

Women and estate management in the early eighteenth century:

Barbara Savile at Rufford Abbey, Nottinghamshire 1700-1734

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Abstract

There is a rich and increasing body of research pointing to the significant role elite women played in property management during the eighteenth century. In this paper we examine the contribution of an elite widow, Barbara Savile, to the management of her son Sir George Savile's extensive landholdings in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire from 1700 until her death in 1734. We establish that Barbara Savile had a deep understanding of estate business and was a shrewd judge of character, expertise on which both Sir George and his stewards relied. She scrutinised account books, commissioned surveys for rental reassessment, was instrumental in the negotiation of wood contracts and was closely involved in the practical management of many aspects of tree and woodland management.

Introduction

There is a growing volume of valuable research on women's relationships with property in Britain in the early modern period.¹ Amy Erickson established that women owned much more property in early modern Britain than historical accounts and the law might suggest.² Key papers have emphasised the role of women as moneylenders and as keen

¹ Amanda L. Capern, Briony McDonagh and Jennifer Aston (eds) *Women and the Land, 1500-1900* (Woodbridge, 2019); Briony McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape, 1700-1830* (Abingdon, 2018).

² Amy Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London, 1993); Amy Erickson, 'Possession – and the other one-tenth of the law: assessing women's

participants in the developing financial markets of the early eighteenth century.³

Christine Wiskin has stressed that ‘women *were* in business in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’ and had ‘genuine engagement with their economic world’.⁴ A recent critical review shows how women ‘overcame the barriers of gender, social status and circumstances of birth by exploiting the power of property’.⁵ The considerable contribution that women made to the management of landed estates in the medieval and early modern period through to the Restoration period has been highlighted by scholars such as Amanda Capern and Briony McDonagh.⁶ There is also a number of individual case studies of elite women which further establishes female involvement in eighteenth-century estate management.⁷

McDonagh’s recent book *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape, 1700-1830* makes a crucial intervention to understandings of the relationship between women and landownership in general and the roles of elite women in estate management in particular. She identifies female land ownership through examination of parliamentary

ownership and economic roles in early modern England’, *Women’s History Review*, 16.3 (2007), 369-385.

³ Anne Laurence, ‘Lady Betty Hastings, her half-sisters, and the South Sea Bubble: family fortunes and strategies’, *Women’s History Review*, 15.4 (2006), 533-540.

⁴ Christine Wiskin, ‘Businesswomen and financial management: three eighteenth-century case studies’, *Accounting, Business and Financial History*, 16.2 (2006), 143-161, p. 143.

⁵ Hannah Worthen, Briony McDonagh and Amanda Capern, ‘Gender, property and succession in the early modern English aristocracy: the case of Martha Janes and her illegitimate children’, *Women’s History Review*, 30.1, (2021), 49-68, p. 52.

⁶ Amanda L. Capern, ‘The landed woman in early modern England’, *Parergon*, 19.1 (2002), 185-214; McDonagh, *Elite Women*. See also Sandra Dunster, *Women of the Nottinghamshire Elite c.1720-1820* (Nottingham theses, 2003), <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/12083/1/288090.pdf>; Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats. Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox 1740-1832* (London 1995).

⁷ John Beckett, ‘Elizabeth Montagu: bluestocking turned landlady’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49.2 (1986), 149-64; Dunster, *Women of the Nottinghamshire Elite*, Ch. 7: Property; Ruth Larsen, ‘For want of a good fortune: elite single women’s experiences in Yorkshire, 1730-1860’, *Women’s History Review* 16.3 (2007), 387-401, Richard Goulding, ‘Henrietta Countess of Oxford’, *Transactions of the Thoroton Society* 27 (1923), <http://www.nottshistory.org.uk/articles/tts/tts1923/oxford/oxford1.htm>

enclosure claims in the later eighteenth century. There were more women landowners – 10% on average across her sample - than the gendered property laws might suggest and considerable evidence that women used the law to protect their property from male relatives. McDonagh highlights how the small yet significant number of elite female landowners managed their own property, many actively, some as married women. She also draws attention to the further hidden estate-management roles of women who did not own land themselves. That might be as wives managing land alongside or in place of absent husbands, widows managing estates for their male heirs while they were minors, or due to jointure provisions and longer term mother-son estate management relationships.

The complexities of estate management and the importance of the role of the steward or land agent have also been the subject of thorough research. Until recently, the management of landed estates in the long eighteenth century has frequently been regarded as a domain of men, either elite owners or their professional agents or employees.⁸ David Hainsworth's valuable assessment of the work of land agents, *Stewards, Lords and People: The Estate Steward and his World in Later Stuart England* published in 1992, emphasises this not only in its subtitle, but in its almost complete absence of discussion of the role of women in estate management.⁹ Recent work on the role of the

⁸ See for example, John Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914* (Oxford, 1986); Stephen Daniels and Charles Watkins, 'Picturesque landscaping and estate management: Uvedale Price at Foxley, 1770–1829' *Rural History* 2.2 (1991), 141-169; Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stroud, 1995); M. Hanson (ed.), *Ducal Estate Management in Georgian Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire: The Diary of William Gould 1783-1788* (Nottingham, 2006); Sarah Webster, 'Estate improvement and the professionalization of land agents on the Egremont estates in Sussex and Yorkshire, 1770-1835', *Rural History* 18.1 (2007), 47-69.

⁹ D. R. Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People. The Estate Steward and his World in Later Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1992).

land agent also tends to underplay the role of women.¹⁰ McDonagh, however, convincingly argues that in the period 1700-1830 elite women engaged more widely, deeply and expertly with estate management as landowners in their own right and as widows, mothers, wives and daughters than has been previously recognised. This intervention has encouraged reconsideration of the role of women as active and controlling participants in the management of property in the early eighteenth century.

The activities of elite female landowners incorporated legal and financial matters, such as keeping and checking accounts, managing and clearing debts, instigating ‘improvements’ with future generations in mind and ensuring evidence of property rights. Women also made day-to-day estate management decisions; interacted with stewards and tenants; collected or supervised the collection of rents; and commissioned estate surveys and lease agreements. In addition there has been considerable research on the roles that women, including female landowners, played in garden creation, use and representation, including their subversive engagements with more conventional garden spaces such as flower or walled gardens.¹¹ McDonagh makes arguments for the existence of ‘a specifically feminine spirit of estate improvement’ amongst some of her protagonists, combining personal religious commitment and community-oriented benevolence with a keenness to profit from agricultural modernisation.¹² It is a feature hinted at by other

¹⁰ See, for example, the following important recent collections: Carol Beardmore, Steven King and Geoff Monks (eds), *The Land Agent in Britain: Past, Present and Future* (Cambridge, 2016); Lowri Ann Rees, Ciarán Reilly, Annie Tindley (eds), *The Land Agent 1720-1920* (Edinburgh, 2018).

¹¹ Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats. Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge, 2013); Susan Groag Bell, ‘Women create gardens in male landscapes: a revisionist approach to eighteenth-century English garden history’, *Feminist Studies*, 16.3 (1990), 471-491.

¹² Briony McDonagh, ‘Women, enclosure and estate improvement in eighteenth-century Northamptonshire’, *Rural History*, 20.2 (2009), 143-162, p. 156.

authors although there is certainly evidence of other women deploying more stringent estate management measures mainly for family gain.¹³

In this paper we examine in detail the role of Barbara Savile in the management of the extensive Rufford estate in Nottinghamshire from 1700-1734 to establish insights into elite female participation. We are able to do this because of the survival of letters and correspondence between members of the Savile family, and, importantly, between Barbara Savile and estate employees. Estate records and diaries provide additional contextual information. This allows us to demonstrate the level of her detailed engagement in the management of a major estate. The paper has three major aims. First, we seek to establish Barbara Savile's involvement in managing the legal and financial rights of her children, both her son George as landowner and her two daughters, Anne and Gertrude. Second, we aim to explore and document her role in the day-to-day workings of the estate, investigating, in particular, her relationship with both her son and his estate stewards. We identify her keen understanding of the need to maintain precise control over the scale and design of estate plans and maps which were so important in establishing and maintaining landed power and influence. We also demonstrate how her personal knowledge of estate staff could be mobilised to solve competing demands over estate resources. The third main aim is to explore how her extensive knowledge and experience was used in tree and woodland management. Letters and estate accounts allow us to demonstrate that she was directly and crucially involved in negotiations with major ironmasters in the provision of wood for charcoal, and also contributed to negotiations over the sale of timber to the Navy. The paper demonstrates that Barbara Savile was an active protagonist and protector of estate resources and a formidable player and negotiator in its practical management.

