

Charterville and the Chartist Land Company

By KATE TILLER

SUMMARY

Charterville lies in the parish of Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire. A settlement of 78 cottages on small-holdings, with a school-house and meeting-room, it was built in 1847-8 as the third of five Chartist Land Plan estates. This account describes the creation of Charterville and its subsequent history. The significance of the Land Plan in unifying or fragmenting late Chartism is discussed, as is the theoretical and practical basis of the scheme and the nature of its widespread attraction for working people. The experience of the Chartist allottees at Charterville is examined. Although their presence was very short-lived, the opportunities subsequently afforded to local agricultural workers by the Charterville allotments are found to have made a lasting and distinctive mark on Minster Lovell and surrounding areas of West Oxfordshire.

'... the system of large-scale production in industry was advancing at a rapid rate. The workers were separated from capital, and depended on their wages alone. Out of this separation grew all those new institutions in urban life, the trade union, the friendly society, and the co-operative store. These movements, however, were not allowed to develop without opposition, and on these occasions the urban workers turned longing eyes to what they regarded as the ideal conditions of self-supporting independence on the soil. One of these aberrations resulted in the Charterville colony of small holdings at Minster Lovell'.

A. W. Ashby: *Allotments and Small Holdings in Oxfordshire* (1917), p. 110

'One of these aberrations', then, is the verdict of a not unsympathetic observer, A. W. Ashby, on the Chartist Land Plan settlement which lies three miles from the market-town of Witney in West Oxfordshire. Reflecting on the whole saga of the Chartist Land Company between 1845 and 1851, of which Charterville was part, David Jones in *Chartism and the Chartists* (1973) comments 'a tragic end to a splendid experiment', whilst Dorothy Thompson, the most recent general historian of the Chartists, concludes that, 'As a practical venture, the Land Plan failed... its history did not in the end bring much credit on the Chartist movement...'¹

'Aberration', 'tragic', 'experiment', 'failure' – how then does the Land Plan fit into the story of Chartism as a whole? How did such a scheme generate such enthusiasm and practical support throughout the country? What does the specific example of Charterville tell us about later Chartism, a period of the movement's development which has perhaps been relatively neglected by historians?

One cannot talk about the Chartist Land Plan without concentrating on Feargus O'Connor; accordingly, this account will consider the remarkable effect this individual leader had upon the many thousands of Chartists who joined the Land Plan, and upon the creation of Charterville.

¹ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (1984), 303-4.

TABLE I
Population levels in six Windrush Valley parishes 1801-1901

| | TAYNTON | FULBROOK | SWINBROOK | WIDFORD | ASTHALL | MINSTER LOVELL | TOTAL |
|------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------|
| | % CHANGE +/- | % CHANGE +/- | % CHANGE +/- | % CHANGE +/- | % CHANGE +/- | % CHANGE +/- | |
| 1801 | 315 | 320 | 132 | 40 | 304 | 283 | 1394 |
| 1811 | 305 - 3.14 | 333 + 4.06 | 167 +26.4 | 39 - 2.5 | 291 - 4.2 | 252 -10.9 | 1387 |
| 1821 | 324 + 6.2 | 351 + 5.42 | 208 +24.0 | 51 +30.07 | 365 +25.4 | 326 +29.6 | 1625 |
| 1831 | 371 +14.5 | 361 + 2.85 | 222 + 6.73 | 51 0.0 | 352 - 3.56 | 355 + 8.8 | 1722 |
| 1841 | 381 + 2.69 | 368 + 2.21 | 218 - 1.8 | 45 -11.7 | 389 +10.79 | 316 -10.9 | 1717 |
| 1851 | 379 - 0.52 | 406 +10.32 | 195 -24.5 | 43 - 4.4 | 383 - 1.5 | 450 +42.4 | 1856 |
| 1861 | 341 -10.0 | 392 - 3.4 | 191 - 2.05 | 38 -23.2 | 424 +10.7 | 586 +28.0 | 1967 |
| 1871 | 335 - 1.71 | 332 -15.3 | 201 + 5.29 | 47 +42.4 | 381 -10.01 | 561 - 4.26 | 1857 |
| 1881 | 290 -13.4 | 349 + 5.1 | 168 -16.4 | 49 + 4.2 | 377 - 0.52 | 511 - 8.91 | 1741 |
| 1891 | 260 -10.3 | 302 -13.4 | 216 +27.3 | 82 + 6.1 | 351 - 6.9 | 443 -15.2 | 1624 |
| 1901 | 184 -29.2 | 296 - 1.5 | 191 -11.1 | 30 -42.3 | 358 + 2.0 | 459 + 3.42 | 1518 |

