

INTRODUCTION

Landscape associates people and place ... landscape is not a mere visible surface, static composition, or passive backdrop to human theatre ... Landscape connotes a sense of the purposefully shaped, the sensual and aesthetic, the embeddedness in culture ... Landscape has meaning.¹

People have always attached meaning to the world around them, and these meanings have changed over time. In European societies from the later eighteenth century, the surface of the earth was increasingly seen not only in material terms, as an economic resource to be exploited, but also as ‘landscape’, as an object of aesthetic and moral value. Landscape was understood to incorporate human engagement with the physical environment over time. Although areas of ‘wilderness’ still existed, landscape was generally seen not as ‘natural’, but as something created in dialogue with men and women. In the words of John Stilgoe,

Once in a while landscape is new, fresh, almost virginal. South Georgia, the Falkland Islands, Kerguelen, the Crozets, Macquarie, Elephant, Pitcairn, and other islands ... proved bereft of humans when Europeans discovered them. Unknown to humankind, not just Europeans, they existed only as wilderness when found ... But typically landscape is mature, often hoary, sometimes ancient, part prehistoric. Wilderness appears timeless.²

¹ A. W. Spirn, *The language of landscape* (New Haven and London, 1998), pp. 16–18.

² J. R. Stilgoe, *What is landscape?* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), p. 83.

As an historical product of humanity in all its diversity, landscape has attracted a great variety of aesthetic and moral responses. Different landscape features have been valued for different reasons by different cultures, and interpreted in different ways.³ Human responses to landscape are necessarily subjective.⁴ Yet, as with human responses to countless other things, generalisations remain possible: most obviously, perhaps, landscape has been valued on account of being seen as distinctively beautiful, picturesque or otherwise visually impressive.⁵

That said, assessments of the visual appeal of any given landscape feature do not derive from its (perceived) physical characteristics alone; because landscape is a human construct, exogenous factors inevitably come into play. Since Kant, philosophers have understood that evaluations of aesthetic worth depend on the quality of authenticity.⁶ Like forged art, landscape known to be ‘fake’ – to use Robert Elliot’s term – does not exert the same appeal as that deemed to be ‘original’. Thus, knowledge that an apparently ‘unspoilt’ hillside had previously been quarried limits one’s appreciation of it, even if no traces remain of the quarry, the landscape having been ‘restored’ to the appearance it had before the works were undertaken.⁷ The value of landscape depends on factors other than its perceived physical properties. Many visually inconspicuous landscape features are after all of considerable cultural significance: examples include sources of rivers, birthplaces of famous figures, and sites of battles and other historical events.⁸ Crucial here is what may be termed associational value, the value placed on

³ Y.-F. Tuan, *Space and place* (Minneapolis, 2008 [1977]), esp. p. 162; and, for the particular point on culture affecting perception, Y.-F. Tuan, *Passing strange and wonderful: Aesthetics, nature, and culture* (Washington, DC, 1993), p. 101.

⁴ T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic theory* (London, 1984 [1970]), p. 104; D. W. Meinig (ed.), *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 3, 33–4.

⁵ D. Lowenthal, ‘Finding valued landscapes’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 2 (1978), 373–418.

⁶ ‘[W]ere we to play a trick on our lover of the beautiful, and plant in the ground artificial flowers ... and perch artfully carved birds on the branches of trees, and were he to find out how he had been deceived, the immediate interest which these things previously had for him would at once vanish ... The fact is that our intuition and reflection must have as their concomitant the thought that the beauty in question is nature’s handwork; and this is the sole basis of the immediate interest that is taken in it’; I. Kant, *Critique of judgement* (Oxford, 2007 [1790]), pp. 128–9.

⁷ R. Elliot, ‘Faking nature’, *Inquiry*, 25 (1982), 81–93. Elliot’s arguments are extended further in his *Faking nature: The ethics of environmental restoration* (London, 1997).

⁸ Tuan, *Space and place*, pp. 161–2.

those connections and interactions between the environment and human experience that both create landscape qua landscape, and supply the basis for the ascription of meanings to it.

