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Strategic Countryside Management

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Contents

Chapter 1

What is the Countryside?

1. Introduction

Although built on natural foundations, the countryside remains very much a human construct. In developed countries, especially those with a mainly urban population, the key actors in debates about the countryside include those who live in and perhaps "own" parts of it, those whose livings depend upon it, those who visit, and those who care about it. There are many overlaps between these groups and the interactions between them provide much of the justification for countryside management. Our definition of this activity, given later in this chapter, is based on the need to manage countryside resources in ways that meet the sometimes conflicting needs of each of these groups.

We begin, however, by exploring the basic question: what is the countryside? There has been considerable debate among academics and politicians as to when an area of land should be classified as "rural." The resulting definitions are often based on population densities, and vary across different countries (Roberts & Hall 2001). Similarly, arguments arise when attempting to decide what is meant when we use the word "countryside" and whether or not this is the same as "rural." It is our contention that, in practice, such definitions are redundant and the important focus should be what individuals think of as countryside. Perceptions of what constitutes countryside inform a variety of sources, including the regular Great Britain Leisure Day Visits Survey (e.g. TNS Travel and Tourism 2004) an important source of information on how many people visit the countryside. For many of us whether or not we perceive an area of land as "countryside" will depend to a great extent on how that land is used and the values and ideas that we associate with those uses. On this basis, land use may be a sensible starting point in any text attempting to take a strategic approach to the management of the countryside.

Despite the importance of this issue, many texts on the countryside report only primary land use. This term describes the single dominant activity on an area of land, generally agriculture, forestry or urban use. Such simple descriptions can conceal as much as they reveal and hide the important fact that in most cases land has a number of secondary uses. Thus, agricultural land may be a valuable water catchment, provide habitats for non-agricultural plants and animals, store or recycle various substances (for example the greenhouse gases associated with global warming), and help to determine the landscape which is the key input for a range of recreational and cultural activities. Furthermore, any such definition of land use is static, ignoring the movement of land between different uses, a point we return to in Chapter 2.

Not surprisingly, when a change in land use is proposed, many people with an interest in the issue may attempt to influence events. This may be achieved by purchasing the land, thus acquiring some of the necessary rights to determine how it is used. A more common approach is to dispute the proposed change in use, either through the political process, or through the planning system (see Chapter 13). It is important to note that many of those participating in such debates have no claim to the ownership of the land but may legitimately assert some rights when change of use is under consideration. Legitimacy here would include what is politically acceptable as well as what is consistent with the law.

Many of the major items on the countryside management agenda are generated by the conflicting or competing demands over land. Such pressures have developed over long periods, so it is appropriate to begin this account with a review of the historical development of the countryside. Before attempting a more precise definition of countryside management, we briefly examine some of the major issues facing modern countryside managers and argue that a strategic approach is required in order to deal with them effectively.

2. The Evolution of the Countryside

To understand the modern countryside it is not necessary to go back to the earliest human occupation of the land that we now call the United Kingdom. The human relics of those periods form an important cultural element of the countryside and provide a potential attraction for visitors; however, the landscape in which our earliest predecessors lived differed in many important ways from what we know today. Indeed, it was not until the end of the first millennium AD, that the patterns of human settlement and agriculture that would provide the basis of the modern countryside became widely established.

Limitations in transport and communications at that time prevented any regional specialisation of agricultural production and the maintenance of law and order was also largely a local matter. Following the Norman Conquest in 1066, the system of land use was codified and rural occupation was standardised at the level of the manor. During much of the first half of the last millennium, land which was not held in manors was usually either owned by the crown or by the church; indeed, many Lords of the Manor held their land in the gift of the crown on condition of accepting certain military obligations.

Postan (1972) suggests that before the Norman Conquest "*the church had acquired a large part, perhaps as much as one third, of all England's occupied surface. The possessions were, as a rule, also held in large units.*" Following the Conquest, the Normans re-assigned the ownership of estate properties either to William the Conqueror or to those accompanying him. "*The superior ownership of land was vested in the Crown from whom all other titles now derived.*" Below the Crown, a systematic framework of land ownership and occupation, consisting of a hierarchy of owners, tenants and sub-tenants, covered the whole of England.