TABLE 2
Houses and household size in six Windrush Valley parishes in 1841-1901

| | TAYNTON | | | FULBROOK | | | SWINBROOK | | | WIDFORD | | | ASTHALL | | | MINSTER LOVELL | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | INHAB. HOUSES | UNIN- HAB. HOUSES | BUILD- ING |
| 1841 | 78 | | | 87 | 8 | | 40 | 1 | | 8 | | | 80 | 10 | | 59 | 2 | |
| 1851 | 80 | 3 | | 95 | 5 | | 43 | | | 8 | | | 83 | 4 | | 104 | 38 | |
| 1861 | 83 | 1 | | 91 | 7 | | 42 | | | 7 | 2 | | 89 | | | 138 | 4 | 3 |
| 1871 | 80 | 2 | | 85 | 19 | | 42 | | | 10 | | | 87 | 12 | | 135 | 13 | |
| 1881 | 66 | 4 | | 87 | 17 | | 41 | 1 | | 10 | | | 82 | 15 | | 120 | 29 | |
| 1891 | 58 | 6 | | 87 | 7 | | 47 | 5 | | 10 | | | 80 | 8 | | 119 | 22 | |
| 1901 | 55 | 8 | | 79 | 6 | | 45 | 7 | | 8 | 1 | | 83 | 7 | | 118 | 17 | |
| NO. OF PERSONS PER HOUSE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1841 | 4.88 | | | 4.24 | | | 5.20 | | | 5.60 | | | 4.86 | | | 5.35 | | |
| 1851 | 4.73 | | | 4.27 | | | 4.53 | | | 5.36 | | | 4.62 | | | 4.32 | | |
| 1861 | 4.10 | | | 4.30 | | | 4.54 | | | 4.90 | | | 4.76 | | | 4.24 | | |
| 1871 | 4.18 | | | 3.90 | | | 4.79 | | | 4.70 | | | 4.37 | | | 4.15 | | |
| 1881 | 4.40 | | | 4.00 | | | 4.10 | | | 4.90 | | | 4.60 | | | 4.17 | | |
| 1891 | 4.48 | | | 3.47 | | | 4.60 | | | 5.20 | | | 4.38 | | | 3.72 | | |
| 1901 | 3.34 | | | 3.74 | | | 4.25 | | | 3.75 | | | 4.47 | | | 3.90 | | |

AVERAGE NO. OF PERSONS PER HOUSE FOR SIX PARISHES - 4.41

The Chartist Land Plan settlements represent a remarkable phenomenon: pieces of raw social and economic engineering set down in randomly-chosen areas of rural England. What was that experience like? What actually happened to the 250 allottees in the Land Company ballots who uprooted themselves, mainly from urban and industrial areas, to live in a cottage with two, three, or four acres of land? And why did they do it? For Charterville is part of the complex strand of emotion and theory, of yearning for a return to the land, of an interplay between town and country which appears time and again in the labour movement and in middle-class thinking up to the present day.

Finally, it is important to consider what it was like for the 'host' community, the rural backwater of Minster Lovell, to have a famous, not to say notorious, MP (Feargus O'Connor), and some eighty outsiders (in many senses of the word) descending upon them. This needs to be a two-way picture, for we should not confine ourselves to the tragic end of the Chartist Land Company in 1851. Most of the Charterville cottages still remain; they have made a lasting impact on the area, and it is interesting to apply that perspective to our judgements of the success and failure of the Land Plan.

This study arose out of just such a local perspective. A comparison of the fortunes of six parishes in the Windrush Valley during the 19th century soon demonstrated that the 'Charterville effect' made Minster Lovell a special case.² Notably, its population leapt at a time when that of the neighbouring parishes had peaked (usually having attained maximum growth in the second decade of the century), and was entering a period of stagnation, if not actual decline (Table 1). Further, the housing stock of the parish almost doubled, a very radical development in any small community. In 1851 (a time when the fate of the original Chartist allottees was still uncertain) there were no fewer than 38 uninhabited houses (Table 2). Yet in the long term Charterville survived. Outside it, the numbers of uninhabited houses in this and other parishes illustrate the effects of the dramatic depression in rural areas from the 1870s: depopulation, coupled with declining housing standards for those who stayed. By contrast, the evidence is that the Charterville cottages remained almost fully occupied throughout the period.

In June 1847 O'Connor bought nearly 300 acres of land in Minster Lovell.³ It cost him £10,378 (£36.37 an acre) – some said expensive.⁴ By September the layout of the estate had been made (Fig. 1), and between then and February 1848 78 single-storey cottages and a school-house were constructed from local stone.⁵ Here was a 'Victorian' settlement with no church and no chapel. The cottages were solidly built (some said too solidly and too expensively), with blue slate roofs. The site was above the valley, on high and rather exposed downland, so water was not easy to obtain. There were three wells for the whole settlement, but each cottage had a system of iron gutters diverting rain-water into an indoor tank sunk below floor level: just as the Chartists believed in access to the land as a God-given right, so their water-supply appropriately came direct from heaven.

The cottages take a form familiar in other Land Plan settlements. The front door, in a central bay with characteristic decorated gable, opens into a kitchen/living room with kitchen range, a store-cupboard and a dresser fitted as standard. A cottage examined by

² This study of the Windrush Valley in the 19th century was the work of an Oxford University Department for External Studies evening class, tutored by the author, which met in Burford during 1980–3. Much information on Minster Lovell and Charterville was discovered by Sylvia Ross, Ralph Scott and Philip Best, who studied census enumerator's returns, tithing apportionments and rate books and undertook oral history interviews. Their help is gratefully acknowledged.

³ *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (JOJ), 5 June 1847.

⁴ Reports of the Select Committee on the National Land Company, *Parliamentary Papers* (1847–8), xxix, Q429.

⁵ See A. M. Hadfield, *The Chartist Land Company* (1910), especially Ch. 10.