Especially important vectors of the spread and valence of associations attaching to landscape have been artistic and literary productions, their impact being aided by the commercialisation of culture and the development of modern tourism and leisure practices. In the British context one might think, for instance, of the ‘Constable country’ of Suffolk and Essex, made so famous by the paintings of the eponymous artist that the travel agents Thomas Cook were offering coach tours of the locality by the 1890s.⁹ Similarly, in relation to poets and novelists, ‘Dickens Land’, ‘Thackeray-land’, ‘Wordsworthshire’, ‘Hardy’s Wessex’, ‘The Land of Scott’, ‘The Brontë Country’ and ‘The Country of George Eliot’ had all emerged before the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Writing in the *Quarterly Review* in 1881, one commentator noted that

it is English scenery, with its historical associations, which has inspired our poets, artists, and novelists. There are spots everywhere that evoke the shade of Shakespeare, from the cliff at Dover to the blasted heath of Forres ... Who can look on the windings of the Severn without thinking of Milton’s ‘Comus’; and what prettier pictures can we have of cottage life and country superstitions than those he gives with such exquisite grace and delicacy in ‘L’Allegro’?¹¹

The role of art and literature in so contributing to the appeal of landscape was part of a wider-felt sense of connection between landscape and the past: as the *Quarterly* reviewer observed, it was the ‘historical associations’ inscribed in the landscape that had so drawn the attention of English painters and writers. The landscape was storied. Indeed, it might be said that landscape is by definition storied. Recall the words of Stilgoe, quoted above: ‘typically landscape is mature,

⁹ S. Daniels, *Fields of vision: Landscape imagery and national identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 210–13. For the late-nineteenth-century enthusiasm for Constable, see I. Fleming-Williams and L. Parris, *The discovery of Constable* (London, 1984).

¹⁰ N. J. Watson, *The literary tourist* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 5.

¹¹ [A. I. Shand], ‘Walks in England’, *Quarterly Review*, 152 (July 1881), 146.

often hoary, sometimes ancient, part prehistoric'. Since the early modern period, if not before, societies have understood time to confer value on place. European (and non-European) landscapes evocative of past ages, significant events, the great figures of old, have come to be esteemed precisely because of these associations. Many of the more resonantly evocative of these became, to use a term now worn somewhat threadbare, 'sites of memory' – focal points for mobilising a collective consciousness of the past.¹² In large part because of its associations with human history, landscape was thus transformed into heritage, the impulse driving this shift in sensibility fuelling, among other things, the modern-day preservation and conservation movements.

The process by which landscape became heritage was inextricably bound up with contemporaneous constructions of collective identity. Before the eighteenth century, the heritage embodied in landscape tended to be related to local and confessional identities, as Alexandra Walsham's work on the Reformation-era environment has demonstrated.¹³ Over time, however, this heritage was increasingly understood to be national in character, despite the persistence of associations between landscape and locality (which, as we shall see, were by no means antithetical to the newer languages of landscape and nation). Just as a particular landscape might have special value for an individual on account of its being evocative of events in that individual's past (connected, for instance, with happy experiences in childhood), so did national communities come to ascribe value to landscapes evocative of the imagined pasts of those communities. On account of its historical associations, landscape became a powerful means by which a people's sense of self and identity might be maintained and celebrated, its utility in this respect growing stronger in the context of industrialisation, urbanisation, rapid technological and societal change, and other transformations of modernity.¹⁴

This is a point worth emphasising. Nations are by definition territorial entities, laying claim to defined portions of the earth's surface as rightfully their own. As the sociologist Michael Billig has written,

¹² P. Nora, *Realms of memory: Rethinking the French past*, 3 vols. (New York, 1996–8).

¹³ A. Walsham, *The reformation of the landscape: Religion, identity, and memory in early modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2011).