In the absence of a cash economy, or any system of written enforceable contracts, the rights to use land had to be assigned on the basis of commonly accepted custom. This "custom of the manor" defined for villagers their individual obligations to and rights in the collective economy (Dahlman 1980). Under this custom, rights to the use of land were carefully specified, differentiating between the rights of private cultivation of land in the few major arable fields and the rights to the key communal resource. The latter included the

rights to graze green lanes and tracks, the gleaning and grazing of stubbles, as well as the use of commons and the wastes surrounding the arable fields. Various classes of tenure existed for villagers and this would entitle some to the right of private cultivation on strips in the arable fields. These strips were scattered through the fields in a seemingly random fashion, an apparently inefficient system of land use, the long survival of which is still debated by historians.

The significant contrast within this system was between the allocation of exclusive cultivation rights on the strips in the period between ploughing and harvest, and their use for communal purposes during the rest of the year. The common resources of the manor were extensive and important to all tenants. Decisions were therefore required at various points in the year to determine when land would move from private use to common, and back again.

These decisions were made by the manorial court, which, according to the custom of the manor, managed the collective resources and established the dates of cultivation, sowing, and harvest. Law and order and defence were also regulated by the custom of the manor (Dahlman 1980). Obligations to the manor, in return for the use of land and the provision of defense and law and order, were paid for by labour or through military duties.

It is not necessary to rhapsodise about the manorial system as a model of land management, but in the context of the last millennium, where nation states were just coming into existence in these islands and the technology of agricultural production was primitive, it can be seen as a notable success. Its role in establishing a settled agricultural system which persisted for several hundred years is not in dispute and its contribution to the early stages of economic growth was vital. Its particular interest to countryside managers comes from its ability to provide an effective means of delivering certain goods, such as law and order and defence, that provided common benefits to all members of society. The provision of such "public goods" (see Chapter 12) is, as we shall see, a central role of current countryside management systems.

The eventual demise of the manorial system was brought about by a changing economic and social situation to which other systems were better suited. One important change was the increased use of cash in the economy, a factor which made it possible for labour dues to be converted to wages. At the same time labour costs increased, due to a combination of the early development of urban centres and periodic reductions in the working population through disease (in particular the Black Death, which reached England in 1348). In addition, the developing legal framework led to the increasing use of written contracts and a more specialised economy began to provide inputs for more effective agricultural production.

As well as the manorial system, the Normans also introduced the concept of forests to the British Isles. Initially these had little to do with trees but were areas that certain superior landowners, usually the Crown or the monasteries, defined as forest. Forests might comprise a large area, perhaps several villages and manors, with their associated waste. Initially their main purpose was to provide an area for hunting and the sovereign retained all rights to the chase within them, controlling all activities which might influence the quality of the sport (James 1981). The sovereign might also make concessions regarding use of the forest to those he wished to reward. Such concessions could be very valuable, including the rights to take venison or timber, and possibly including rights of conversion of forest land to cropping (assart). As well as their use as gifts, these rights could also be sold if

the monarch needed money. Wild boar were also hunted in the forest and, together with venison, these two species provided an important source of meat: this was highly significant given that cattle and sheep were not much eaten, providing mainly draught power, wool and tallow.

An important related form of land use in that period which, according to Rackham (1986), reached its peak towards the beginning of the fourteenth century, was the deer park. These parks were created by enclosing areas of forest and woodland with fences, high stone walls and banks, so that the deer (mainly fallow deer) within them were easily accessible for harvesting as venison. Rackham estimates that there were some 3,200 parks in England by 1300, averaging about 100 hectares in size and covered some 2% of the country.

The development of Scotland for human use and habitation was different from that experienced in England and Wales. In Scotland the early land owning system was essentially tribal and based on the clans. As the manors were being established in England the agricultural land use evolving in Scotland was based on a dichotomy of cultivation of separate plots or "riggs" on the lower lying inbye land, contrasting with the outbye, used for extensive grazing and hunting, on the slopes of hills and mountains (Bedford Franklin 1952). This inbye system of cultivation was known as run-rigg and the scattered strips or riggs are reminiscent of the manorial system further south, except that the riggs were ridges separated by furrows. It also differed from the English manors in that it was based on one field only, with subsequent weed infestations occasionally obliging the occupants to let the field lie fallow for a year. A further disadvantage of the system was that the riggs might become high enough to make ploughing difficult and to ensure that the furrows in between them became waterlogged. Occasional shifting cultivation might also be practised on the outbye.