¹³ *Ibid.*; Larsen, 'For want of a good fortune'.

Barbara Savile and her family

Barbara Savile (c.1660-1734) was the oldest of three daughters of a wealthy Newcastle merchant family. Her father was Thomas Jenison (1636-1676) who was Mayor of Newcastle in 1674.¹⁴ His wealth is indicated by the elaborate dining room at their Newcastle house with tapestry hangings, ‘damask tablecloths, a “flower’d Callico Carpitt”, cushions’ and a large collection of silver.¹⁵ Her mother Alice Emerson was the daughter and co-heir of another Newcastle merchant who served as Mayor in 1660 and owned farmland at Stanhope, Durham, and property in Newcastle. This family background ensured that Barbara was independently wealthy and gained knowledge and experience of trading and deal making.¹⁶ She married John Savile, rector of Thornhill, near Wakefield in Yorkshire, who was the second son of Henry Savile of Bowling, near Bradford, himself the youngest son of Sir George Savile of Thornhill.¹⁷ The Jenison family were already connected to the Savile’s through the marriage of John’s cousin Mary to Robert Jenison.¹⁸ In 1701, John Savile died, having served at Thornhill for almost 30 years.¹⁹ Four years later, Barbara Savile’s mother, Alice Jenison, died leaving Barbara co-heir with her two sisters to the family property in Durham and Newcastle. After the death of her sister, Elizabeth Jenison (spinster), Barbara co-managed this estate with her

¹⁴ Alternative spelling Jennison.

¹⁵ Durham University Probate Database DPR/I/1/1676/J2/1; Lawrence Robinson, *The Merchant Community of Newcastle upon Tyne 1660-1750* (Durham theses, 2019), p. 125. http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/13021/1/1_robinson_thesis.pdf?DDD17+

¹⁶ A. Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment: the Diaries of Gertrude Savile, 1721-1757* (Devon, 1997), p. 15.

¹⁷ Barbara Savile was John Savile’s second wife. His first wife, Elizabeth Tully, the daughter of Dr Thomas Tully, rector of Middleton in Teesdale, died childless in 1676 and the second marriage followed quickly.

¹⁸ J.W. Clay, ‘The Savile family’, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 25 (1920), 1-47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

sister Isabella Newton until 1728, when she empowered her sister ‘to act in all my Consens in the North for me without Limitation’.²⁰

John and Barbara Savile had three children, George (1678-1743), Anne (1681-1736) and Gertrude (1697-1758). Their son, George Savile, inherited the extensive Rufford (Nottinghamshire) and Thornhill (Yorkshire) estates in 1700 aged 22, and his baronetcy four years later on the death of his father’s cousin, Sir John Savile, 6th Baronet. The principal mansion was Rufford Hall (Abbey) on the fringes of Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. The Rufford estate was one of the largest in the county and consisted of almost 17,000 acres extending from the dry sandy soils of the Forest in the west to the heavy clay soils in the east. In 1700 there were around 10,800 acres of heathland, 4,531 acres of pasture, meadows and arable and 1,392 acres of valuable woodland and parks.²¹

Although her son George, 22, had matriculated and was studying at the Middle Temple when he inherited his estates in 1700, Barbara Savile continued to have a lively, practical involvement in their management for the next 34 years. Before we examine her estate management, we explore her concerns over the legal and financial rights of her three children: George, Anne and Gertrude. Barbara Savile entered George’s household with her youngest daughter, Gertrude, in 1701, after the death of her husband, the Reverend John Savile. Aged about 40, she quickly became a central figure at both Rufford Hall and the London house her son soon rented (and later purchased) in Golden Square. By 1703 Sir George was recording payments for housekeeping expenses to his mother. She received an annual payment of £250 in annuities from her son, expenses incurred on Sir

²⁰ In 1728 Barbara empowered her sister ‘to act in all my Consens in the North for me without Limitation’. DPRI/1/1706/J3/1; Letter of Attorney (copy) Barbara Savile to Mrs Isabella Newton, 14 September 1728. NA: DD/SR/212/3/45.

²¹ NA: DD/SR/227/130.

George's behalf in the running of Rufford and £100 'for maintenance of ye Coach'.²² She remained responsible for the domestic management of both Rufford Hall and Golden Square until the Baronet's marriage in 1722. Thereafter, the London house became the exclusive preserve of the Savile women and though Barbara continued to visit the Hall after 1722 – pressed to take advantage of 'Rufford sweet air' to assuage her 'shortness of breath' – Golden Square was her principal residence until a few years before her death in 1734.²³

Throughout her life, Barbara Savile was concerned for the welfare and financial security of all her children. She was careful to make arrangements to protect her eldest daughter's interests during her two marriages. Five years after George Savile inherited Rufford his sister Anne married Sir Nicholas Cole of Brancepeth Castle, County Durham and in 1706 Anne received £1000 from her brother as 'engaged... in ye marriage article'.²⁴ When Anne's husband died in 1711, she re-entered her brother's extended family circle, resident at both Rufford, where she paid board, and Golden Square. A second marriage in 1725 to the Flemish Catholic Baron D'Ongnyes took Anne abroad. The marriage, initially opposed by mother and brother on religious grounds, became strained through the feckless extravagance of the Baron. Barbara Savile worked tirelessly to secure her daughter's finances from the 'great bird of prey' as she dubbed him, offering, at one

²² Letters George Savile to Barbara Savile, 16 March 1726 & 6 March 1727 (NA: DD/SR/ 212/3/25 & 212/3/52); George Savile's Personal Account Books, 1703-8 & 1715-22 (NA: DD/SR/211/193/2 & DD/SR/211/178/1).

²³ Letters Thomas Smith to George Savile, 4 & 6 April 1724, 23 July 1726 (NA: DD/SR/211/227/102,101,130); Letter George Savile to Barbara Savile, 16 September 1726 (NA: DD/SR/212/3/63); Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment*.

²⁴ Marriage deed of settlement executed by Sir Nicholas & Lady Anne Cole (Westpark, Helmpark in Brancepeth, Durham) 15 June 1706 (NA: DD/SR/1/D/6/2); George Savile's Personal Account Book, 1703-8 (NA: DD/SR/211/193/1).

point, to serve as trustee.²⁵ In 1731 Anne returned to London to live with her mother in rented property in Westbourne Green; Gertrude remained in Golden Square until after her mother's death.²⁶

In 1716, Gertrude's 19th year, Barbara Savile proposed the terms upon which money might be made available from her son's estate to finance a settlement, noting the depressive anxiety that the lack of such security was causing her younger daughter.²⁷ She wrote to Sir George 'If poor Getty shud Lose you, She Loses her greatest blessing upon earth; and shud she then have no provision; What a grieving agrivation it be to her malloncholy?', and proposed that he 'put out for her of the first money you can spaire'.²⁸ In 1717 he settled a dowry of £3000 on his sister and annuities to the value of £200 per annum to be paid out after his death if she remained single.²⁹ By 1722 Gertrude had use of a coach and was receiving an annual expenses allowance of £80, a contribution she attributed to the instigation of her mother: 'I suppose 'twas from her, that my brother kept me as he has done'.³⁰ The sum had more than trebled by 1726 reflecting, as son-

²⁵ Anne received an annual income of £200 raised from Helme Park and West Park on her late husband Sir Nicholas Cole's estate. Letters exchanged between Anne Cole (Baronne d'Ongnyes) and Barbara Savile, 1726-8. NA: DD/SR/212/1&2.