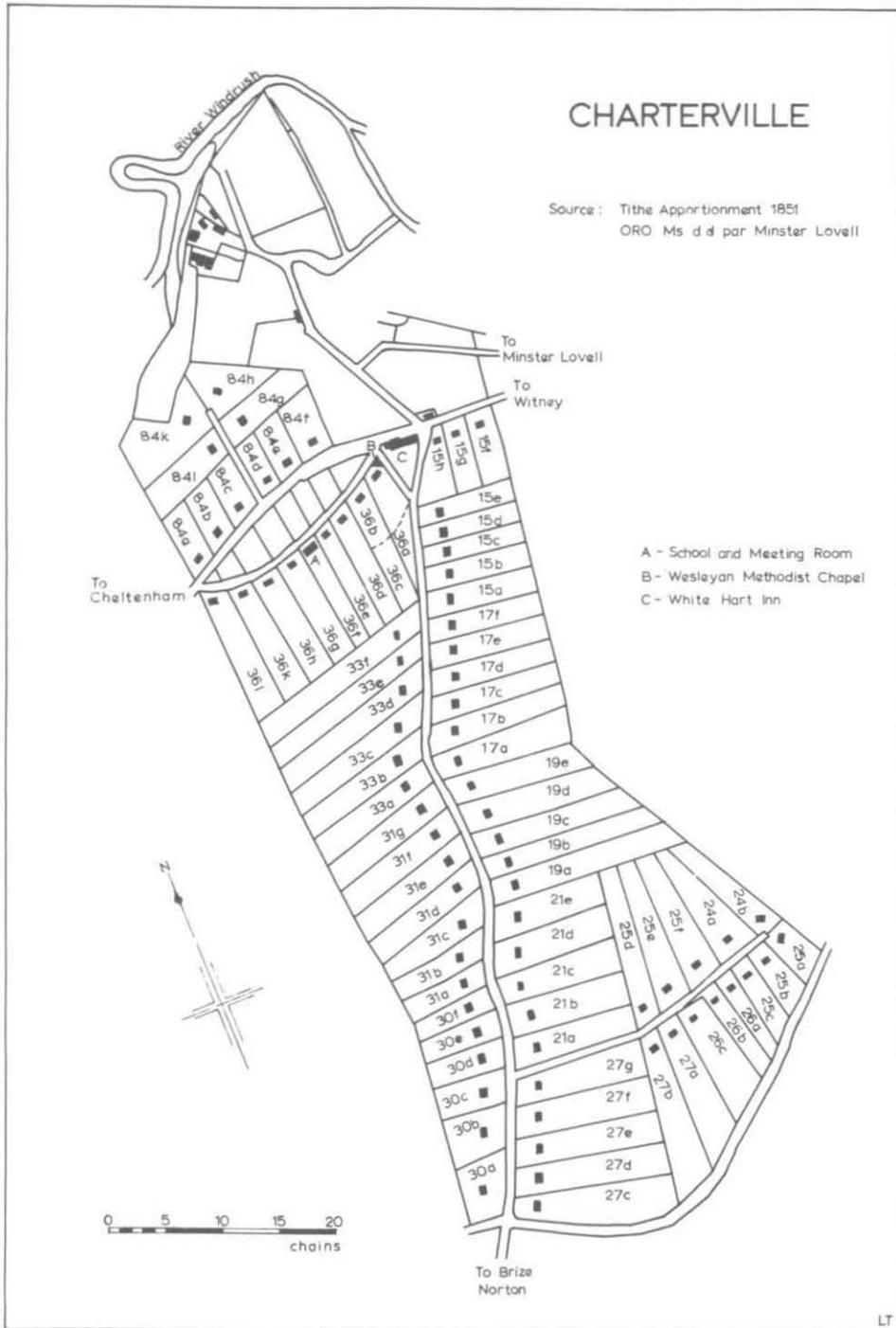


Fig. 1. Charterville in 1851. (For details of occupiers and plot size see Table 3.) The scale of 20 chains equals ¼ mile and approximately 0.4 km.

Daphne Aylwin in the 1970s still had the dresser *in situ*.⁶ On either side of this room were two more for use as bedroom and sitting-room. Behind was a rear range of service rooms: a central back scullery (for a pump) with two smaller rooms off, one with a copper, the other for storage. To the rear were pig-sties (the pig was to prove a key to any hope of prosperity to these holdings, which were too small to sustain any larger stock). Each cottage stood on an allotment (at the time of the ballot of February 1848, 38 of four acres, 12 of three acres and 23 of two acres). These had been cleared of fences and stumps (although, some disaffected settlers were to claim, not effectively so), and ploughed and harrowed twice. A pile of manure (sufficient supplies of this essential commodity were to be another problem for the future) was stacked at each gate.

The soils varied in different parts of the estate between light stonebrash, rather thin in places, and areas of heavier soil. Through the estate ran the main Oxford – Cheltenham road: a major artery, but not giving access to any major potential markets. However, the momentum of the whole Chartist Land Plan at the time was tremendous, and Charterville came on a peak of enthusiasm. The results of the ballot for allotments on the estate among shareholders in the Land Company were announced in the *Northern Star* on 12 February 1848; by the following August, only 14 months after the purchase of the site, all but four or five houses were reported to be occupied.

What does Charterville represent for Chartism as a whole? It was the third of the Land Plan settlements, which eventually numbered five. The policy of Land Reform, accepted by the Chartist movement at its Convention of 1843, represented a change of direction. The growth of the movement between 1838 and 1842 was particularly remarkable for a melding of many disparate elements of working-class radicalism into a concerted programme of action, all accepting the political priorities of the six points of the charter. It achieved a national organisation and network; it shook the establishment severely; it could not be ignored. In 1842 the National Holiday and National Petition represented a peak of action and confrontation, sometimes violent. This emphatic response by the ruling classes forced the Chartists to decide what tactics to adopt next. There had always been tensions in the coalition of individuals and approaches that Chartism encompassed, and in this period after 1842 the differing emphases of these various parts re-emerged more clearly. Some of the coherence and single-mindedness of the earlier phases was lost.

The attempt to give Chartism new life and direction through a practical programme of Land Reform was a major example of this (as some undoubtedly understood it) 'fragmentation' of the movement: an abandonment of direct political priorities. Equally the Land Plan may be seen as the major unifying force in the difficult late years of Chartism. It was a route which Feargus O'Connor himself began to lay down within a year of the events of 1842. The essential simplicity of the scheme helps to explain its tremendous appeal. It was to restore to working people their God-given right of access to the basic means of survival, the soil. It aimed to get them land, and with it freedom, independence and enfranchisement. It was an alternative to commercialism, to industrial capitalism, to machinery, to the evils of surplus labour. In short, the working man could have the means of self-sufficiency and earn a profit. He would keep the fruits of his labour and control his own time, as his predecessors had done. He would regain his self-respect and have the right to a 40s. freehold vote in the county parliamentary constituency. His move to the land would lessen the pool of surplus labour in the towns which kept wages so low there. The burden of poor-rates would be lessened.