¹⁴ For an especially valuable discussion of the dislocating effects of the technological and other changes associated with the experience of modernity, see S. Kern, *The culture of time and space, 1880–1918*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

nationalism is never ‘beyond geography’, the ‘imagining of a “country”’ necessarily involving ‘the imagining of a bounded totality beyond immediate experience of place’; while for the philosopher David Miller a key ‘aspect of national identity is that it connects a group of people to a particular geographical place ... A nation ... must have a homeland.’¹⁵ Historians agree. In his recent survey of nationalism in Europe and America since the late eighteenth century, Lloyd Kramer has pointed out that ‘All nations and nationalisms claim a homeland or bounded territory ... Nationhood can scarcely be imagined without reference to specific lands, just as selfhood cannot be understood without reference to specific human bodies.’¹⁶ For Kramer, as for many other scholars, European intellectuals such as Herder, Fichte and Mazzini played a vital role in establishing the importance of geography to conceptualisations of the nation, the homeland being imagined as continuing undiluted up to its borders, there being separated from the similarly undiluted domains of other nations.¹⁷

Yet the imbrication of geography and nationhood goes beyond the definition, assertion and political control of territorial homelands. While bounded space is certainly important, specific places – landscapes – are no less so. Indeed, when it comes to the cultural as opposed to the political imagining of nations, they are crucial. As Stephen Daniels observed in his path-breaking *Fields of vision*, ‘Landscapes, whether focusing on single monuments or framing stretches of scenery, provide visible shape; they picture the nation.’¹⁸ Across the world in the modern period, landscapes, and distinctive landscapes in particular, have functioned as powerful symbols of national identity. The American ‘Wild West’, the Swiss Alps and the Norwegian Fjords are obvious examples here. One recent study has highlighted the importance of river landscapes to national identities, using case studies from France, the United States, Ireland and elsewhere; another has explored the potent appeal of the Russian Steppe to the nationalist sensibilities of that country; and there are of course many other examples, the work

¹⁵ M. Billig, *Banal nationalism* (London, 1995), p. 74; D. Miller, *On nationality* (Oxford, 1995), p. 24.

¹⁶ L. Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, cultures, and identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011), p. 57.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 58–9.

¹⁸ Daniels, *Fields of vision*, p. 5.

in this vein produced by art historians being especially notable and extensive.¹⁹

Despite this literature, however, the significance of the *historical* associations of nationally valued landscapes has been insufficiently appreciated. This is surprising, not least because of the acknowledged significance of understandings of the past to nationalist discourse more generally. Indeed, building on the work of theorists of nations and nationalism such as Anthony D. Smith, who have insisted on the importance of history as an agent of nationalist mobilisation,²⁰ historians have shown an increasing interest in the part it played in the shaping of modern-day national cultures and identities. In the British context, one might point to the work of Billie Melman on nineteenth-century understandings of history as ‘a chamber of horrors’, Stephanie Barczewski on the myths of Robin Hood and King Arthur, or Martha Vandrei on the long continuities of British historical culture.²¹ In addition, the ever-burgeoning work on memory and commemoration has also deepened our understanding of the ways in which the past can be brought to bear on contemporary ideas of national belonging, most notably in relation to the experience of the First and Second World Wars.²² And a further well-ploughed furrow of enquiry has been

¹⁹ T. Cusack, *Riverscapes and national identities* (Syracuse, NY, 2010); C. Ely, *This meager nature: Landscape and national identity in imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL, 2002); A. R. H. Baker, ‘Forging a national identity for France after 1789: The role of landscape symbols’, *Geography*, 97 (2012), 22–8; D. Hooson (ed.), *Geography and national identity* (Oxford, 1994); P. Bishop, *An archetypal Constable: National identity and the geography of nostalgia* (London, 1995).

²⁰ This argument is clear throughout Smith’s work as a whole, but an especially succinct expression of it can be found in his debate with Ernest Gellner in the pages of *Nations and Nationalism*: see A. D. Smith, ‘Nations and their pasts’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), 358–65; and A. D. Smith, ‘Memory and modernity: Reflections on Ernest Gellner’s theory of nationalism’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), 371–88.

²¹ B. Melman, *The culture of history: English uses of the past 1800–1953* (Oxford, 2006); S. L. Barczewski, *Myth and national identity in nineteenth-century Britain: The legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000); M. Vandrei, *Queen Boudica and historical culture in Britain since 1600: An image of truth* (Oxford, 2018); and M. Vandrei, ‘A Victorian invention? Thomas Thornycroft’s “Boudicea” group and the idea of historical culture in Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 57 (2014), 485–508.