The relationship between the Normans and the Scots was different from that in England where they took the role of conquerors. In Scotland, Norman knights helped settle some areas, bringing them under consolidated rule, and in some cases were rewarded with gifts of land. The Norman landlords had much fuller rights over their land than the tribal owners and used these to change the conditions of tenure for their tenants, although they did not succeed in changing their mode of cultivation. In Scotland, as in England and Wales, ownership by the church was very important, with the monasteries often playing a key role in civil administration and economic development. By the late thirteenth century the church had acquired much of the best land in Scotland (Callander 1987).

In England and Wales, the move from the manorial system to one of enclosed agriculture, took several hundred years to complete and two separate phases of enclosure can usefully be differentiated. The first phase, sometimes referred to as the Tudor enclosures, proceeded mainly by adding the waste surrounding the manors to the cultivated area. These areas had traditionally been used as extensive grazing for pigs or for hunting, and could be brought into the manorial cultivated area comparatively easily. In the process of enclosure, traditional common rights were diminished and some communal obligations lapsed. This phase was also affected by the rise of the wool trade with The Netherlands, which led to demands for extensive areas of grazing. Following the Act for Dissolution of the Monasteries of 1536 in England and later legislation in Scotland, large areas of land were transferred to the ownership of the Crown. However, this was passed on by the monarch to other owners, by sale or gift, within a short space of time.

The second phase of enclosure involved a more rigorous Parliamentary process of passing an Enclosure Act for each village. This process, although piecemeal, village by village, was nevertheless radical. Enclosure Commissioners were appointed by the Act of Parliament and would conduct hearings in the village where claims to land rights could be heard. The commissioners would then determine the apportionment of land amongst claimants. Historians debate whether this process seriously disadvantaged the poor, mainly through arguments about how many people were displaced from the countryside and lost their rights to cultivate land. It seems unlikely that the smallest landowners, especially those who had only common rights, will have benefited directly from enclosure. Certainly the main opponents of enclosure during this phase emphasise the appearance of a class of landless labourers, which, more recently, has made it easier for agriculture to reduce its labour force rapidly, as the industry has modernised its production processes. Nevertheless it is not appropriate to assert that all of those displaced from agriculture by enclosure will have lost as a result. As with any migration from one activity to another, many movers will have significantly improved their situation and enhanced their prospects.

Parliamentary enclosure in England was concentrated in the period from the mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. In arable areas it produced the countryside with which we are now familiar, typified by regular rectangular fields and scattered farmsteads (Hoskins 1988). Strong opposition to enclosure came from early defenders of the countryside, such as the poets John Clare and William Wordsworth, who particularly attacked the disappearance of extensive public rights of access under the process. The debate about access in England and Wales (see Chapter 15) thus has strong roots in agricultural history, in that enclosure, by creating a more efficient agricultural system also removed many important public rights of access from the countryside.

In Scotland, the transition from tribal to modern land occupation was achieved through a process of feu-ing (Callander 1987), whereby landowners converted traditional tenancies to a fixed rent basis. This differed from the English enclosures in that change could take place on a small scale, driven rapidly by market forces. The resulting land ownership structure is more concentrated, with far fewer landowners than in the rest of the U.K. and consequently offers potential for more rapid change, as proposed in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill 2003. In the Highlands of Scotland the situation was different in that the land was poorer and was only able to support part-time farming. Other significant activities in the highlands were cattle droving and professional soldiering, often as mercenaries. Haldane (1968) explains how the practice of rieving, which was an activity on the Borders between Scotland and England involving frequent raids across the border to steal cattle, was a natural precursor of the more civilised droving of cattle and sheep from Scottish producing areas to the growing English towns and cities further South. Before the advent of railways, such trade depended on the availability of a group of people able and willing to drive the cattle the substantial distances to market.