So the Land Plan aimed at restoring peasant proprietorship: at achieving individual

⁶ In C. Paine et al., 'Working-class Housing in Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensta*, xliii (1978), 206 et seq.

**NATIONAL
LAND COMPANY.**

PROVISIONALLY REGISTERED.

SHARES £1. 6s. EACH.

The object of this Company is to enable Working Men, for a trifling sum, to obtain possession of Land and Dwellings, upon such terms, that, by honourable and independent labour, they may maintain themselves and families in comfort and respectability.

BENEFITS ASSURED.

The following are the benefits which the Company guarantees to its members:

HOLDERS OF TWO SHARES—A COMFORTABLE HOUSE, TWO ACRES OF GOOD LAND, AND £15.

HOLDERS OF THREE SHARES—A HOUSE, THREE ACRES, AND £21. 10s.

HOLDERS OF FOUR SHARES—A HOUSE, FOUR ACRES, AND £30.

LEASES FOR EVER WILL BE GRANTED TO THE OCCUPANTS.

Thus ensuring to them the value of every improvement they may make upon their allotments. The Company affords great facilities to those members who have the means of purchasing their allotments. The rent will be moderate, as it will be regulated by a charge of 5 per cent. upon the capital expended.

The Company having been called into existence for the benefit of the WORKING CLASSES, the Rules enable the poorest to avail themselves of its advantages, as the Shares may be paid by instalments as low as **THREE PENCE PER WEEK.**

THE RULES OF THE COMPANY (PRICE 4s.)
can be obtained of Mr. WHEELER, the Secretary,
AT THE OFFICE, 83, DEAN STREET, SOHO, LONDON,
where members may be enrolled, and every information obtained.

Or at

7567
REGISTRY OF
1 APR
1847

John G. Shaw

Fig. 2. A handbill issued by the National Land Company early in 1847.

property ownership rather than establishing a collectively-regulated, co-operative community. The way in which its benefits were offered is well-illustrated by a handbill issued in 1847 (Fig. 2). Yet if it seemed to offer a newly realistic route to the longed-for goal, that goal was part of an established tradition of working-class aspirations and beliefs. Far from being a cranky or isolated phenomenon, the Land Plan was developed during a period when community-building at home and abroad had been widely debated and variously attempted by Owenite and socialist groups, by dissenting Christians, and by concerned and alarmed liberal democrats and philanthropists.⁷

The strongest strand of this tradition in Feargus O'Connor's Land Plan literature and speeches seems to be the retrospective, if not reactionary: an echo of the radical-conservative rhetoric of William Cobbett and perhaps of O'Connor's own Irish background.⁸ It is an approach, and a solution, framed in terms of recreating a 'lost world' within the interstices of a new, growing capitalist economic system. William Cobbett, who died in 1835, grew up in a period when that system was still developing and its pervasive nature was perhaps less clear than it was by 1845–51, the timespan of the Chartist Land Company. The Chartist experience was a realisation of just what that capitalist economic system (by then mature) meant. The Land Plan seems a turning-back from that realisation, far in theory from the collective, co-operative socialist enterprises of the Owenites only a

⁷ For a brief introduction to some of the resulting settlements see G. Darley, *Villages of Vision* (1975).

⁸ For O'Connor see J. A. Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom* (1981).

few years before. Yet, as Dorothy Thompson suggests, 'The desire for self-sufficiency and freedom from the dictates of merchants and employers could lead either to involvement in petty landholding schemes or to co-operative ventures, often much closer in practice than theory'.⁹

The paradoxical conservatism and radicalism of a place like Charterville are indeed very apparent. The references to 'honourable and independent labour' and 'comfort and respectability', the belief in the virtues of self-help and a sober, hard-working, happy domestic life, were as much part of the drive to recover lost freedom of action and self-determination as they were part of Samuel Smiles's gospel (with which they have later and mistakenly been almost exclusively identified). Equally, the view that the land is God-given, that men should have direct access to it and its fruit, was inherently radical. The logical conclusion of this latter view is land nationalisation. This inherent contradiction made the Land Question a source of Chartist disunity. Dissenters from O'Connor's plan, notably Bronterre O'Brien, argued that private property in land was basically wrong, that the remedy was the gradual purchase of land by the nation, stages of the purchase being funded by rents from tenancies of land already held by the state, until land nationalisation was achieved. Besides this O'Connor's scheme could only be a palliative, encouraging selfish, narrow views amongst the lucky holders of Land Company plots, benefiting a few but not really getting to the heart of the problem.

In the event it was the policy of land nationalisation which passed, in 1851, into the Chartist programme, and which re-surfaced in later stages of the socialist movement: in the Land and Labour League from 1869, in the vogue for Henry George's Single Tax, and in the Social Democratic Federation in the 1880s. But in 1845 it was Feargus who was carrying the argument, or perhaps the emotions, of Chartists with him, and in that year the Chartist Land Company was established to give practical expression to his ideas. His rhetoric and his presence are a key to this.

Subscribers were to pay weekly sums towards the purchase of shares. From these funds lands would be bought on which to build estates of small-holdings; ballots would be held of all paid-up shareholders; and the lucky ones drawn would be allotted holdings of two, three or four acres according to the sizes of their shares, each with a cottage and a small sum of capital. Hope was given of eventually acquiring freehold. In 1847 a Land and Labour Bank was set up in association with the Land Company. (This was to encourage Chartist depositors, although in Company affairs O'Connor continued to use other banks, e. g. Clinch's at Witney near Charterville).¹⁰

The practical difficulties into which the Land Company ran have often been related¹¹ and need only brief summary here. There were basic problems over its legal position, for it proved ineligible for registration under either the Friendly Societies Act or Joint Stock Company legislation. This meant that it could not own property as a company or grant freeholds, and that legally all the property belonged to Feargus. This caused some disquiet, and by February 1848 Feargus (then MP for Nottingham) was trying to secure legal status by a private Act of Parliament.