²² The literature on this is vast. See, e.g., J. Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: The Great War in European cultural history*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2014 [1995]); S. Goebel, *The Great War and medieval memory: War, remembrance and medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge, 2007); M. Connelly, *We can take it! Britain and the memory of the Second World War* (London, 2004);

history writing itself. It may be that historians – perhaps motivated by professional narcissism – are naturally drawn to study the work of their forebears, but whatever the reason, considerable attention has been paid to the ways in which the work of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians intersected with, and helped to construct, patriotic discourse and understandings of the nation.²³ In particular, and following the lead of J. W. Burrow, British intellectual and cultural historians have had much to say about the Anglo-Saxonism of Stubbs, Freeman and other Victorian historians, and the teleologies of national progress that informed and found expression in their work.²⁴ In the wider European context, a major research project led by Stefan Berger on ‘Representations of the past: National histories in Europe’ has generated considerable interest in national historiographies and their nationalist significance, not least by means of its associated book series on ‘Writing the nation’, seven volumes of which have appeared at time of writing since 2008.²⁵ Yet for all that this work has elucidated the importance of the relationship between the past and the nation, it has had relatively little to say about landscape in this connection.²⁶ The

L. Noakes and J. Pattinson (eds.), *British cultural memory and the Second World War* (London, 2013).

²³ See, e.g., P. Mandler, *History and national life* (London, 2002); T. Lang, *The Victorians and the Stuart heritage* (Cambridge, 1995); J. Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and national history in twentieth-century Britain* (Lanham, MD, 2005). Many of the essays collected in S. Collini, *English pasts: Essays in history and culture* (Oxford 1999) and S. Collini, *Common reading: Critics, historians, publics* (Oxford, 2008) are also relevant here.

²⁴ J. W. Burrow, *A liberal descent: Victorian historians and the English past* (Cambridge, 1981); C. Parker, *The English historical tradition since 1850* (Edinburgh, 1990), esp. Chapter 1; M. Bentley, *Modernizing England's past: English historiography in the age of modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge, 2005), esp. Chapters 1–3; G. A. Bremner and J. Conlin (eds.), *Making history: Edward Augustus Freeman and Victorian cultural politics* (Oxford, 2015).

²⁵ See, e.g., S. Berger and C. Lorenz (eds.), *The contested nation: Ethnicity, class, religion, and gender in national histories* (Basingstoke, 2008); S. Berger and C. Conrad, *The past as history: National identity and historical consciousness in modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2015); S. Berger and C. Lorenz (eds.), *Nationalizing the past: Historians as nation builders in modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2015).

²⁶ There are, of course, some exceptions, perhaps the most notable of which is provided by the work done on the German idea of *Heimat* and its relationship with local, regional and national identities. See, e.g., C. Applegate, *A nation of provincials: The German idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990); A. Confino, *The nation as a local metaphor: Württemberg, imperial Germany and national memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).

same can be said of the work of historians of national identity more generally, and even those treatments that have emphasised the importance of the past, or of memory. Kramer's study, cited above, is an example. While cognisant of the territorial determinants of nationhood, it pays less attention to landscape than to history writing and language, stressing the 'crucial' role historians played in 'describing the national meaning of the past and ... showing how the living generations were always connected to the dead'.²⁷

This relative neglect of the patriotic force of valued landscapes reflects a more general privileging of the textual on the part of professional historians: 'modern conditions of research', Raphael Samuel pointed out some time ago, 'seem to dictate an almost complete detachment from the material environment'.²⁸ Yet, as Samuel's own work on memory, heritage and British identity demonstrated so eloquently, history manifests itself in a wide plurality of contexts: its 'subject matter is promiscuous', encompassing far more than the written word, let alone the 'chronological past of the documentary record' or the recondite interpretations of university-based scholars.²⁹ History, Samuel insisted, is present in fiction, myth, folk traditions, ritual, art, photography and material culture.³⁰ It is also deeply inscribed in landscape – indeed, it is intimately connected to the cultural value assigned to landscape, and more specifically to its patriotic significance.