The development of the Highlands has not been without substantial problems. For example the Highland Clearances, which spanned the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the rapid establishment of deer forests at the end of the nineteenth century. The Clearances were made by landowners restructuring their estates rapidly to facilitate the introduction of extensively grazed sheep, to meet the demand for wool. Controversy still continues, regarding the rights and wrongs of these events. It was an early major example of

the conflict between highlands and lowlands within Scotland, with the highlanders seeing themselves as losing out to the southern landowners who took away their livelihoods. However, it has also been argued that the Highland form of land use, based on what crops could be grown, some droving and military service, had reached the end of its capacity to support the rural population. The potato famine (1846–1848) in Ireland had its counterpart in Scotland and many families left the land and emigrated for that reason. Others were moved to new settlements by landlords and had to find new ways of supporting themselves.

Later in the nineteenth century, another rapid change of land use was introduced in the Highlands with the rapid adoption of deer forests. This was brought about by several factors in combination (Orr 1982). First, economic growth elsewhere, notably in England, the United States and some European countries, generated a wealthy leisured class who were able to spend large sums in providing for their relaxation. Second, the spread of railways made it possible to travel significant distances in pursuit of recreational opportunities. Third, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the production of sheep for meat became uneconomic as refrigerated shipping brought New Zealand and Australian lamb to the British market which had traditionally been supplied partly from the Highlands.

According to Orr, these forces combined to bring significant numbers of wealthy people to Scotland in search of sporting opportunities. The main sport was deer stalking, but grouse shooting was also a significant interest. The new population of sportsmen visited on a seasonal basis, mainly coming by rail to the Highlands. Some of the wealthier sportsmen bought estates and reorganised them round the creation of deer forests, often quite drastically and with little attention to the interests of local people. The introduction of rail also allowed Scotch beef to be delivered to its traditional markets in the South more quickly and cheaply. This was another blow to the Highland working population as it removed the need for cattle droving, an important source of occasional employment in rural areas.

The full impact of these developments can be seen in Orr's estimate that more than one million hectares, nearly a quarter of the agricultural area, were diverted to deer forest management in the Highlands during this period. This implies a significant reduction in agricultural production and, more importantly, the loss of livelihood of many crofters. This very significant change in land use involved an important shift of emphasis from the production of one private good (food) to another (game) and in that sense it is perhaps untypical of the problems confronting countryside managers today. Nevertheless there is an important group of issues surrounding the pursuit of game in the countryside and their impact on many other types of activity. The developmental impact of such switches of activity may be crucial to the continued provision of countryside goods of all kinds.

3. Demographic Development

The *demand* for countryside is expressed by people and their geographical location will influence which areas of countryside they use. Therefore the demographic development of this country has been a key element in the evolution of the countryside. In this section we first report the broad facts of population growth over recent centuries and then seek to establish its distribution on either side of the urban-rural boundary.

3.1. Total Population

Deane & Cole (1967) present a useful summary of the historic evolution of the population of these islands based on an array of sources. They estimate that the population of Britain grew from 6.8 to 10.8 million in the century from 1701 to 1801, when the first Census was taken in Britain. However, Ireland diverged from England and Wales during the nineteenth century. The Irish potato famine in the 1840s, followed by high rates of emigration, reduced the population by 3.5 million, by the end of that century (Deane & Cole 1967). Scotland fared somewhat better in the nineteenth century, although it, too, suffered rural poverty and depopulation during the second half of the century.

The U.K. population as a whole grew threefold between 1851 and 2001. Although, rates of growth were different between its constituent parts. Whilst the population grew least in Northern Ireland, it trebled in England and roughly doubled in Wales and Scotland. The Government publication *Social Trends 2001* (Central Statistical Office 2001) includes a graph projecting population change to 2021, suggesting that an additional four million will be added to the U.K. population over the next 20 years, most of it in England, with a small decline in Scotland.

3.2. Rural Population

The internal distribution of population between urban and rural areas evolved over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as can be seen in Table 1.1.

Comparing the agricultural counties with the industrial/commercial ones, we see roughly double the growth rate in the latter group. So what was the source of these differences in growth rate? It is tempting to argue that agricultural counties could be taken as synonymous with rural and industrial/commercial as approximating the urban situation. However, that is not strictly appropriate in the eighteenth century during which there was still substantial industrial activity in rural areas. Nevertheless, we may say that the industrial and commercial counties include most of the future urban areas in England and Wales. It is in the urbanising counties that we would expect the emergence of an interest in the countryside as a desirable location for recreation.

