillations.[66] These men are two typical examples of many. Members of the new aristocracy like Portman and Armstrong caused architect J.J. Stevenson to claim in 1880 that country houses must now have "a complicated arrangement of servants."[67] Because of their wealth and the increased capital they spent on servants, the new aristocracy completely overhauled the domestic spaces inside their country homes. This trend extended into the country house as a whole.

Members of the new aristocracy like Henry Portman and William Armstrong often tore down and rebuilt ancient country houses to be much larger. In *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry*, engraver William Watts described how Henry Portman gutted and enlarged "Bryanston House" after his grandfather bought it from a member of the old landed gentry.[68] Portman had Bryanston House "entirely new built of freestone," within viewing distance of the site of the ancient mansion.[69] Portman rebuilt Bryanston to be "one hundred and twelve feet by one hundred," considerably more significant than its predecessor.[70] Between 1870 and 1885, William Armstrong enlarged his country house "Cragside" from a "humble shooting lodge" into a grand country residence.[71] In his 1865 book *The Gentleman's House*, a book designed to assist the new aristocracy in constructing and managing their country houses, Robert Kerr wrote an entire section devoted to the proper ways to enlarge older country homes.[72] Kerr included chapters on how to "rearrange a whole plan" and how to "enlarge principal rooms inwards."[73] After transforming the domestic spaces and the plans of their country houses, members of the new aristocracy like Portman and Armstrong turned the interiors of their country homes into increasingly private, family-oriented spaces.

The new aristocracy made the interior spaces of their country houses more private oriented towards the family. Where one might have found great halls and chamber bedrooms in the past, the country houses of the new aristocracy often included uniquely family-oriented spaces such as a "morning room" or a "garden room."[74] Here, the influence of the middle class is most apparent, as many sought to add rooms such as a "wash house, brewhouse, scullery and 'offices'" to their homes.[75] In his remodeling of the lavish Bryanston House, Henry Portman included a "music room, twenty-five feet by forty," and a "library."[76] At Cragside, William Armstrong implemented a study and a "garden alcove room."[77] The country house became a sanctuary where a family lived, not the seat of a great Lord. In *The Gentleman's House*, Robert Kerr devoted sections to private and family-oriented rooms like the "music room" and the "private theatre."[78] Kerr even provided sections for how to dismantle rooms that had now gone out of taste.[79] While rooms such as the "state dining room" still existed in many of their houses, as a whole, the new aristocracy placed much more emphasis on privacy and family than the old aristocracy in the interior spaces of their country residences.[80] This

meant that members of the new aristocracy began to collect more fine art for private display in their country houses.

The new aristocracy increasingly used the country house as canvases to display fine art that they collected. Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild, a member of the new aristocracy and avid art collector, claimed in his 1897 memoir *Bric-a-Brac* that the "mania for old art has shifted from the descendants of the old to the founders of the new families."[81] Like Rothschild, members of the new aristocracy spent small fortunes on art to display in their country residences, like Rothschild's Waddesdon Manor. In *Bric-a-Brac*, Rothschild remembers the purchase of dozens of artworks for his country estate. When recalling his purchase of some "Bouchers," Rothschild remembered that his "heart fluttered wildly," as he "already saw the Bouchers on my wall."[82] Cannadine and Musson argue that country houses often acted as "vessels for the display of collections" but do not conclude that it was explicitly the new aristocracy who treated the country house in this way.[83] As proof that it was the new aristocracy, Rothschild claimed that because the new aristocracy had "greater means in their command," they often purchased their art from members of the old aristocracy, who sold the art as a "means of replenishing depleted fortunes."[84] Thus, members of the new aristocracy, like Ferdinand de Rothschild, transformed their country houses into private places to display their art.

Emulation or Indifference?

By the late-nineteenth century, the 'old' aristocracy responded to the rise of the 'new aristocracy' and their subsequent transformations of the English country house with either disapproval or emulation. Those in the old aristocracy who disapproved saw the 'new aristocracy' as nothing more than wealthy upstarts and viewed their transformations to the country house as vain luxuries. Members of the old aristocracy who sought to emulate the trends set by the new aristocracy in their country houses often remodeled or changed their own homes. This emulation often led to bankruptcy because most members of the old aristocracy lacked the funds possessed by the new aristocracy.