The failure of historians fully to appreciate this is especially striking given what we know from social theorists about the historical associations typically attaching to valued landscapes, as well as their importance as sources of national symbolism and – at a more fundamental level – the fact that nations exist in space as well as time. Geographers in particular have understood that in the valued landscapes of a nation, space and time are powerfully conjoined. As Jan Penrose has put it, 'Every society has stories about its origins and its past. These stories ... always occur in space and are usually associated with specific sites and/or landscapes.'³¹ Indeed, a now quite considerable

²⁷ Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America*, Chapter 3, p. 73.

²⁸ R. Samuel, *Theatres of memory*, Vol. 1: *Past and present in contemporary culture* (London, 1994), p. 269.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. x, 443.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 3–48; and see also R. Samuel, *Theatres of memory*, Vol. II: *Island stories: Unravelling Britain* (London, 1998).

³¹ J. Penrose, 'Nations, states and homelands: Territory and territoriality in nationalist thought', *Nations and Nationalism*, 8 (2002), 277–97 (p. 282).

number of geographers have explored the relationship between landscape and national identities – one might mention Stephen Daniels, David Lowenthal, Peter Bishop, Denis Cosgrove, David Matless and Catherine Brace, among others.³² Of these, David Lowenthal, one of the pioneers in the area, stands out as particularly important on account of the emphasis he has placed on the landscape–past nexus. In a series of books and articles across the space of several decades, Lowenthal has insisted that the English see their landscape not simply as beautiful or otherwise visually distinctive, but as ‘both admirable and ancestral’.³³ The value placed on English landscape, he has argued, has been to a large degree determined by its association with the past of the national community, and in this respect England stands out as distinctive: ‘Nowhere else is landscape so freighted as legacy.’³⁴ In articulating this argument, Lowenthal has stressed the importance of the countryside: the landscape most valued by the English is largely rural in character. This is no wilderness of untamed nature, but a landscape suggestive of many centuries of human occupation and cultivation, and thus the antiquity of the English nation.³⁵

³² See, e.g., Daniels, *Fields of vision*; D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (eds.), *The iconography of landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design, and use of past environments* (Cambridge, 1988); D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998); Bishop, *Archetypal Constable*; D. Lowenthal, ‘British national identity and the English landscape’, *Rural History*, 2 (1991), 205–30; C. Brace, ‘Looking back: The Cotswolds and English national identity, c. 1890–1950’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25 (1999), 502–16; C. Brace, ‘Finding England everywhere: Regional identity and the construction of national identity, 1890–1940’, *Ecumene*, 6 (1998), 90–109.

³³ Lowenthal, ‘British national identity and the English landscape’, p. 215. See also D. Lowenthal and H. E. Prince, ‘English landscape tastes’, *Geographical Review*, 55 (1965), 186–222; D. Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country* (Cambridge, 2015 [1986]), esp. pp. 104–5, 183–4; D. Lowenthal, *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history* (London, 1996), esp. pp. 7, 185–6.

³⁴ D. Lowenthal, ‘Landscape as heritage: National scenes and global changes’, in J. M. Fladmark (ed.), *Heritage: Conservation, interpretation and enterprise* (Aberdeen, 1993), pp. 3–15 (p. 9). See also D. Lowenthal, ‘European and English landscapes and national symbols’, in Hooson, *Geography and national identity*, pp. 15–38 (pp. 20–1).

³⁵ ‘Beloved rural England is trebly historical. Its features are compages of datable cultural acts, mostly ascribable to ancestral precursors. The past that permeates this landscape is not the primordial wild, but a nearer history infused with memorable human processes, desires, decisions, and tastes’; Lowenthal, ‘British national identity and the English landscape’, 216.