In the early days of 1843 there had been talk of the Plan settling forty estates on 20,000 acres, thus helping 5,000 families and reducing the surplus labour pool. The scheme relied on the early settlements generating enough rental income to be re-invested in further land. This always seemed unrealistic: in fact virtually no rents were paid before the Company

⁹ Thompson, *op. cit.* note 1, 113.

¹⁰ Evidence of C. Doyle, who managed the construction of the Minster Lovell Estate, to the Parliamentary Select Committee: *op. cit.* note 4, Q2674.

¹¹ See Hadfield *op. cit.* note 5.

began to falter altogether. The national outcome was a Parliamentary Select Committee to inquire into the Land Plan. Its report in 1848¹² found the financial and legal basis unsound, *but* that Feargus O'Connor was guilty of no dishonesty. Indeed, he was a financial loser. Those involved were given a chance to resolve the affairs of the Company, but eventually in 1851 the properties were put into the hands of Chancery and the estates sold up. The allottees, of whom 250 had been settled on five estates, were given the chance to stay on after payment of rent arrears.

This then was the background against which Charterville was built and ran its brief existence as a Chartist Land Plan settlement between 1848 and 1851. It was the product of the peak of the Company's history. In the first eighteen months the Company attracted 13,000 members, between August 1847 and January 1848 another 42,000 were added, and the membership stood at 70,000 early in 1848. It has been said that the land seems most attractive when times are bad, and this was the case in the economic depression of the winter of 1847. The opening of the Company's first estate, Heronsgate in Hertfordshire, encouraged further recruits. The appeal of this kind of Chartistism really was country-wide. Besides the expected strength in industrial areas, 86 branches in the north and 48 in the Midlands, there were also 89 in the south and 24 in London. This included a number of country towns and some villages. Members included labourers and gardeners. In an 1847 list were a farmer, a milkman and a thatcher, as well as miners, weavers, grocers, tailors, innkeepers and printers.¹³

People did not readily lose faith in so impressive an organisation. Loyalty to Feargus was also a keynote, as we see in a resolution passed by the Banbury branch in November 1848, when doubts were already widespread in some quarters: 'That the members of this branch, and the depositors in the Land and Labour Bank, have the most unbounded confidence in Feargus O'Connor, Esq., MP notwithstanding that a portion of the press is trying to undermine his reputation, and that we are determined to assist him by all means in our power, until the Land is restored to its rightful owners, and every man is in possession of his just and equitable rights'.¹⁴ Certainly O'Connor devoted himself to the Land Plan with great vigour. A visitor in January 1848 to the new Charterville, then still under construction, found him in cold and snow, along roads a foot deep in mud 'living in such a place as could only compare to the barrack-room of the only officer I ever knew in the service who lived on his pay'. The same visitor found the speed with which the cottages and roadways had been built and the land prepared (all since the previous September) remarkable.¹⁵

Soon the allottees were moving in. They came into a parish which was not particularly 'closed' in its social structure. There were no great concentrations of landownership, and several landlords were absentee; it was not an estate village. For much of the earlier part of the century the clergy had also been absentee. However, Minster Lovell was far from a traditional subsistence agrarian economy. It was not a backwater into which to escape, but had itself been effected in its own way by some of the forces operating in urban and industrial areas: market forces, production methods, increasing size of units of production and ownership. So the in-comers had to cope with an unfamiliar agrarian setting, and with a capitalised, improved and improving agricultural 'industry'. The only variant elements in this were the Forest of Wychwood (with a distinctive economy, but to be enclosed within five to ten years) and Witney with its blanket factories.

¹² *Parliamentary Papers* (1847-48), xxix.

¹³ D. Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (1973) maps the Land Company branches in July 1847 and analyses the occupations of over 2,289 members (134-37). See also Thompson, *op. cit.* note 1, 93 et seq.

¹⁴ Quoted by P. Horne, 'The Chartist Land Company', in *Cake and Cockhorse*, iv (1968-71), 21.

¹⁵ Parliamentary Select Committee, *op. cit.* note 4, Q2146 and 2135.

Charterville was set in an alien, if not overtly hostile environment. There was no major market of easy access. Witney, three miles east, was a market town of some *local* importance, but was not big enough to generate the ring of potential prosperity through product specialisation which marked mill towns in northern England. Burford, six miles west, was declining; while Oxford and Cheltenham were considerable journeys. There was no accessible rail-link to these centres, despite talk in the land sale details of 1847 of a proposed Oxford – Cheltenham railway ‘near the Estate’.¹⁶ The allottees had no local contacts through which to exploit what market there was. They clearly lacked practical farming experience in nearly all cases, and this problem was compounded by the lack of stock and capital (e. g. no machinery or draft animals were available). Even for a fit, vigorous, well-versed small-holder four acres was marginal to make a living. In theory the family were to manage solely with spade cultivation. The Parliamentary Select Committee read O’Connor’s *What may be done with three acres of land*. This promised a weekly diet of 14 lbs. of bacon; 1½ ston of flour; 4½ ston of potatoes; 20 duck eggs; 2 lbs. of honey; fruit and vegetables; and also an income of £44 p. a. ‘after consumption and the best of good living’. This was achievable on 157 days labour. Cobbett was invoked, not least in his claim that a cow could be kept on a quarter-acre.¹⁷