Some members of the old aristocracy were unconcerned with the rise of the new aristocracy, whom they viewed disapprovingly as nothing more than wealthy upstarts. In his 1874 book *England, Political and Social*, Auguste Laugel wrote on reactions of the old aristocracy to the rise of the new aristocracy, wherein he claimed there was "no hostility between hereditary wealth and parvenu wealth,"[85] because to the old landed gentry, the new aristocracy was simply "bourgeois wealth."[86] To many in the old landed class, the new aristocracy had money but little else. Laugel conceded that the new aristocracy was as "rich as" or even "richer than" the "descendants of the old families." However, many members of the old aristocracy still felt that their titles and ancient family names put them above the new aristocracy, as no amount of up-jumped wealth could hope to match generations of inherited history.[87] Many members of the old landed class, "when the real sovereign is the richest man when the old races have become the vassals of speculators when those who give their lives are replaced by those who buy the lives of others, the English ideal will become dimmed and finally extinct."[88] Those who disapproved or were indifferent to the rise of the new aristocracy also looked down upon their transformations to the English country house, which they saw as excess luxury.

Those in the old gentry who disapproved of the rise of the new aristocracy felt that the country house trends set by the new aristocracy were excessively luxurious. In the mind of Auguste Laugel, to the old aristocracy, the new aristocracy was "imprisoned within mansions of stone" and "vainly set its wits to work to create new enchantments." Laugel then remarked that the new aristocracy "adorns its habitations, makes comfortable and easy, perhaps too easy

and too uniform. Thick carpets deaden the footfall, a thousand nothings, at first superfluous, become indispensable. But high art rarely lights with rays these artificial lives, this domestic pomp, this humdrum luxury."[89] In the minds of some of the old aristocracy, art collection and increased luxury, both country house trends set by the new aristocracy were viewed negatively. Indeed, to many old aristocracy members, the new aristocracy's changes to English country houses were artificial, excessive, and superfluous. However, not all families in the old aristocracy had such opposing viewpoints of the new aristocracy -- some attempted to emulate the very trends which their fellow landed gentry disapproved.

Other members of the old aristocracy attempted to revamp their own country houses in the nineteenth century to emulate those of the new aristocracy, usually leading to financial ruin. Cannadine and Musson argue that the "shifting sands of agricultural depression, inflation, and taxation of inherited wealth--along with the rising cost of staff wages" caused families in the old aristocracy to end in financial ruin. Still, they overlook that these people often attempted to emulate the precedents set by the new aristocracy.[90] Members of the old aristocracy, like the 6th Duke of Devonshire, built the "Sculpture Gallery at Chatsworth" to keep up with the increased art collection of the new aristocracy.[91] While this worked for him, many in the old aristocracy who attempted emulation ended in financial frustration. Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild remembered the "Duke of Buckingham," whose "reckless extravagance had brought him into the bankruptcy court."[92] The duke's "wish to be without rivals" (members of the new aristocracy) led to his downfall. Rothschild recalled, "Many an impoverished landlord" attempted to "indulge in the fashionable amusements of the day" to emulate the country houses and lifestyles of members of the new aristocracy and ultimately bankrupted themselves.[93] Most of those in the old aristocracy simply lacked the funds required for such extravagance.

Most members of the old aristocracy were unsuccessful in their attempted emulations of the new aristocracy and their country houses because of budgetary deficits. Rothery and Stobart suggest that it was the "careful management of spending" and eschewing "ruinously lavish lifestyles" that prevented older aristocratic families from "the burden of debt."[94] Most members of the old aristocracy who attempted to emulate the ostentatious nature of the new aristocracy certainly did not engage in "careful management of spending."[95] As seen before, the new aristocracy had considerably "greater means in their command" than the old aristocracy, and many of their transformations to the country house revolved around this increased wealth.[96] Because many members of the new aristocracy owed their fortunes to economic success and not hereditary wealth, they were the only ones able to afford such lavish changes to their country houses. When members of the old aristocracy, with their smaller budgets, attempted to emulate these extravagant changes, they often found themselves in financial ruin.