²⁶ Letter George Savile to Barbara Savile, 6 November 1725 (NA: DD/SR/212/2/6); Letter Barbara Savile to Anne Cole (Baronne d'Ongnyes), 15 March 1728 (NA: DD/SR/212/2/9); Letter Anne Cole (Baronne d'Ongnyes) to Barbara Savile, 28 February 1731 (NA: DD/SR/212/2/11); Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment*, p. 224. In 1737 Gertrude took a house in Farnsfield, Nottinghamshire, rented for her by her brother's steward.

²⁷ Gertrude Savile's diaries record vividly the chronic depression that caused her to avoid many social occasions. In October 1721 she noted that at Rufford her 'only felicities' were 'Walking alone or sitting under a tree in my Brother's park', Saville (ed.) *Secret Comment*, p. 10.

²⁸ Barbara Savile suggested upcoming wood revenue as a potential source. Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, May 1716. NA: DD/SR/212/3/2.

²⁹ Abstract of deeds made by Sir George Savile in favour of his sister Gertrude, 1717-23 (NA: DD/SR/225/26) quoted in Dunster, *Women of the Nottinghamshire Elite*, p. 251.

³⁰ Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment*, p. 26; Gertrude Savile's Journal, Part 4, 1721-22 (NA: DD/SR/212/11) quoted in Marjorie Penn, 'Account books of Gertrude Savile, 1736-58', *Thoroton Record Series* 24 (1967), 99-146, p. 101. George Savile paid his sister Anne an

mother correspondence suggests, Sir George's generous response to this solicitude. Barbara Savile told her son that she was 'very sorry' that Gertrude 'has any hesitation about keeping a footman, I hope there will be no occasion to deny her self whatever her reason & inclination Concurr in.'³¹ However, despite this provision, Gertrude felt cramped by the strictures of her mother's company – 'an old woman [37 when Gertrude was born]... past the inclination or fitness to introduce me or put me forward into the world' – and, during a brief spell with her aunt Newton in Bath, recorded her exhilaration at release from being under her 'Mother's wing'. Gertrude noted 'I was born with Whig Principles... There is a charm in the word liberty and being mistress of it, tho' without making use of it.'³² Economic independence and the liberty it granted came in 1729 when, to the shocked surprise of her extended family, Gertrude found herself the principal benefactor of her cousin Jonathan Newton's Will, and his property in Durham and Northumberland passed into her hands.³³

Although Gertrude's diaries showed that she was often oppressed by her life at home in Golden Square with her mother, there is no doubt that Barbara Savile negotiated carefully and effectively with her son, Sir George, to ensure that she had a respectable income. She was also assiduous in protecting her elder daughter's interests, especially following the latter's problematic second marriage. Barbara was described by her son's

annual income of £100 from Annuity Stock, however there is a marked absence of reference to Stock in the accounting for Gertrude's payments during her brother's lifetime.

³¹ Letters George Savile to Barbara Savile, 7 December 1725 (quotation), 16 March 1726 & 6 March 1727 (NA: DD/SR/ 212/3/40, 212/3/25 & 212/3/52). In March 1724 Sir George's mother and two sisters took over the tenancy of Golden Square; the rental had hitherto been paid by Sir George. George Savile's Personal Account Book, 1722-7 (NA: DD/SR/211/192/2).

³² Gertrude Savile's Journal 1721-2 (NA: DD/SR/212/11) quoted in Penn, 'Account books of Gertrude Savile, 1736-58', p. 100; Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment*, pp. 5-6.

³³ Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, 20 August 1730 (NA: DD/SR/212/3/43); Will of Jonathan Newton, Merchant of Calcutta, East Indies, dated 1727, probate 3 March 1733 (National Archives: PROB 11/658/14).

lawyer and daughter Anne's trustee as 'ye most worldly woman in the world', an address she accepted with grudging respect; she described herself as her son's 'faithfull Monitor' and was equally attentive to the interest of her two daughters, Anne and Gertrude. We now turn to consider her engagement with estate management at Rufford.

Barbara Savile and estate management

Meryl Jancey described estate management as 'a partnership between landlord and steward'; positions, as the language implies, predominantly held by men.³⁴ There is strong evidence that at Rufford Barbara Savile fulfilled important aspects of both roles. Personal correspondence between Sir George and his mother, his sister Gertrude's diaries and the estate correspondence of successive stewards all testify to the strength of the relationship between mother and son. They also show the respect that Sir George paid to his mother's opinions and the competence and readiness with which Barbara Savile acted as her son's proxy in the management of his estates when called upon to do so. On her death in July 1734, William Elmsall, Sir George's Yorkshire steward, acknowledged the loss: 'None to my understanding had greater Reasoning & Parts & none better could apply them', prefacing his letter with a recognition of the 'great Concerne' he knew it would cause his master: 'I always observed such a mutual affection betwixt your mother & your self'.³⁵ A note in her watch case signed 'G.S.' read: 'Her love and care who set my feet to run/Require my love and duty to be done', with pinned to it 'My kind son's writing for my watch, grown dim, get him to make it clearer'. Another note stated

³⁴ E. M. Jancey, 'An eighteenth-century steward and his work', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, 56 (1957), 34-48, p. 41.

³⁵ Letter William Elmsall to George Savile, 9 July 1734. NA: DD/SR/211/3/46a.

‘Madam, give leave I may depend/Soe by your side to my Live’s end/Alike in welfare or distress/Your most obedient son G. S.’³⁶

In this section, we examine how this close connection allowed Barbara Savile to advise her son closely on the management of his estate. It was an unusual state of affairs as elite widows ‘with children did not normally take over management of the main estate except for relatively short periods of time until their eldest son came of age’.³⁷ At Rufford, the survival of rich documentation allows us to demonstrate that Barbara Savile continued to make an important contribution to estate management for 34 years after her son had come of age.

In a letter of advice from 1716, Barbara Savile assured her son that ‘your interest has been my cheife concern ever since you were born And I have made it my cheife business to promote your advantage at all times’. This assertion is supported by Savile’s acknowledgement of his mother as ‘ye Only Person in ye World I have to Consult with’ and the person from whom ‘I may reap... Advice & Intelligence of what happens which I am not like to know from others’. This is amply borne out by the record of her actions.³⁸ Of particular advantage to Sir George when at Rufford was his mother’s access to social networks in London. These might be called upon to facilitate estate business as Sir George’s letter to his mother, December 1725, regarding transfer of assets on the death of an uncle records: ‘I am very sorry & disappointed y^t you have not got tidings

³⁶ Edith Milner with Edith Benham (ed.), *The Records of the Lumleys of Lumley Castle* (London, 1904), p. 206.

³⁷ McDonagh, 2009, p. 157.

³⁸ Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, May 1716 (NA: DD/SR/212/3/2); Letter George Savile to Barbara Savile, 30 June 1725 (NA: DD/SR/212/3/18).

when & where S^r R: Forbes dyed. I can do nothing till I know, which I am here out of y^e way of – y^e Tythes, as I remember, (or Part) become due at Candlemas'.³⁹

The tone of Barbara Savile's personal correspondence and the content of archival documentation touching upon her biography suggest that she was an energetic and decisive woman, with strong moral convictions, an outspoken nature and the courage to act upon her beliefs when she felt it in the family interest, even at the risk of displeasing her son. Themes of duty (temporal and spiritual), rectitude, public service and self-examination recur in the correspondence between mother and son. When in the early 1720s Sir George, then aged 43, was still actively seeking a wife, his mother openly criticised his approach – 'yo^r Stroling from place to place to find out side beauty as yo^r first & chiefe aime'. It was 'in the old method':

This Limited engagement with ye outside of a woman prevents the desire of acquaintance with the beautys of her mind, and so such men are left ignorant of those beautys that are the strongest engagement of true affections.⁴⁰

Sir George married Mary Pratt, a girl 'very young, not 16', in 1722.⁴¹ Notably, he continued to confide closely and converse with his mother throughout his married life. In the letter of 1721, Barbara Savile described herself as the Baronet's 'faithfull Monitor' a service 'which besides my self you have none' and there is evidence to suggest that the temperaments of mother and son were to some extent complementary.⁴² Anne described her brother as having a 'hatred of trouble and busyness' and a willingness to accept

³⁹ Letter George Savile to Barbara Savile, 27 December 1725. NA: DD/SR/212/3/41.