Another visitor to Charterville was sceptical. He thought such hopes quite unrealistic on the light and stony grounds, high and exposed as they were to drought in summer and cold winds in winter. His visit in March 1848 seems to have justified these fears. Only seven or eight men could be seen cultivating the allotments. When approached, none proved to be the occupiers, but local labourers hired to work the plots. The allottees were said to be indoors, escaping the icy wind and meanwhile paying the locals 12s. per week in wages, rather than the 8s. offered by local farmers. It seems that Charterville was offering an unexpected solution to the local labour surplus. When the labourers were asked if they could pay the rent and make a living on the plots ‘most said they would like to try, but they would like to have Saturday night – meaning the farmer’s pay [also].’¹⁸

The growing uncertainties about the Land Company did not help. After the findings of the Select Committee in 1848 an attempt was made to collect rents from the allottees at Charterville. They had hoped for a freehold, at least secure tenancy, and objected to paying. James Beattie, a Scottish allottee, openly attacked Feargus at the November 1848 Land Conference, saying that the land had been insufficiently prepared and the capital allowance inadequate, and that he was destitute. Beattie subsequently toured, speaking to meetings against the Land Plan, and featured in the press including the *Illustrated London News*. Apparently he was sub-letting three of his four acres at £13 p. a. The hostile feeling was widespread amongst allottees, four of whom petitioned the House of Commons in March 1849 that they had been offered freeholdings and were exempt from rent or distraint of goods against rent.¹⁹ In late November O’Connor obtained a distraint order, but the attempt ended in a confrontation of allottees with bailiffs and military, and in a dismissed assault case against an allottee who resisted an army officer accompanying the bailiffs.

When Charterville had been bought, £5000 of the purchase price had been secured against a mortgage. At this stage O’Connor abandoned attempts to get rents from the estate to help settle the Land Company’s affairs and left the matter to the holders of the mortgage, a merchant and a farmer who were trustees of the estate of the original vendor of the land. Although their title was dubious, they obtained ejectment orders in February

¹⁶ *JOJ*, 5 June 1847.

¹⁷ Parliamentary Select Committee, *op. cit.* note 4, Fifth Report, 27 et seq.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, evidence of John Revans, Q3393–4.

¹⁹ The complex events of this period are fully rehearsed in Hadfield, *op. cit.* note 5, 160 et seq.

TABLE 3
Occupiers of Charterville 1851

(Sources: Tithe apportionment, January 1851; Census enumerator's returns, March 1851)

| Plot No. on Plan | Name | Size A-R-P | Census Schedule No. | No. in Household and its composition | Occupation (Head of Household) | Birthplace (Head of Household) |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|---------------------|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 25a | John Clarke | 2 | | | | |
| 25b | | 2 | | | | |
| 25c | Thomas Wyatt | 2 | 52 | 4 - husband, wife, son, dau. | Road labourer | Minster Lovell |
| 26a | George Tinton | 2 | | | | |
| 26b | John Leyley | 2 | | | | |
| 26c | James Knight | 4 | | | | |
| 27a | in hand | 4 | | | | |
| 27b | John Littlewood | 4 | 89* | 5 - husband, wife, 3 daus. | Smith & farrier | Retford, Notts. |
| 25d | James Beathe (<i>sic</i> , Beattie?) | 4 | | | | |
| 25e | Ann Price | 4 | | | | |
| 25f | James Shawcrops | 4 | | | | |
| 24a | John Bradshaw | 4 | | | | |
| 24b | Charles Wilkins | 2 1 9 | | | | |
| 27c | George Johnson | 4 | | | | |
| 27d | | 4 | | | | |
| 27e | Alonzo Dimford | 4 | | | | |
| 27f | George Carter | 4 | | | | |
| 27g | John Bowers | 4 | | | | |
| 21a | Benjamin Chapman | 4 | | | | |
| 21b | William Parish | 3 3 | | | | |
| 21c | John Smart | 3 3 | | | | |
| 21d | Thomas Belstead | 4 | 85 | 5 - husband, wife, 3 sons | Farmer of 3 acres | Dedham, Essex |
| 21e | William Chandler | 4 | 84 | 7 - Mary (widow?), 5 daus., 1 son | Farm labourer | Derby |
| 19a | Abraham Deale | 4 | 76 | 2 - husband, wife | Farmer of 3 acres | Maplestead, Essex |
| 19b | William Smith | 4 | 74* | 3 - husband, wife, 1 son | Farmer of 3 acres | Newcastle-on-Tyne |
| 19c | Henry Kirham | 4 | 81 | 1 | Farmer of 4 acres | St. Mary, Whitechapel, Middlesex |
| 19d | George Turton & George Carter | 4 | | | | |
| 19e | Charles Willis | 4 | 80* | 3 - father, 2 sons | Farmer of 4 acres | Ongar, Essex |
| 17a | George Lay | 4 | | | | |
| 17b | Charles Neppard | 3 | 79 | 6 - Elizabeth (widow), 3 sons, 2 daus. | Farmer of 3 acres | Grateley, Hants |
| 17c | Hayes | 3 | 78 | 2 - John, bro.-in-law | Gardener | Cernel, Somerset |
| 17d | James Holmes | 3 | | | | |
| 17e | Charles Arnold | 3 | | | | |