Conclusion

From the early-eighteenth to the late-nineteenth century, changes to the English country house closely paralleled developments to the English aristocracy. The Reform Act of 1832 seriously crippled the political power of the old aristocracy, enfranchising for the first time many who had lived on feudal land attached to country houses. Because of this, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, the country house was used less as a physical manifestation of feudal-era political power and more in a ceremonial, personal context. Rooms once used for political power through practices such as tenant rent collection like the great hall went out of style, and country houses were less often attached to feudal lands. Beginning in the early-eighteenth century, the proliferation of the African slave trade, the Industrial Revolution, and Britain's

1833 abolishment of slavery led to the rise of new, untitled members of the aristocracy. For the first time in English history, these members of the 'new aristocracy' started to occupy English country houses. Families like the Rothschilds, Grenfells, and Hardmans all rose to be members of the new aristocracy and invested in luxurious country houses.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the rise of the new aristocracy and their spread into country houses was in and of itself an aristocratic development. These members of the new aristocracy tailored their country houses to their exact wants and needs, sometimes mirroring the middle classes. Increased wealth allowed the new aristocracy to increase spending on luxuries and servants, remodel and enlarge country houses, and create private family-oriented spaces to display their fine art. At the same time, the old aristocracy responded to this rise of the new aristocracy and their changes to the country house with either contempt or emulation. Some members of the old aristocracy felt like the new aristocracy was nothing more than the wealthy bourgeoisie and thought their changes to the country house were excess and superfluous. Other members of the old aristocracy sought to emulate the flashy changes to the country house brought about by the new aristocracy. This often led to financial ruin, as most members of the old aristocracy lacked the funds that had allowed the new aristocracy to accomplish their transformations to the English country house as a whole.

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[1] For an aerial video of Mentmore Towers

[2] Percy Lubbock, *The Letters of Henry James*, Vol. 1 (London, England: Macmillan, 1920), p. 76.

[3] David Cannadine and Jeremy Musson, *The Country House Past, Present, Future: Great Houses of the British Isles* (New York City, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2018), pp. 42-3.

[4] John Martin Robinson, "The Function, Planning, & Social Use of the English Country House." In *The English Country House from the Archives of Country Life*, ed. Mary Miers (New York, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2009), p. 73.

[5] John Austin, *A Plea for the Constitution* (London: J. Murray, 1859), p. 12.

[6] Austin, *A Plea for the Constitution* (1859), p. 81.

[7] Auguste Laugel, *England, Political and Social*. Trans. Professor James Morgan Hart (New York, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1874), p. 90.

[8] Robinson, "The Function, Planning, & Social Use of the English Country House," p. 73.

[9] Robinson, "The Function, Planning, & Social Use of the English Country House," p. 73.

[10] David Cannadine and Jeremy Musson, *The Country House Past, Present, Future: Great Houses of the British Isles*, p. 132.

[11] Cannadine and Musson, *The Country House*, p. 356.

[12] William Mitchell, "Our Aristocracy," *The Yorkshire Tribune*, September 1886, pp. 193-4.

[13] Mitchell, "Our Aristocracy," 1886, p. 196.

[14] Passy, "The Great Proprietors, having control of legislation, devised laws which tended to their own aggrandisement," "Additional Acts of Parliament passed by the owners of the soil, assembled in Parliament, to exempt themselves from taxation," in *The Aristocracy of Britain and the Laws of Entail and Primogeniture, Judged by Recent French Writers; Being Selections from the Works of Passy, Beaumont, O'Connor, Sismondi, Buret, Guizot, Constant, Dupin, Say, Blanqui, and Mignet: Showing the Advantage of the Law of Equal Succession. With Explanatory and Statistical Notes.*, trans. Anonymous (London: G. & J. Dyer, 1844), p. i-ii.

[15] Passy, "The Great Proprietors," (1844), p. i.

[16] "Entail" meant that a tract of land that was given to a landed family would be granted "forever to his direct descendants." In the case of no descendants, the land would return to the crown. (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Entail," Britannica (Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998).)

[17] According to the Encyclopedia of North Carolina, "primogeniture" meant that the oldest son was always "heir to a family estate," regardless of income or any external factors. Donna J. Spindle, "Primogeniture," NCpedia (State Library of North Carolina, 2006).

[18] Spindle, "Primogeniture," (2006).