Table 1.1: Estimated population of England and Wales by type of county, 1701–1831 (millions).

County Type	**1701**	**1751**	**1781a**	**1781b**	**1801**	**1831**
Agricultural	1.95	1.96	2.38	2.33	2.61	3.69
Mixed	1.92	1.93	2.33	2.33	2.79	4.04
Industrial/commercial	1.95	2.25	2.82	2.87	3.76	6.32
Total	5.83	6.14	7.53	7.53	9.16	14.05

Source: Deane & Cole (1967).

3.3. Urban and Rural Populations

Although there are no time series data for the rural population before 1851, from 1801 population censuses where conducted every ten years and these made a crude division between urban and rural, based essentially, on an administrative classification of what was urban and what was rural. In 1851 it was found that the balance of population between urban and rural had shifted so that England and Wales had become urban dominant, that is the urban population exceeded the rural population. We can see that Figure 1.1. presents a rather complex story, reflecting both a shifting boundary and the fact that people are migrating across it in both directions.

Following the enclosures, the agricultural population had reached its maximum at about 2.1 million, in 1851. After this high point in agricultural employment, technological advances led to new and more efficient farming systems that did not employ so many workers. Pressure on the agricultural workforce was compounded by the great Agricultural Depression of the 1870s and the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw rural poverty on a major scale in the arable districts and to a lesser extent in the livestock areas. From this time agriculture lost its traditional position as a monopoly supplier of the British market in one commodity after another, as other countries began to export large quantities of cheap food.

From the latter half of the nineteenth century we see considerable growth in urban populations, while their rural counterparts remained at much the same levels. Figure 1.1 shows a sharp decline in rural populations between 1951 and 1961: but this is an artifact of changes in the way that rural populations were classified after this date. Rural population increases after 1961 are a product of net out-migration from towns into rural areas. Growth in population has not been equal across all areas and population densities have continued to decline in some remoter rural areas.

The urban-rural dichotomy that now underlies all aspects of the countryside only became important when urban populations became large in comparison with rural ones. The importance of urban dominance is perhaps more symbolic than substantive, but it did signal the very definite arrival of an urban majority in this country. From then on, two distinct interest groups can be identified in the countryside. On one hand are those who live in rural

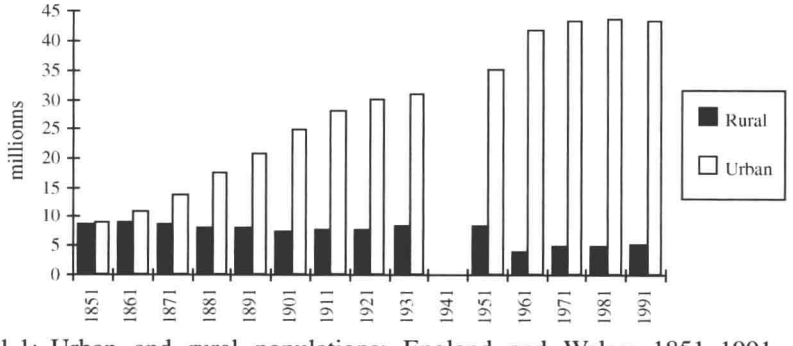

Figure 1.1: Urban and rural populations: England and Wales: 1851–1991. *Source:* Population Census, via Saville (1957), and OPCS (1981) and (1991).

areas, and, on the other are those urban dwellers with an interest in the countryside. The urban interest can be illustrated by the increasing demand for countryside recreation and in the more recent tendency for some urban households to relocate to rural areas.

The discussion so far has dealt with population as a whole. However, from the point of view of recreation demand, it is important to note the growth in the proportion of older people in the population. By 1901 more than half the population was less than 25, whereas by the end of the twentieth century, the proportions in the three age ranges — up to 24, 25–44, and 45 and over — were more nearly the same for both men and women. Indeed, the projection for 2026 shows the proportions in each range (up to 24, 25–44, 45–64 and 65+) approaching equality. The slightly larger number of women than men in the population comes about because women live somewhat longer than men and therefore have a higher proportion in the oldest age range.

