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The Business of the Land Agency as a 'Profession'
in Later Eighteenth-Century England ——
The Case of Nathaniel Kent

by Hirokazu TAKAHASHI

In England, actual management of estates on behalf of the aristocracy and gentry has historically been dealt with, in most cases, by a land agent, known variously as 'steward', 'bailiff', or simply 'agent'. As large-scale estates grew in complexity and organization in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the business of land agency, whose functions had become increasingly crucial and specialized, was being recognized as a kind of 'profession'.

Although the duties and business activities of land agents varied considerably according to circumstances, they can reasonably be divided into rough groups in the period under consideration : (1) a part-timer whose regular occupation was in work more or less related to the estate business ; (2) a full-time and sometimes highly-paid agent who was connected with or worked exclusively for one employer, often a magnate landowner ; and (3) a land-agent firm which practised for a number of employers on a fee or commission basis.

This paper deals with the case of one successful land agent, Nathaniel Kent (1737-1810), whose business can be placed in category (3) above. Kent was also known for his books on agriculture, in particular his work, *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property*. The intention of this paper is to analyze in detail the wide-ranging business activities undertaken by Kent and his partners, which included the survey, management and brokerage of landed properties, in addition to their work as agricultural advisers.

A look at the career and the ideas of Nathaniel Kent reveals that, in spite of some attitudes that are viewed backward today and the inevitable self-contradiction characteristic of this sort of work, his business methods and the intensity of his attitude as an independent estate expert were quite advanced. The type of land-agent firm in which land surveyors played the principal part, most clearly demonstrated in the case of Ken's firm, appears to have been the primary source of the formal profession of land agency that came into existence in the later nineteenth century and onward.

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