[19] Gustave de Beaumont, "Not only the Law of Entail, but the Law of Primogeniture, must be abolished," "Effect of the abolition of the Law of Primogeniture, so as to turn the scale of legal right," in *The Aristocracy of Britain and the Laws of Entail and Primogeniture, Judged by Recent French Writers; Being Selections from the Works of Passy, Beaumont, O'Connor, Sismondi, Buret, Guizot, Constant, Dupin, Say, Blanqui, and Mignet: Showing the Advantage of the Law of Equal Succession. With Explanatory and Statistical Notes,* p. iv.
[20] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* pp. 113-4.
[21] "Rotten boroughs" were boroughs with parliamentary representation that had been established during the medieval period. With urbanization in the eighteenth and nineteenthcentury, the only people left living in these places were landed elites. Landed elites would purchase these boroughs and control who was elected to represent said borough in parliament. ("The Reform Act of 1832," UK Parliament (UK Parliament), accessed February 21, 2021.).
[22] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* pp. 113-4.
[23] Laugel, *England, Political and Social*, p. 136.
[24] "The Reform Act of 1832," UK Parliament.
[25] John Martin Robinson, "The Function, Planning, & Social Use of the English Country House," p. 73.
[26] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* p. 99.
[27] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* p. 99.
[28] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* p. 99.
[29] William Wilkinson, *English Country Houses : Forty-Five Views and Plans of Recently Erected Mansions, Private Residences, Parsonage-Houses, Farm-Houses, Lodges, and Cottages : with a Practical Treatise on House-Building*. (London: James Parker and Co., 1870).
[30] Ernest Newton, *Sketches for Country Residences : Designed to Be Constructed in the Patent Cement Slab System of W.H. Lascelles, 121 Bunhill Row, Finsbury, London, E.C.* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1882).
[31] Miers, *The English Country House from the Archives of Country Life,* p. 33.
[32] Miers, *The English Country House from the Archives of Country Life,* p. 55.
[33] J.J Stevenson, *House Architecture* (London: Macmillan, 1880), quoted in Christina Hardyment, *Behind the Scenes Domestic Arrangements in Historic Houses* (London: National Trust Enterprises Limited, 1997), p. 24.
[34] Wilkinson, *English Country Houses,* pp. xxv-xxvi
[35] William Wilkinson, *English Country Houses,* p. A1.
[36] William Wilkinson, *English Country Houses*, table of contents.
[37] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* p. 324.
[38] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* p. 91.
[39] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* p. 112.
[40] The Werner Company, *Beautiful Britain; the Scenery and Splendors of the United Kingdom, Royal Residences, Homes of Princes and Noblemen, Palaces, Castles and Stately Houses, Beauties of Mountain, Lake and River* (Chicago, Illinois: The Werner Company, 1895), p. 102.
[41] The Werner Company, *Beautiful Britain* p. 102.
[42] The Werner Company, *Beautiful Britain*, p. 104.
[43] David Mlinaric and Derry Moore, *Great English Interiors* (Munich, Germany: Prestel Publishing, 2018), p. 166.
[44] Mlinaric and Moore, *Great English Interiors*, p. 124.
[45] Mlinaric and Moore, *Great English Interiors*, p. 166.
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[47] John Preston Neale, *Jones' Views of the Seats, Mansions, Castles, Etc. of Nobleman And Gentlemen In ... Great Britain, Illustrated* (London, England: Jones, 1829), sequence 257.
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[49] "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Database," IDs 20706, 27129, 90009.
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[51] "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Database," Slave Voyages, IDs 90458, 90459.
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[57] "William John Bankes Physical Legacy Details," Legacies of British Slave-ownership.
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[60] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* 112.
[61] Laugel, *England, Political and Social,* 112.
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[66] Hardyment, *Behind the Scenes Domestic Arrangements in Historic Houses*, p. 25.
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[68] Watts, *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry,* plate 11.
[69] Watts, *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry,* plate 11.
[70] Watts, *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry,* plate 11.
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[79] Kerr, *The Gentleman's House,* pp. xx-xxi.
[80] Kerr, *The Gentleman's House,* pp. xx-xxi.
[81] Rothschild, Ferdinand de. *Bric-a-Brac*, 1897.
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[84] Cannadine and Musson, *The Country House*, p. 13.
[85] Cannadine and Musson, *The Country House Past*, p. 117.
[86] Cannadine and Musson, *The Country House*, p. 93.
[87] Cannadine and Musson, *The Country House*, p. 117.
[88] Cannadine and Musson, *The Country House*, p. 324.
[89] Cannadine and Musson, *The Country House*, p. 93.
[90] Cannadine and Musson, *The Country House*, 356.
[91] Goodall, *English House Style from the Archives of Country Life*, pp. 282-283.
[92] Rothschild, *Bric-a-Brac*, 1897, p. 13.
[93] Rothschild, *Bric-a-Brac*, 1897, p. 13.
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[96] Rothschild, *Bric-a-Brac*, 1897, p. 13.