4. Shifting Attitudes

Numbers do not tell the whole story. In particular, they tell us nothing about the changing attitudes to the natural world, which underpin the long British love affair with the countryside. These changes have been well documented by Thomas (1983), who notes that at the start of the early modern period[1] "*man's ascendancy over the natural world was the unquestioned object of human endeavour.*" By 1800, however, the end of the period of Thomas' analysis, although it was still the objective recognised by most people, doubts and hesitations were being expressed "*about man's place in nature and his relationship to other species.*" He considers four questions which were then under discussion in this context:

- Town or country?
- Cultivation or wilderness?
- Conquest or conservation?
- Meat or mercy?

Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that these questions all feature in contemporary debates about the countryside, it is still not clear which way subscribers to the "countryside ethic" would answer them. Love of the countryside is not the sole prerogative of the country dweller. Similarly, wilderness is by no means the only type of countryside favoured in Britain (which may be just as well, given that most ecologists would probably agree that there is now no real wilderness left in these islands). Conservation is generally valued but in many cases can only be achieved following some drastic alterations to the structure of property rights pertaining to land. Finally, while those who love the countryside are by no means all vegetarians, many are concerned with issues of animal welfare.

Thomas provides a thorough review of the way that attitudes to the countryside have evolved in this country over the centuries. In general, he stresses the shift towards a balance, preferring the second of each pair of alternatives. He found that, as urbanisation proceeded,

[1] Generally taken to be 1700.

enthusiasm for the countryside grew; as cultivation extended, wilderness was more highly valued; as wilderness was replaced by cultivation and development, its loss was increasingly lamented (often by those who had profited most from its destruction); and distaste for killing animals was expressed both by growing interest in vegetarianism and by attempting to conceal slaughter houses and butchery from the public gaze! However, we cannot assert a majority in favour of any of these positions without more evidence.

Another source of arguments about attitudes comes from the history of landscape. Ousby (1990) rebuts current commentators' received wisdom that tourism is a modern phenomenon and delves more rigorously into its past. He dismisses this view as "*a phantasm, compounded of modern self-dislike, intellectual snobbery and sentimentality about the past.*" He finds striking similarities between modern tourism and the tourism described in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales more than 600 years ago. Stopping short of claiming identity between the two periods, he nevertheless convincingly traces out a long sequence, starting from the crusades and pilgrimages of the middle-ages through to the Grand Tour of Europe which was a necessary step in every young gentleman's education. That was followed, in the eighteenth century, by increasing recognition of the visual and cultural pleasures on offer nearer home. A precondition for that to occur was the construction of roads and the introduction of the steel carriage spring. Spreading railways brought the countryside yet nearer to the towns and made for much easier access by urban populations. He also notes the important change in attitude, from one of regarding the natural world with awe, to recognising its romantic charm. Ousby develops his theme by analysing the evolution of tourism, through its treatment in the literature, with the country house and the crucial roles of information and changing attitudes. He skillfully links these factors in the emergence of the countryside and tourist phenomena.

A related theme is the landscape movement which led to the creation of many properties which are now the focus of many countryside visits. Mowl (2000) has documented the "*great age of the English Arcadia*," from 1620 to 1820, when amateurs (Gentlemen) vied with professionals (Players) in designing the landed estates and their surrounds. These developments depended upon the availability of resources, which came from both industrial growth and improved agricultural efficiency, and on the interest of those developing their estates. The result has been to create artificial landscapes, which now add to the attractions of the countryside. Many of these properties are now in the hands of the organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage.

An often cited, and early influential source of information on the countryside, is the poet William Wordsworth. The first edition of his Guide to the Lakes was published anonymously in 1810 and it has been in print ever since. The currently available paperback version (Wordsworth 1835) also contains his lengthy letter to the Editor of the *Morning Post* regarding the proposed railway link from Kendal to Windermere. In his guide he refers to the Lake District as of such importance that it should become a "*sort of national property*" which leads to the thought that he has discovered the concept of public goods. His concluding sentence to the main text is:

> In this wish the author will be joined by persons of pure taste throughout the whole island, who, by their visits (often repeated) to the Lakes in the North of England, testify that they deem the district a sort of national property, in