It is of course England and the English nation that form the focus of the present book, and the importance of the countryside to constructions of English national identity is now quite generally recognised. In his wide-ranging synoptic study, *The making of English national identity*, Krishan Kumar concluded that by the late Victorian period, ‘the essential England was rural’, and many other scholars have made similar pronouncements.³⁶ In this perspective, although ideologues of the nation since Herder had promoted the idea of a return to nature and the countryside, away from the artificiality and corruption of towns, the impulse took particularly strong hold in England, and assumed distinctively conservative forms. Rooted in the rural, the discourse of Englishness was opposed to modernity and its works, extolling instead a pastoral south country of picturesque cottages, gently rolling farmland and stable social hierarchies, with squire and parson at the top. Given the actual lived experience of modern-day Englishmen and women – rich or poor, villager or city-dweller – much of this was a mirage, but it nonetheless offered a seductive vision of peace and order, permeating English culture and having a real influence on elite and popular attitudes. Some scholars – most notably Martin Wiener – have even suggested that this reactionary ruralism undermined the British ‘industrial spirit’, retarding economic development and contributing to the eventual ruin of the once-mighty workshop of the world.³⁷ Many more, however, have been content to identify and elucidate the phenomenon, without seeking to connect it to economic performance. Often drawing heavily on Wiener and his claim that the Industrial Revolution was increasingly seen as ‘an unEnglish aberration, “A spread over a green and pleasant land of dark satanic mills that ground down their inmates”’,³⁸ they have done so in a bewildering variety of contexts. These include art and literature,³⁹ architecture

³⁶ K. Kumar, *The making of English national identity* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 211.

³⁷ M. J. Wiener, *English culture and the decline of the industrial spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981).

³⁸ Daniels, *Fields of vision*, pp. 214–15, citing Wiener, *English culture*.

³⁹ See, e.g., P. Street, ‘Painting deepest England: The late landscapes of John Linnell and the uses of nostalgia’, in C. Shaw and M. Chase (eds.), *The imagined past: History and nostalgia* (Manchester, 1989), pp. 68–80; C. Payne, *Toil and plenty: Images of the agricultural landscape in England, 1780–1890* (New Haven and London, 1993). Many art historians have suggested that in the second half of the nineteenth century a concept of Englishness was developed that excluded the industrial north, was focused on ‘south country’ pastoralism, and was culturally reactionary and conservative. In

and garden design,⁴⁰ the folk song and dance revival,⁴¹ the history of landscape preservation and the National Trust,⁴² and the garden city movement. Thus, for example, Standish Meacham tells us that proponents of the garden city – facing ‘the realities of class division and the threat of class conflict’ – sought to return to a ‘conservative English past’, one that was paternalistic, undemocratic and pre-industrial,⁴³ and so reached for a mythical rural Englishness that ‘replaced grim realities with the cosy village where all lived healthy lives, cultivated

this interpretation, even radical ruralism – such as that espoused by William Morris – contributed to the ‘rural mythology’ that worked to ‘bolster the cultural hegemony of the class that owned, or had owned, the land’ (Payne, *Toil and plenty*, pp. 40–2).

⁴⁰ A. Helmreich, *The English garden and national identity: The competing styles of garden design, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 2002); R. Strong, *Country life, 1897–1997* (London, 1996).

⁴¹ G. Boyes, *The imagined village: Culture, ideology and the English folk revival* (Manchester, 1993).

⁴² For John Walton, to take one example, the early preservationist movement was animated by what he terms the ‘noblesse oblige’ and ‘authoritarian paternalism’ of ‘high tory Ruskinianism’, the National Trust to which it led celebrating and sustaining the ‘preserved enclaves’ of ‘a deeply conservative vision of England’: J. K. Walton, ‘The National Trust: Preservation or provision?’, in M. Wheeler (ed.), *Ruskin and the environment* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 158–62; J. K. Walton, ‘The National Trust centenary: Official and unofficial histories’, *The Local Historian*, 26 (1996), 80–8 (p. 86). For similar, see for example P. C. Gould, *Early green politics: Back to nature, back to the land, and socialism in Britain 1880–1914* (Brighton, 1988), pp. 88ff.; M. Bunce, *The countryside ideal: Anglo-American images of landscape* (London, 1994), pp. 182–4 and *passim* for a reading of the English countryside ideal as profoundly conservative. See also the journalistic accounts of Paula Weideger and Jeremy Paxman (P. Weideger, *Gilding the acorn: Behind the façade of the National Trust* (London, 1994), esp. p. 36; J. Paxman, *The English*, 2nd edn (London, 1999)). In Paxman’s view, the original purpose of the National Trust was ‘to protect those picturesque areas of countryside the landed gentry didn’t want for their field sports’ (p. 152).