⁴⁰ Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, 4(6) March 1721. NA: DD/SR/212/3/1. More than half a century later, Mary Wollstonecraft would be developing this critique in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

⁴¹ Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment*, p. 33.

⁴² Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, 4(6) March 1721. NA: DD/SR/212/3/1.

considerable financial loss for its avoidance.⁴³ Barbara Savile repeatedly urged her son against this inclination, rather to challenge the actions of others both in relation to estate affairs and personal relationships. She wrote ‘Lose not that purchase; be not Supine nor pretend to yourself you want acquaintance’, and encouraged him, when reluctant to lay himself under obligation, ‘Goe on Dear Son & prosper; That in your blessing I may yet find comfort’.⁴⁴

Barbara sometimes negotiated directly with city institutions on her own and her children’s behalf. In 1725, for example, Sir George was concerned that a Bill drawn on the Bank of England might miscarry, and there might be need to sell annuity stock to make up the balance on a significant debt repayment. He asked his mother to apply for ‘a Blank Warrant or Letter of Attorney that I may, if need, Empower you to sell any quantity of South=Sea=Annuity Stock for me for that Purpose’. He also advised that she could be ‘informed by Mr [Henry] Curwen or any Goldsmith or man of Business where to get such a Blank Warrant or What ye Form is, & if upon Stamp’d Paper’.⁴⁵ When Henry Curwen, who was both a close family friend and one of her daughter Anne’s trustees, died in 1727, Barbara demonstrated to her daughter that women could have agency in the absence of ‘usefull Men’ by attending the ‘South Sea’ alone on Annuity dividend day. She did this to ascertain and collect the money due to her: ‘I went to ye South Sea that I might try to be able to give you an account of the posture of yo^r affairs

⁴³ Letter Anne Cole (Baronne d’Ongnyes) to Barbara Savile, August 1733. NA: DD/SR/225/36/1.

⁴⁴ Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, 4(6) March 1721. NA: DD/SR/212/3/1.

⁴⁵ Letter George Savile to Barbara Savile, 7 December 1725. NA: DD/SR/212/3. Henry Curwen (1680-1727) of Sella Park and Workington Hall was referred to by Barbara Savile as ‘My Cus: Curwen’ and relied upon by Sir George as well as his mother and older sister for business advice.

there'. She had never attended before without Curwen and 'much dreaded goeing', but was pleased to report that 'it pleasd God I met with cevillity & willingness'.⁴⁶

Sir George acknowledged the integrity of his mother's 'veneration for Christianity'.⁴⁷ Like her son's, this assumed a staunchly Protestant character: Gertrude speaks of her mother's positive prejudice towards 'Desenters'.⁴⁸ That such beliefs could directly affect estate management is illustrated by a letter of May 1716 from Barbara Savile to her son, referenced by the latter 'Good Advice & Proposals'.⁴⁹ In this long, closely scripted text Barbara Savile argued that her son's good fortune, including 'a Large Estate' and 'many prospects of Death... recoverd from', made it incumbent upon him, in 'duty and interest', to 'have God Worshipd in reverence & Truth in your family'. Drawing attention to recent lease renewals which had augmented Savile's total rental income by around £1,000 she urged that such 'enlargement of your power pleades for your gratitude... by Works of Charity'; namely, 'to imploy the Tenth part of your encreased Estate in Charitable uses' including the employment of a 'Grave Worthy Clergyman' at Rufford. In 1720 appointment of a 'University Scholar' was being considered and by 1722 there was a regular chaplain, Mr Jackson, reading prayers at Rufford.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Anne's letters in this period repeatedly refer to her perceived want of male support: 'the misery of our Family is the want of acquaintance with Men, I mean usefull Men, & without them women pass but scurvily throw the World'. Letter Anne Cole (Baronne d'Ongnyes) to Barbara Savile, 13 March 1728. NA: DD/SR/212/2/4. Letter Barbara Savile to Anne Cole (Baronne d'Ongnyes), 10 November 1727. NA: DD/SR/ 212/1/29.

⁴⁷ Letter George Savile to Barbara Savile, 18 February 1726. NA: DD/SR/212/3/27.

⁴⁸ Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment*, p. 189. George Savile referred to 'the unnatural disaffection to our Protestant Government' spread amongst the clergy as partly responsible for 'a great weight upon my Spirit' when disposing of an advowson. Letter (draft) George Savile to William Elmsall, 29 June 1731. NA: DD/SR/211/3/107b.

⁴⁹ Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, May 1716. NA: DD/SR/212/3/2.

⁵⁰ For discussion of potential candidates with reference to Barbara Savile's wishes (NA: DD/SR/211/224/47); for subsequent appointment (NA: DD/SR/211/227/13).

In her letter of 1716 Barbara Savile prefaced the advice given for her son's 'spirituall benefitt' with a recognition of what she had already achieved for his 'temporall benefitt': 'I bless God I have had success in my endeavours to your great profit both in advancing your yearly Income, The Sale of Woods, and other bargaining'. Privileged women of the period were tutored in the exercise of power – 'To manage well a great Family', acknowledged Richard Steele in 1710, 'is as worthy an Instance of Capacity, as to execute a great Employment' – and there is considerable evidence to support the conclusion that Barbara Savile's self-assessment was true.⁵¹ Indeed, her son frequently relied upon Barbara Savile's skill as a judge of character. Sir George entrusted his mother to recommend suitable candidates for the position of estate steward at Rufford and she sometimes interviewed the applicants.⁵²

Although not in favour of appointing an attorney as steward, Barbara Savile recognised the importance of legal acumen in estate management. In 1713 she urged her son to challenge his steward George Burden's 'softness' and encourage him to a more active defence of Savile's rights.⁵³ In March 1721 she advised her son when choosing a steward not to 'be hasty to determine upon a cockney; for I hope some Country man may time enough be found that may be fitt'.⁵⁴ On 26 August 1728 Gertrude Savile noted that she was shocked by the number of men being interviewed by her mother and sister for two posts: 'All the morn from 9 the House like a Fair with People that came to speak to Mother... about the Place of Steward, and Gentleman of the Horse to my Brother,

⁵¹ D. F. Bond (ed.), *The Tatler* (Oxford, 1987), vol. 2, p. 444.

⁵² Dunster, *Women of the Nottinghamshire Elite*, pp. 153-5; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven & London, 1998), p. 128; Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, 4(6) March 1721 (NA: DD/SR/212/3/1); Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment*, p. 132; Barbara Savile's correspondence re seeking servant references (NA: DD/SR/211/440).

⁵³ Letter Barbara Savile to Anne Cole, 21 March 1713. NA: DD/SR/211/227/96.

⁵⁴ Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, 8 March 1721. NA: DD/SR/ 212/3/3.

[who] wants both.’ Gertrude reported that ‘It was advertised in the News on Sat. and brought such a multitude here as was surprizing. I believe there was 30 before I went out. Mother and her Sister (who she could not do without upon so great an occasion, and her Sister’s Maid to assist), had business enough for the whole Day.’⁵⁵

There is clear evidence that Barbara Savile had a deep interest in and understanding of estate accounts, surveys and maps. She kept a close and independent eye on the accounts by keeping her own parallel account books for the Thornhill estate. She also advised the Yorkshire steward, William Elmsall, as to ‘ye METHOD’ of recording accounts he should adopt.⁵⁶ Her detailed knowledge of Savile’s profit margins in 1716 points to a similar familiarity with Rufford estate accounts. Moreover in 1733, when Savile applied to Elmsall for details of a past survey of the Rufford Estate carried out by George Hogg (Yorkshire woodsman) and Thomas Smith (Rufford steward) he was informed that ‘Madam Savile had he believe the Field Book [recording the value of ‘every individual Close by the Acre’] to pursue [*sic*]’.⁵⁷ This correspondence demonstrates that Barbara Savile retained her interest in estate management matters for many years.