| Plot No. on Plan | Name | Size A-R-P | Census Schedule No. | No. in Household and its composition | Occupation (Head of Household) | Birthplace (Head of Household) |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| 17f | John Hicks | 3 | 71 | 4 - husband, wife, son, dau. | Spinner & farmer em- ploying 1 man | Hailey, Oxon. |
| 15a | Thomas Maycock | 3 | | | | |
| 15b | Othaniel Homby | 2 | | | | |
| 15c | In hand | 2 | | | | |
| 15d | William Smith | 2 | 74* | 3 - husband, wife, son | Basket maker & far- mer of 3 acres | Newcastle-on-Tyne |
| 15e | Edward Tibbles | 2 | | | | |
| 30a | Ann Price | 1 38 | | | | |
| 30b | Edmund Stallwood | 2 | | | | |
| 30c | Charles Wilkins | 2 | | | | |
| 30d | | 2 | | | | |
| 30e | William Squires | 2 | | | | |
| 30f | Thomas Gilbert | 2 | | | | |
| 31a | Benjamin Mundy | 2 | 99 | 2 - husband, wife | Farmer of 4 acres em- ploying 1 man | Sutton Courtenay, Berks. |
| 31b | | 2 | | | | |
| 31c | George Bubb | 3 | 100 | 4 - husband, wife, 2 nephews | Tailor | Westminster, Mid- dlesex |
| 31d | John Horne | 3 | | | | |
| 31e | George Bogis | 3 | | | | |
| 31f | Charles Wilkins | 4 | | | | |
| 31g | Charles Ireland | 4 | | | | |
| 33a | In hand | 3 3 | | | | |
| 33b | John Bennett | 3 3 | | | | |
| 33c | John Wilkins | 4 | | | | |
| 33d | Henry Corse | 4 | | | | |
| 33e | In hand | 4 | | | | |
| 33f | In hand | 4 | | | | |
| 36a | John Gathard | 4 | | | | |
| 36b | William Nield | 2 | | | | |
| 36c | [John?] Stone | 2 | 91 | 5 - husband, wife, 3 daus. | Cordwainer & farmer of 3 acres | Manchester |
| 36d | Eliza Goodwill | 4 | | | | |
| 36e | Christopher Hanison | 4 | | | | |
| 36f | In hand | 2 2 37 | | | | |
| 36g | Charles Edward Hill | 4 | | | | |
| 36h | John Morgan | 4 | | | | |
| 36k | James Price | 4 | | | | |

| Plot No. on Plan | Name | Size A-R-P | Census Schedule No. | No. in Household and its composition | Occupation (Head of Household) | Birthplace (Head of Household) |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 36l | Susannah Johnson | 4 | | | | |
| 84a | Albion Lloyd | 2 | | | | |
| 84b | Elizabeth Nicholson | 2 | 66 | 3 - mother, dau., son | Farmer of 3 acres | Carlisle, Cumberland |
| 84c | John Metcalf | 2 | | | | |
| 84d | Miles Ashworth | 2 | | | | |
| 84e | Francis Canlk | 2 | | | | |
| 84f | | 2 | | | | |
| 84g | | 2 | | | | |
| 84h | Thomas Kirk | 3 | | | | |
| 84k | Benjamin Jackson | 4 | | | | |
| 94l | William Botherhill | 3 | | | | |
| 15f | Edward Young | 2 | | | | |
| 15g | William Haye | 2 | 78* | 2 - William, brother-in-law | Gardener | Cernel, Somerset |
| 15h | Henry Grimshaw | 2 | | | | |
| 125 | In hand | 7 18 | | | | |
| 104 | | 8 29 | | | | |
| | | 267 3 11 ⁰ | | | | |

Notes

1. Census details are shown for all occupiers listed in the tithe apportionment whom it was possible to identify firmly in the census returns. Their number is few. The major reason must be large-scale departures from Charterville at this time, viz. the 38 uninhabited houses noted in the census.
2. Entries marked * relate to surviving allottees from February 1848.
3. Other residents, although not original allottees, are clearly incomers and some are known to have been of Chartist persuasion e. g. George Bubb (plot 31c) who was elected 'churchwarden' from Charterville.

1850 against 66 allottees,²⁰ who contested them in July at Oxford Assizes.²¹ The mortgagees won, the allottees had to pay costs, and three who could not ended up in Oxford Castle. In September 1850 the mortgagees attempted to sell the estate; the allottees, who still argued that they had freeholds and who were described by the local press as 'poor deluded mechanics . . . the victims of [O'Connor's] memorable land scheme', turned up in force to protest.²² 'James Beattie . . . a fine old fellow, whose spirits did not appear to be broken . . . cautioned people not to buy any of the lots' as he and others intended to stay in possession. This had its effect and the first lot found no bidders. However, five plots with cottages were sold to their occupiers and a further five to purchasers other than their occupiers – including James Beattie's to a Mr. Chinnor, described as Feargus O'Connor's solicitor. This rearguard action by the settlers merely put off the inevitable. In November 1850, 34 of them were ejected 'in a more peaceable manner than was expected'.²³

The plight of the allottees was a cause to which the Chartist movement would once have rallied, for example to collect funds for a High Court action; but no longer. There were recriminations, both by some allottees against Feargus, and by some shareholders who had failed to draw a holding and who saw the idle allottees avoiding both hard work and payment of rent. Some allottees left, others accepted terms for tenancies. The situation was generally confused, and only in July 1851 did some clarification come when Chancery took control and the well-named William Goodchap set about putting affairs in order. He had the three imprisoned allottees released and offered tenancies on payment of rent arrears and on perpetual leasehold terms. By August 1851 the remainder of the estate (164 acres and 53 cottages) was again up for sale.²⁴

By June 1852 it was possible to draw up a list of allotment owners by purchase. By comparing the original *Northern Star* and Select Committee list of allottees of 1848, the tithe apportionment (compiled late in 1850, dated 2 January 1851 and an interesting example of the system catching up with Charterville), the census enumerator's returns of March 1851, and Goodchap's list of June 1852, we see the disintegration of the Charterville Chartists (Table 3).²⁵ Of the 73 plot-holders of 1848, only 33 survive to late 1850. The two-acre plot-holders seem to have been most vulnerable:

TABLE 4
Persistence of plot-holders related to plot size

| Plot Size (acres) | No. of plot-holders in 1848 | No. surviving to 1851 | Percentage surviving to 1851 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 4 | 38 | 16 | 42% |
| 3 | 12 | 8 | 67% |
| 2 | 23 | 9 | 39% |
| Total | 73 | 33 | 45% |

Of the 70 occupiers in the tithe list only 17 appear in the March 1851 census, and only five of these were 1848 plot-holders. By 1852 the 1848 survivors were down to four. By 1861

²⁰ *JOJ*, 9 Feb. 1850.

