



Sir Michael Hicks Beach

Farewell To His Tenantry

Sir Michael Hicks Beach took a formal farewell of his old tenants at Netheravon and Fittleton at a dinner to which he invited them at Netheravon on Wednesday evening. All classes were invited, tenant farmers, cottagers and allotment holders. There being about 350 guests. This severs a relationship which has existed between the family and these two parishes for 250 years, the cause of Sir Michael's departure being that the whole of the estate has been purchased by the War Office.

The Beach family settled in Fittleton in 1650, and the last of the male line bought Netheravon from the Duke of Beaufort in 1760. After his death the property passed to his son-in-law, Mr. Hicks, who took the surname of Beach. It was this gentleman, the great grandfather of the present baronet, that was the great friend of Sidney Smith when the latter was curate of Netheravon.

In replying to the toast of his health at the dinner, proposed by the Vicar, Sir Michael said he celebrated his coming of age at Fittleton by a gathering similar to that just 40 years ago, and he remembered Netheravon from childhood. Many changes had taken place in that 40 years, not the least being the improvement in the condition of the labourers, who were now housed and were able to live in a way that was impossible then. He reviewed the marked alteration in the condition of agriculture in the second half of that period as compared with the first half, and said in the last 20 years the rents on the estate had gone down by half. He had spent more on the labourers' cottages than ever he had received from them, and after paying family charges and other outgoings on the estate, he had received from that great property no more than an agent would get. There had been times when he hardly knew what would happen, when farms seemed likely to be given up, with perhaps small chance of finding fresh tenants; in that case he had no means of farming them himself, and it would probably have come to a forced sale of the property.

He spoke of the wrench it was to sever an association of 250 years at Netheravon House, but he mentioned that if arrangements now in progress were completed some connection between them would still be maintained by Fittleton Manor house being purchased by his son. He predicted that great changes would come over the district by military development. Barracks would certainly be built, and perhaps in time it would become something like a second Aldershot. Much land would go down to grass on cultivated lands less labour would be employed, but no doubt there would be plenty of openings for labour connected with military works.

In bidding them farewell he assured them that in administering that estate he had never considered first his own advantage – he had spent the rents of the property upon it in every way that seemed necessary before he kept a penny for himself. He had looked upon it as a trust, and he believed it was the same with the great majority of landlords in England. The day would be a bad one for this country when the old English system of landlord and tenant came to an end and there was no longer that relationship between them that had happily existed at Fittleton and Netheravon ever since he had known them. He subsequently acknowledged the toast of himself, Lady Lucy and the Misses Hicks Beach, who were all present at the dinner.

Exeter and Plymouth Gazette Saturday 1 October 1898

Gift for Sir Michael Hicks Beach

The Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lady Lucy Hicks Beach have been presented by Sir Michael's former tenants and friends in Netheravon and Fittleton, Wilts, with an illuminated address and a case of handsome silver table vases, as a token of appreciation of the kindness and care which both parishes had received from Sir Michael and Lady Lucy.

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette Thursday 1 June 1899