In the early 1710s it was Barbara Savile, rather than the steward William Elmsall or Sir George, who commissioned Joseph Dickenson to survey in Yorkshire various ‘lordships of land for her sons use’ to help in the reassessment of rental agreements.⁵⁸ However, when she saw the maps produced by the cartographer she immediately found them to be faulty. Indeed, she refused ‘to pay when the maps were given in, by reason the person

⁵⁵ Saville (ed.), *Secret Comment*, p. 132.

⁵⁶ NA: DD/SR/225/3/1; Letter William Elmsall to George Savile, 8 July 1717 (NA: DD/SR/211/2).

⁵⁷ Letter William Elmsall to George Savile, 21 December 1733. NA: DD/SR/211/3/59.

⁵⁸ The maps were completed in 1713, the complaint made 15 years later. Letter Joseph Dickenson to George Savile, 1 July 1728. NA: DD/SR/218/1/34.

employed to draw the maps... had contracted Brearley [Brierley], Shafton, and [H...] into a smaller compass than she liked of, had rather have it done by the same scale, that Yealand map was drawn by'.⁵⁹ To make matters worse, a brief downpour on the road had resulted in a 'damaged Coat of Arms... wherefore she said it was not a fair map, according to agreem^t' and the map had to be redrafted 'to please her Ladyships humour'.⁶⁰

However, since the survey books were in Barbara Savile's possession, Dickenson and the draftsmen had to return to Rufford in order to complete their work. Barbara Savile, however, had meanwhile consulted with her son's steward Thomas Smith, himself a surveyor, over the accuracy of the maps and concluded that the surveys were drawn up to the advantage of the tenants. Consequently, when the men arrived '... she would meddle no more with us, nor so much as suffer the new map to be oppened, in her house, though some of the young Ladys, desired to see it, but packed us away, with angry words'.⁶¹ This episode demonstrates not only Barbara Savile's intimate knowledge of her son's landholdings but also her steely capacity to defend his financial interests.

While Barbara Savile's direct engagement in Rufford estate management was most pronounced prior to her son's marriage in 1722, it is notable that evidence extends beyond this date and throughout the duration of Thomas Smith's stewardship (1712-28). Barbara Savile held Smith in high esteem and was on close and familiar terms with the family more generally. Smith's daughter Mary was Barbara Savile's personal maid and confidant, and on occasions scribed her mistress's correspondence; Barbara Savile and

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Smith corresponded over public affairs (for example, George I's speech on opening parliament in 1718) and personal concerns as well as estate business.

She also engaged with her son's estate employees and tenants more widely. In 1712 the steward George Burden reported to his master that 'The millers complaine for want of fuel & say Mrs Savile told them they should have some', and that widows from amongst his Wellow tenantry had been to the woodtenter there to ask if Barbara Savile had left permission for them to gather sticks.⁶² In November 1718 when 'Wellow Damme' was drained it was to Barbara Savile that a full account of the carp stock was sent including a detailed list of neighbouring landowners to whom gifts of fish were to be delivered. This is an example of intra-elite patronage, which at Rufford included venison, dogs and on occasion seeds and young trees as well as fish.⁶³ While the letter from Thomas Smith which contained this report is addressed on the envelope to George Savile, it begins 'Madam' and refers to Sir George in the third person until an addendum is reached which is addressed directly to the Baronet. It is the division of contents that is particularly notable: the body of the letter concerns Rufford estate management; the additional note to the Baronet contains no more than an account of the performance of his fox hounds.⁶⁴

A detailed reading of the Rufford estate papers in the period 1700-1734 shows conclusively that Barbara Savile and her son, Sir George, had an 'active partnership' facilitated by their complementary experience, skills, temperaments and shared values

⁶² Letter George Burden to George Savile, 26 January 1712. NA: DD/SR/211/435.

⁶³ Sarah Law, *The Landscape of Rufford, 1700-1743: Reconnecting Archives with People and Place*, (Nottingham theses, 2016).
<http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/37356/1/Sarah%20Law%20Thesis%20for%20Submission.pdf>

⁶⁴ Letter Thomas Smith to Barbara Savile, 26 November 1718. NA: DD/SR/211/227/68.

focussed on common goals. Both estate and private correspondence testify to her deep understanding of estate business and meticulous attention to detail. She was directly and closely involved in detailed decisions regarding local patronage and rights of tenants over wood fuel. It is clear that her independent judgements carried weight and were relied upon both by her son and his stewards. In the next section, we examine Barbara Saville's role in the management of Rufford's extensive ancient woods and plantations.

Barbara Savile and the management of trees and woodland

The importance of wood to the economy and cultural identity of the Rufford Estate cannot be overestimated. Large parts of the estate lay within Sherwood Forest where Rufford and nearby estates such as Thoresby, Clumber and Welbeck were in the forefront of woodland 'improvement'.⁶⁵ Rufford's timber reserves were a capital resource worth over £21,000 and annual coppice wood fellings together with intermittent timber sales brought in an average income of £532, equivalent to just over a third of the estate's rental value.⁶⁶ 'The Sale of Woods, and other bargaining' lay at the heart of Barbara Savile's concerns for the profitability of her son's estate, as she herself pointed out in 1716.⁶⁷ In this section we demonstrate how Barbara Savile's deep involvement in woodland management, including the identification of buyers and the negotiation of contracts for timber and charcoal, was a central part of her role in estate

⁶⁵ See Susanne Seymour 'Landed estates, the 'spirit of planting' and woodland management in later Georgian Britain: a case study from the Dukeries, Nottinghamshire' in C. Watkins (ed) *European Woods and Forests. Studies in Cultural History* (Oxford, 1998), 115-134 and Charles Watkins 'A solemn and gloomy umbrage': changing interpretations of the ancient oaks of Sherwood Forest' in Watkins, *European Woods*, 93-113.

⁶⁶ Law, *The Landscape of Rufford*, 2016, Ch. 6.

⁶⁷ Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, May 1716. NA: DD/SR/212/3/2. Barbara Savile emphasises the importance of wood revenues.

management at Rufford. Her manner with wood dealers was forthright and Sir George enlisted his mother's assistance in the negotiation of wood contracts.

In a letter of 1718 Thomas Smith referred to an occasion when 'Mr Hayford and Mr Watts concluded ye Bargain [for cordwood] at Xmas [26th December 1715] in ye Dining room at Rufford at about Two o'clock in ye morning' and the subsequent 'caution' both madam and master issued to him not 'to take Down trees that have bark on before ye season of peeling'.⁶⁸ Denis Hayford (c 1635-1733) was a nationally significant iron and steel master. He had ironworks at Rockley, Rotherham and Cannock and by 1680 supplied rod and bar iron to the Lancashire, Sheffield and Birmingham markets. In 1698 he acquired the Sitwell works at Staveley and Renishaw in Derbyshire.⁶⁹ He was a tough negotiator and in 1710 was involved in a dispute with the Duke of Newcastle over the supply of birch cordwood from Birklands in Sherwood Forest and Welbeck Park.⁷⁰ The vivid description of the early morning discussion at Christmas shows Barbara Savile directly involved with her son in negotiating with Hayford about the necessity that they should be able to peel and harvest the valuable tanning bark before Hayford felled the trees and took away the timber.

Five years after the Hayford deal, Barbara Savile was at Rufford finalising the terms of a significant Thornhill wood sale (Deffer and Soothill Woods) with Mr Cotton, on this occasion in the absence of her son. Cotton, referred to in estate correspondence as an iron master and chapman (a term used to describe wood dealers in this period), was almost certainly William Westby Cotton (1689-1749), son of William Cotton the major

⁶⁸ Letter Thomas Smith to Barbara Savile, NA: DD/SR/211/245.

⁶⁹ Brian G. Awtry, 'Denis Hayford', *ODNB*, 23 September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/47478>

⁷⁰ NA: DD/4P/75/76.