²¹ *JOJ*, 29 Feb. 1850. Weaving and Pinnock (the mortgagees) v. Gothard and others.

²² *JOJ*, 7 Sept. 1850.

²³ *JOJ*, 23 Nov. 1850.

²⁴ *JOJ*, 9 August 1851.

²⁵ Based on: *Northern Star* 12 Feb. 1848; Reports of Select Committee on the National Land Company op. cit. note 4; the additional tithe apportionment for Minster Lovell (covering Charterville) 1851, Oxfordshire Record Office MS d d Par Minster Lovell c7; the census enumerator's returns for Minster Lovell 1851 and 1861; Goodchap's Schedule of Allottees 10 June 1852, P. R. O. C121/401; altered Minster Lovell tithe apportionment 1915, loc. cit.

there were two. The fact that in 1852 44 lots were owned by 28 people shows the tendency for ownership to concentrate. By 1915 only 26 of the 81 plots were owner-occupied, confirming a pattern of sub-letting by small owners almost all of them local. So by the end of 1850, most of the Chartists had vanished almost without trace.

Yet Charterville and its lands remained important. It became part of the host community in that it was expected to pay rates and tithes, but it was and has remained a distinct place. In 1848 the Chartists tried to get three allottees elected as parish officers through the vestry. They were denied by the magistrates and appeal was made to the Home Secretary. Despite overtures from the vicar, who spoke at the first anniversary of the Charterville schoolroom, the archdeacon expelled the elected Chartist churchwarden (the *Northern Star* agent in Charterville).²⁶ By 1854 (when most Charterville residents were local) the vicar was blaming poor attendance at church, and his inability to raise a church rate, on 'the existence of the O'Connor cottages . . . forming another parish almost, the generality of the occupiers being bigotted dissenters'.²⁷

Where the Chartists failed the locals seized the unprecedented opportunity to set up on their own. It was an opportunity badly needed: Oxfordshire was the lowest-wage county in the country, job opportunities and housing were frequently abysmal, and emigration seemed the only alternative. Small traders and others did buy into some holdings, but the occupants were chiefly local people. Many 'core' families from the village down in the valley developed branches up the hill in Charterville. Properties were popular, and holdings remained filled. Until the 1880s the colony flourished, particularly through growing potatoes (a readily marketable crop, grown on few farms at that time) and barley (to feed the pigs which were the chief hope of a profit). These settlers proved one thing: it was virtually impossible to get by on a four-acre holding.²⁸ In 1882 the local vicar told the Royal Commission on Agriculture that O'Connor's scheme 'to deliver the labouring class in towns from the tyranny and oppression of their masters, to put them in an independent position where they might enjoy the fresh air of heaven and sit under their own fig tree and eat the fruit of their own vine', had indeed foundered at Charterville for lack of farming knowledge. But even the present occupants ('picked agricultural labourers, because only the very best man can do there. I mean a man who can work six hours after he has done his work in the day, and who has his wits about him'), even they were hard-pressed to achieve any returns from four acres. There seems to have been no question of managing solely on such a holding.

John Cockbill told the same Commission, rather bitterly, that his four-acre holding showed barely a £7 profit in the last year. But the hope remained. Wages were so low that 'the hope of bettering my position' (Cockbill) remained attractive.²⁹ So settlers did occasional piece-work on neighbouring farms, or building work, or went to the blanket factories (i. e. a variety of dual occupations). But there remained an air of superiority over agricultural labourers. Observers noted this, and the settlers claimed it themselves.³⁰

By the 1880s the theme of 'land for the people' was back in the forefront. Joseph Ashby

²⁶ *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 28 June 1849, cited by Hadfield op. cit. note 5. These events do not appear to be reported in *QJ*.

²⁷ E. P. Baker (ed.), *Bishop Wilberforce's Visitation Returns for the Archdeaconry of Oxford, 1854*, O. R. S. xxxv (1954), 95-6.

²⁸ Evidence of Rev. H. C. Ripley, vicar of Minster Lovell, to the Royal Commission on Agriculture, Minutes of Evidence, iii, *Parliamentary Papers* (1882) xiv, Q64, 445 et seq.

²⁹ Evidence of John Cockbill, agricultural labourer; *ibid*, Q. 64, 624 et seq.

³⁰ As for example Mr. Ernest Bowles of Charterville in conversation with Mrs. S. Ross, Mr. P. Best and Mr. R. Pinfield, 1982.

(whose story has done so much to rescue 19th-century rural life from cosy nostalgia)³¹ was on tour in the Land Restoration League's van around the villages of neighbouring counties. The van, painted red, was emblazoned **FAIR RENTS. FAIR WAGES. THE LAND FOR ALL. JUSTICE TO LABOUR. ABOLITION OF LAND LORDISM**. A generation later, in 1914, Joseph's son A. W. Ashby was surveying allotments and small-holdings in Oxfordshire as a way out of agricultural depression, and remarking that, in the absence of a radical redistribution of the fruits of their labour: 'By the cultivation of vegetables and corn and by feeding a pig, the labourer is enabled in a low wage county to keep from his growing family the insistent pangs of hunger, and sometimes put a comfortable barrier between himself and the poor-house'³² – sentiments with which O'Connor would not have been unfamiliar!

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³¹ M. K. Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe 1859–1919* (1961).

³² A. W. Ashby, *Allotments and Small Holdings in Oxfordshire. A Survey* (1917), 78.