Yorkshire iron master and one-time partner to Denis Hayford and William Simpson of Nottinghamshire.⁷¹ Correspondence between Sir George and his Yorkshire steward, William Elmsall, makes clear that this was a controversial deal, the terms of which were negotiated over several months: Elmsall strongly favoured a closed auction; Savile accepted Cotton's initial bid without inviting competitors such as Hayford; Cotton renegotiated the terms of sale. Notably, it was Barbara Savile who closed the deal. In May 1721 Cotton arrived at Rufford with the contract and met Barbara Savile in the presence of Rufford steward, Thomas Smith, who reported the transaction to his absent master:

This day about Three of ye Clock Mr Cotton came to Rufford & after some time spent in Discourse with Madam Savile tis Resolved that ye Article which George Hogg Likewise brought with him to Day... be Returned to him to have Engrossed & that we Get a bond Drawn for all ye persons mentioned in ye former agreement to Signe... Mr Cotton is very willing to Comply to any thing that may make you & Madam Savile easy... he is so very fare in every respect that Madam Savile & my Self are perfectly Satisfied all will be as Safe & Right as is possible without ye Least appearance of Danger or hazard.⁷²

The reference to 'Danger or hazard' is striking. This was a significant deal and Cotton might well have been favoured out of a sense of loyalty. That it involved Barbara Savile in an assessment of character as well as calling on her business acumen is clear.

⁷¹ Brian G. Awtry, 'Cotton Family', *ODNB*, 23 September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/49045>

⁷² Letter Thomas Smith to George Savile, 15 May 1721 (NA: DD/SR/211/227/34); see also NA: DD/SR/212/3.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, British iron production depended principally upon charcoal for both the smelting and refining of the crude ironstone ore.⁷³ Charcoal grade wood was referred to in the period as cordwood.⁷⁴ The source of wood for cording could be birch trees, especially from the sandy soils of Sherwood Forest, coppice poles (such as field maple, elm and other broadleaved trees from the ancient woods on the clay soils), the ‘Lop, or Boughs and Branches of trees... about the Thickness of a Man’s Arm’, and ‘good oak’ cut into three foot lengths.⁷⁵ The wood resources of the Sherwood estates and navigable water both of the River Trent and River Idle at Bawtry, made Sherwood Forest and Nottinghamshire attractive locations.⁷⁶ Sir George Savile had contracts with Denis Hayford for the supply of ironstone and cordwood.⁷⁷ Between 1715

⁷³ In the East Midlands, transition to coke-fuelled iron works did not occur until 1764. P. Riden, ‘The charcoal iron industry in the East Midlands, 1580-1780’, *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 111 (1991), 64-84; H.R. Schubert, *History of the British Iron and Steel Industry* (London, 1957).

⁷⁴ G. Hammersley, ‘The charcoal iron industry and its fuel, 1540-1750’, *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 26:4 (1973), 593-613, p. 606. A cord was a volumetric measure defined in the East Midlands as a stack of wood 4 feet x 4 feet x 8 feet. See contract of sale from the Derbyshire woods of John Holles, 1st Duke of Newcastle (NA: 157/DD/P/42/68); Lease for Carburton Forge (1704), contracting a cordwood quota for either Carburton Forge (Nottinghamshire) or Staveley ironworks (Derbyshire) (NA: DD/2P/28/18-19).

⁷⁵ M. W. Flinn, ‘The growth of the English iron industry 1660-1760’, *Economic History Review*, New Series, 11:1(1958), 144-53, p. 148; ‘The third report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the state and condition of the woods, forests and land revenues of the crown’ (1788), 29; John Evelyn, *Silva, or a Discourse of Forest-Trees...* (London, 1706, 4th edition ‘Inlarg’d and Improvd’, first published 1664), p. 267.

⁷⁶ Bawtry was the traditional shipment place for industrial products of north Derbyshire and north Nottinghamshire. Goods were loaded directly onto seagoing vessels at Gainsborough and Stockwith on the Trent. Riden (ed.), *George Sitwell’s Letterbook*, pp. xxi-xxii; D. Holland, *Bawtry and the River Idle Trade* (Doncaster, 1976, first published 1964); Letter to Mr Foljambe (Osberton, Nottinghamshire), 29 May 1728, detailing freight costs for wood (NA: DD/FJ/11/1/2/178-9).

⁷⁷ Hayford’s interest in Carburton seems to have persisted until 1720 when Lord Harley (Welbeck Estate, Nottinghamshire) leased Kirkby, Carburton and Clipstone forges to Richard Knight (Bringewood, Herefordshire) & William Westley (Haigh, Yorkshire). In 1727, Carburton was leased to Millington Hayford (Romeley, Derbyshire). Raistrick & Allen, ‘The South Yorkshire ironmasters’; B. L. C. Johnson, ‘The Foley partnerships: the iron industry at the end of the charcoal era’, *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 4:3 (1952), 322-40; NA: DD/P/6/1/16/95; NA: DD/2P/28/19; NA: DD/P/6/1/17/82; NA: DD/4P/80/15; Sheffield Archives: SpSt/60495/17. For

and 1719 Sir George was bound by contract (that of 26 December 1715, see above) to supply a specific volume of charcoal grade wood to the iron forge at Carburton. By November 1718 the supply was in serious arrears and no obvious source of cordwood was identifiable on the Rufford estate. For reasons unspecified in the correspondence, Sir George had both failed to instruct his steward over the measures to be taken and was unavailable. Under these difficult circumstances Smith turned to Barbara Savile. She had been present at the December 1715 meeting with Watts and Hayford and had clearly been in communication with Smith already over the cordwood assignment and taken measures to ascertain the supply margins. A letter forwarded to Watts by Smith – ‘to ye purpose ye mentioned in yours’ – and explaining Sir George’s absence, had elicited the polite imperative ‘[I] Must therefor Desire you’ll write to him for his Order not in ye Least Doubting but Sir George will perform his Bargain’.⁷⁸ Instead Smith sent an urgent request for advice to Barbara Savile at Golden Square on 26 November:

I Do not know where youll Get what he Expects, thers none y^t I Can hear on to be bought nor would y^t please because our buying only prevents them buying it. Besides ye article says y^t its to be found on some part of my masters Estate...⁷⁹

A fortnight later Sir George was again in charge of the situation and options were under discussion, including the stubbing of windblown roots whose removal would ‘ornament ye parks’. Although the extent to which Barbara Savile contributed to the final means of

Thornhill ironstone agreements and dealings with Hayford see NA: DD/SR/30/65,63; William Elmsall’s evidence to *1720 Interrogatories* (NA: DD/SR /225/3/1); Letter Raph Elmsall to George Savile, 12 March 1743 (NA: DD/SR/211/333). For Rufford cordwood contract see Letter Thomas Smith to Barbara Savile, 2 December 1718. NA: DD/SR/211/227/65.

⁷⁸ Transcription of Watt’s reply in Letter Thomas Smith to Barbara Savile, 26 November 1718. NA: DD/SR/211/227/68.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

supply is unclear, her readiness to take decisive action as her son's proxy, and familiarity with the demesne and tenanted landscape of Rufford and its woodland management practice are supported by her interventions on demesne supply from Black Walk (see below) and the advice Smith relayed to Sir George on his return that 'thers Severall Trees in M^f Levertons [a significant tenant] closes that Mad^m Savile promised should Go down (some of which we stubbd Last year) y^t would yield cordwood.⁸⁰

It was far more economic to transport charcoal than the heavier, bulkier cordwood from which it was made. Sales contracts involving cordwood generally contained clauses giving the colliers liberty to 'Digg sod and Dust for ye covering and coaling of ye said coardwood' at specified places on the estate, and on occasions granted permission 'to build cabins there for Colliers employed for coaling'.⁸¹ The friability of charcoal meant that these sites had to be close to the ironworks. Hammersley quotes 3-5 miles as the supply radius normally accepted by British ironmasters, but his figures seem low for Nottinghamshire.⁸² Correspondence between Thomas Smith and Barbara Savile indicates that the custom at Rufford was to wheel the cordwood to within 60 yards of the centre of the intended coaling pit, the latter being situated 'where ye wood shall be Cutt and Ranked or upon other Adjacent Grounds'.⁸³

At Rufford two strategies were used for the sale of timber. Either the wood was sold after felling, the various products retailed directly to the trades that required them; or it

⁸⁰ Letter Thomas Smith to George Savile, 10 December 1718. NA: DD/SR/211/227/63.

⁸¹ Draft lease for Carburton Forge by John Holles, 1st Duke of Newcastle, 1703. NA: DD/P/5/83. Preference was for regularly used sites (the ground beneath was progressively levelled) and light rather than clay soils (cold ground lengthened burn times). D. H. Kelley, *Charcoal and Charcoal Burning*, (Shire, 1986), p. 5.

⁸² Hammersley, 'The charcoal iron industry', p. 606.

⁸³ Letter Thomas Smith to Barbara Savile, 2 December 1718. NA: DD/SR/211/227/65.

was sold as standing wood to middle men, who then worked up the timber etc. and sold it on. Both approaches required adroit stewardship and management: valuing timber holdings and coppice yields; finding markets and assessing the creditworthiness and reliability of potential purchasers; negotiating the terms of sales and on occasions the delivery of the merchandise. There seems to have been a preference for selling timber wholesale where large sales were involved. That said, finding reliable chapmen on a timescale acceptable to the estate was not always easy.

A letter sent from Rufford in March 1711 concerning a large intended fall of timber in the estate's New Park captures Barbara Savile's practical and assured manner of engagement with her son's woodland business affairs and their relationship to wider estate management concerns. She informed and cautioned Sir George, who was in London, about a potential new partnership of wood chapmen she had learned about, suggested a strategic approach to the sale, and offered advice as to how the felling might proceed without jeopardy to the aesthetics of the estate.

Sir Thomas Willobey [Willoughby of Wollaton Hall, Nottinghamshire] who is now in Town has some while since sold £1800 in Wood to one Sheperdson & partners here[.] they have lately been to enquire after your wood; 'Tis fitt you ask Sir Thomas whether they be good paymasters & what he knows of them & hasten to send me word because time is already lost in waiteing for an account of Dible [Dibble, dealer for the Royal Navy]⁸⁴ & you know but one Chapman can be in the Park at once: In this days Letter to Mr Burden [Savile's steward] I have desired him to speak to Sir Thomas Willobey about it to Ease you. But if you are

⁸⁴ In *The House of Commons, 1690-1715*, John Dibble (*d.* 1728) is included as a member whose 'principal trade was in timber for the navy'. D. Hayton, E. Cruickshanks & S. Handley (eds), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1690-171* (Cambridge, 2002), vol. 3, pp. 87-86.

not sure that he speaks to Sir Thomas tis fitt you doe as soon as possible that those men may be dispatched to make way for other Chapmen.⁸⁵

This provides strong evidence of Barbara Savile's managerial input and how she gathered intelligence about wood transactions, the preferred style of sale, the range of markets available, the creditworthiness of purchasers, market volatility and time constraints on felling. She alerted Sir George who was away in London about the advantages and disadvantages of dealing with a new group of Nottinghamshire timber merchants and persuaded him to ask Sir Thomas Willoughby of Wollaton Hall, who was also in London, whether they could be trusted.

She goes on to tell Sir George that speed was essential as Mr Ball, who was employed to value the Rufford timber, was keen to know whether some timber could be sold in distinct lots to maximise the income from bark for tanners and cordwood for charcoal making.

[Ball] still adviseth that you sell some part at Least by cutting it first down & so sell each tree in your new park to different trades, as the bark to taners the Cordwood to forge men &c: yet pray enquire as soon as may be after Sir Thomas Willobeys Chapmen for they wud either buy the whole or by parcels, forget it not.⁸⁶

She also reminded Sir George of the impact that the timber fellings would make on the landscape of the parkland and the estate, offering felling advice that would minimise the visual disruption:

⁸⁵ Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, 3 March 1711. NA: DD/SR/211/435.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

I think you said you would look over the south Wing of the new park again ere they were took down haveing an aprehesion they wud be Left too thin: from which reason, & because twill be most out of sight, Why may not the Trees far back in that park be first sold pray say.⁸⁷

Eighteenth-century landowners were constantly being reminded of their duty to supply the navy with timber for ships: ‘the Walls and chief Foundations of this Kingdom’.⁸⁸ But while this seemingly insatiable appetite for wood made the naval market attractive to landowners, the way in which the Royal Navy transacted sales was complex and particular to itself, and the disadvantages could be considerable.⁸⁹ Barbara Savile’s correspondence with George Burden in 1711 (quoted above) is one of the few references in the Savile Archives to direct dealings with the Royal Navy and shows her shrewdly conscious of the hazards such transactions might entail. In March 1711, Burden recorded postage of ‘a letter to Mr Robinson to enquire after Chapmen for ship Timber’ and Barbara Savile warned her son of time being ‘lost in waiteing for an account of Dible’, a dealer for the Royal Navy.⁹⁰ There is no record of whether a deal was struck with Dibble on this occasion, but by the 1720s the latter’s reputation for malpractice was legendary in the Sherwood area, and certainly influenced the style of approach made to the navy by Rufford. When, in 1724, Smith suggested sale to the Royal Navy, he qualified his recommendation with the caution:

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ W. Ellis, *The Timber-Tree Improved; or, the Best Practical Methods of Improving Different Lands with Proper Timber* (London, 1738), p. 1; origin of expression, Lord Coventry’s speech to the Judges of England, 1635 (J. Rushworth, ‘Historical Collections: 1635’, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: Volume 2, 1629-38* (London, 1721), <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rushworth-papers/vol2/pp287-318>).

⁸⁹ Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People*, pp. 226-30.

⁹⁰ George Burden’s Estate Accounts, 1711-12 (NA: DD/SR/A4/30); Letter Barbara Savile to George Savile, 3 March 1711 (NA: DD/SR/211/435).

But pray Sir Remember how Esquire Dibble cheated this Countrey &
Ran a way Great Sums in their Debt and be well Secured that whats a
greed on will be paid for, My thinks the best way with South countrey
Dealers is to pay ye whole Summs Down before a tree be Removed out
of your park.⁹¹

Individual, valuable, high-quality timber trees were regularly sold from all areas of the estate. Notable examples are from a New Park sale in 1703 in which four trees fetched £38 19s (just under £10 per tree), two trees fetched £16 8s (just over £8 per tree), and a tree was sold to Mr Neale for £12 6s for use as ‘a Hamer beame’.⁹²

The appearance of trees, ancient woods and plantations at Rufford from specific viewpoints, especially the mansion, caused debate and discussion between Barbara Savile and her son. Large areas of New Park were visible from both house and pleasure grounds, and Barbara Savile and Sir George were concerned that the felling would reduce the density of trees in the view. She suggested that trees more distant from the house and obscured by the closer trees should be the first to be felled. Later estate correspondence regarding a timber fall in New Park highlights that such landscape considerations – ‘the **Appearance** [word emphasised in original] of them [the remaining trees] to an Eye at the House’ – continued to be of considerable importance.⁹³

⁹¹ Letter Thomas Smith to George Savile, 7 March 1724. NA: DD/SR/211/227/106.

⁹² George Burden’s Estate Accounts, 1703 (NA: DD/SR A4/27); Lease Contracts re forges owned by successive Dukes of Newcastle (NA: 157/DD/2P/28/44; DD/P/5/83); Letter Francis Knight of Clipstone Forge to Lord Harley, 28 November 1728 (NA: DD/4P/80/15); Duke of Devonshire’s Licence re wood upon Sherwood Forest, 15 April 1702 (NA: DD/SR/229/13/19).

⁹³ On this occasion 36 trees were left distributed so that they would appear as a row from the house. Letter George Holt to George Savile, 21 January 1738. NA: DD/SR/211/24/136.

Woodland was a major feature of the pleasure grounds at Rufford. Sir George had a marked interest in design and during his lifetime directed the laying out of c.70 acres of ornamental woodland; excavation of two major canals; planting of a grand parterre and construction of a 'Bath Summer-House' and mill.⁹⁴ The majority of this work was carried out after 1720, a period when Barbara was living principally in Golden Square, and there is no extant evidence for any significant role. However, as the example below records, in the early stages of her son's improvements and where woodland was involved, Barbara Savile was kept abreast of changes and called upon both to intercede with her son on his steward's behalf and to draw on her contacts in Yorkshire to recruit expert advice.

Black Walk was a shady walk to the south of Rufford Hall. It ran alongside Black Walk Pond, a stream fed by the river, Rainworth Water, and supplied Rufford brewery, stew ponds and Hall.⁹⁵ By the mid-1710s, the ashes, alders and quicksets planted along its borders no longer provided a serviceable hedge, and in the winter of 1715 Savile issued directions for the sides of the walk to be 'speedily' thickened. Thomas Smith, then steward, responded cautiously: it would be 'a work both of time [7 years] and charge' involving selective felling and drastic pruning of the existing trees.⁹⁶

By December 1718, Savile had become impatient with the walk's progress. Smith was uncertain how to proceed. In a strikingly frank letter to Barbara Savile, Smith made known his frustration with a situation for the outcome of which he must take overall responsibility, but in which his advice was not being heeded:

⁹⁴ Law, *The Landscape of Rufford*, 2016, Ch. 4.

⁹⁵ John James in *The Theory and Practice of Gardening* (London, 1728, first published 1712, p. 52) describes 'White Walks' as 'no other than those that are all sanded, and kept naked over' suggesting a naming based on surface type.

⁹⁶ Letters Thomas Smith to George Savile, 23 March 1715 & 10 December 1718. NA: DD/SR/211/227/88,63.

My Oppion is that no Care nor Charge can raise a Clever thick hedge on black walk whilst the trees are there. I am loath to Cutt up ye Quicks and plant a Bundance of new ones Except I hop'd of better Success... I shall not be blamed if it Dos not Answer ye End and Charge[.] [I]f my Master please to view any young hedge where thers 'Trees Espetially ashes he'll perceive what Enemies they are to Quicks Espetially where they Stand so thick as the Ashes and owlers [alders] in Blackwalk Dos...⁹⁷

Smith's letter, while intimating Sir George's lack of horticultural knowledge, continued with a direct reference to the inexperience of the then Rufford gardener in 'planting' matters, and a request that Barbara Savile herself authorise the assistance of her son's Yorkshire woodsman, Mr Hogg:

I have often heard you say Mr Hogg was Understanding in such things I begg he may Come over and Do that, and any thing Necessary at ye wilderness alsoe in ye new plantation on beech hill... your Gardiners Skill as far as I Can Judge would require Some Assistance. None properer than Mr Hoggs and if he Raises a Clever True hedge on black walk whilst those Iregular Ashes and owlers stand in ye Quicksett rows I am Mistaken.⁹⁸

This incident indicates how the agent was able to discuss precise details of tree and woodland management with Barbara Savile and use these discussions to negotiate and influence the opinions of Sir George on how best to establish and manage trees in Rufford Park. It reinforces the key findings reported in the section which show how Barbara Savile was able to mobilise her long experience of working with a wide range of

⁹⁷ Letter Thomas Smith to Barbara Savile, 2 December 1718. NA: DD/SR/211/227/65.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

estate staff, including gardeners, tenants and stewards. We have also demonstrated how she was able to bring to bear her strong negotiating skills in dealing directly with nationally important iron masters such as Denis Hayford, and with John Dibble, agent for the Royal Navy.

Conclusions

In this paper we have investigated the role of an elite widow, Barbara Savile, in the management of her son Sir George Savile's extensive land holdings and have demonstrated the importance of elite female participation in estate management. The survival of Barbara Savile's correspondence with her son, land agents and other staff has enabled us to establish both the range and nature of this widow's involvement with her children's welfare – economic, social, domestic and spiritual – and the extent of her detailed engagement in the day-to-day management of a major estate. It has thereby allowed us to set estate management within the broader context of elite female support and contribution to family interests in property. Our first main conclusion is that Barbara Savile was deeply involved in the management of legal and financial rights of her children, both her son George as landowner and her two daughters, Anne and Gertrude. Her will of 1733 is notable both in that all significant beneficiaries are female and that where the bequests concern married women (her niece and elder daughter) they are termed in such a way that the women are the sole beneficiaries. Barbara Savile is determined that the female members of her family will experience, as she has, the security, autonomy and power that the possession of private property brought.

Second, we have shown that for over thirty years she was involved in the daily management of the estate. We demonstrate, through her dispute with the mapmaker

Joseph Dickenson, that she understood the need to have close control over the production of estate plans and maps, appreciating their crucial importance in maintaining landed power and influence. We also show how she drew on her personal knowledge of estate staff to solve competing demands over estate resources. This paper has demonstrated that Barbara Savile fulfilled vital land management responsibilities at Rufford, one of the largest agricultural and woodland estates in Nottinghamshire. Her role corresponds well with David Hainsworth's view of the ideal estate steward: one who acted as the landowner's surrogate, ambassador, 'eyes and ears' and, in their absence, even mouthpiece.⁹⁹ It is now clear that Barbara Savile continued to make a lively and effective contribution to management for over thirty years after her son inherited his estate, and while it was being managed by him and several estate stewards.

Third, we demonstrate that Barbara Savile had detailed knowledge and experience of many practical aspects of tree and woodland management. Letters and estate accounts establish that she was directly and crucially involved in negotiations with major ironmasters in the provision of wood for charcoal, and also contributed to negotiations on the sale of timber to the Navy. We show that Barbara Savile was an active protagonist and protector of estate resources and a formidable player and negotiator in its practical management. Her principal concern was with the profitability rather than aesthetic or sporting potential of her son's estate. To this end she made significant contributions to the sale of demesne timber, dealing directly with chapmen and iron masters on her son's behalf.

The paper highlights the importance of examining closely the interconnections between family correspondence, diaries and estate records to explore the complex roles that elite

⁹⁹ David Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 108.

women played in estate management in the early eighteenth century. This extends existing understandings of the influence such women had over business transactions and in the management of property.¹⁰⁰ We have established the value of employing a range of rich archival sources for individual estates to allow women's actions and influences over estate management to be uncovered. We have used estate and private correspondence to reconstruct Barbara Savile's deep understanding of estate business and meticulous attention to detail whether regarding the balancing of books, commissioning and scale of maps, negotiation and prosecution of wood contracts or assessment of character. The relationship between Barbara Savile and her son was one of 'active partnership' facilitated by their complementary temperaments and shared values focussed on common goals. In addition, Sir George was able to draw on his mother's access to social networks in London. There is no doubt that her independent judgements carried great weight and she was relied upon both by her son and the estate stewards. Our paper demonstrates the necessity of carefully unravelling the importance of such estate management relationships involving elite women, which are otherwise so easily disguised and obscured by the nature and form of the available documentary evidence.

The paper also emphasises that we need to think of elite women as operating in many different ways, and at different scales, when engaging with their estates. It goes some way to help free such women from the constraints of their houses, parks and gardens to which they have frequently been confined by novelists and landscape historians. In relation to woodland management, women tend to be strongly associated with the aesthetic values of trees. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for example, Fanny Price celebrates the beauty of the trees while her uncle and cousins relish the timber and

¹⁰⁰ McDonagh, *Elite Women*; Wiskin, 'Businesswomen and financial management'.

shooting that the woods provide.¹⁰¹ But we have shown that women also had detailed knowledge of woodland management techniques, timber contracts and charcoal production: Barbara Savile at Rufford is deeply engaged in the management of trees and woodland. Nevertheless, women are almost completely absent from contemporary and academic literature on the history of trees and forestry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This paper, therefore, helps to open up a new area of research on the largely ignored interconnections between women and the management of trees and woods in the period.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Charles Watkins, *Trees, Woods and Forests. A Social and Cultural History* (London, 2014), p. 176; McDonagh, *Elite Women*, p. 51.

¹⁰² N. D. G. James, *A History of English Forestry* (London, 1981).