⁴³ S. Meacham, *Regaining paradise: Englishness and the early garden city movement* (New Haven and London, 1998), pp. 2, 183. On the whole, Meacham’s conclusions have been well received. See, for instance, S. Heathorn, ‘An English paradise to regain? Ebenezer Howard, the Town and Country Planning Association and English ruralism’, *Rural History*, 11 (2000), 113–28. As Heathorn has commented, Meacham’s work shows how ‘The movement that Howard helped to begin had as its only binding element a shared idealization of English rusticity. The village green, the quaint artisan cottage and the benevolent paternalistic squire featured in this romantic view of the pre-industrial past: a seemingly simpler and better past that represented all that was worthy of the appellation “English”’ (p. 119). For a more critical review, see P. Mandler, ‘Visions of merrie Letchworth’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 February 2000, p. 21.

their gardens, and accepted their place within a hierarchy governed by an elite that understood its obligations to those whom it both ruled and served'.⁴⁴

Such interpretations, however, have not quite swept all before them. In a spirited rejoinder, Peter Mandler has argued that the rural Englishness identified by many scholars was in fact culturally marginal, better seen more as a protest against prevailing trends than representative of mainstream perspectives. With approximately three-quarters of its population living in towns and cities by 1900, England was 'a nation that had come to terms with its urbanity'.⁴⁵ The culture of the dominant classes was 'aggressively urban and materialist',⁴⁶ while phenomena such as the folk-song revival reflected 'the values of some *bien-pensant* Bohemians and would-be squires, but nothing like the British Establishment or even the average upper-middle-class family'.⁴⁷ As for preservationist organisations such as the National Trust, they had small, unrepresentative memberships and were 'distrusted by government as wet and faddish'.⁴⁸ There is much to be said for this critique. As Mandler shows very clearly, a reactionary language of protest was not absent from the discourse of rural Englishness, finding expression in, for example, the writings of the Poet Laureate Alfred Austin (1835–1913), who had a good deal to say in praise of 'hamlets snug', 'proud demesnes', 'blue spires of cottage smoke mong woodlands green' and 'authority' being 'loved in every vale'.⁴⁹ It is also the case, moreover, that organisations devoted to the preservation of rural landscape and culture – the Commons Preservation Society, the National Trust, the Lake District Defence Society, the English Folk Song and Dance Society – did not, before the First World War, have anything approaching mass memberships. Yet for all that, the scale and variety of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century engagement with land, landscape and the rural is too extensive to be regarded as culturally marginal. This engagement was apparent not only in art and literature, but also in activities

⁴⁴ Meacham, *Regaining paradise*, p. 183; and see also, e.g., pp. 68–9.

⁴⁵ P. Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English culture and the limits to rural nostalgia, 1850–1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 7 (1997), 155–75 (p. 160).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴⁹ A. Austin, 'Why I am a Conservative', *National Review*, 6 (December 1885), 564–5.

as diverse as amateur botany and geology, gardening, antiquarian and heritage tourism, photography, cycling, rambling, and mountain climbing.⁵⁰ And to take the particular example of landscape preservation, while the bodies giving institutional expression to this impulse may not have had mass memberships, such was not the aim of their leaders, whose focus was rather on acquiring the support of public figures and thus influencing public opinion.⁵¹ In this they achieved considerable success: to give one index of it, between 1865 and 1897 more than 13 square miles of open space were preserved in and around the Greater London area (not counting 5,531 acres saved in Epping Forest), while at least 15,000 acres in provincial towns and cities were preserved over the same period.⁵² Moreover, the fruits of such campaigning by middle-class activists were congruent – to a large degree – with the autonomous preferences of working-class people themselves, many of

⁵⁰ See, for example, D. Gervais, *Literary Englands: Versions of Englishness in modern writing* (Cambridge, 1993); C. Wood, *Paradise lost: Paintings of English country life and landscape 1850–1914* (London, 1988); P. Howard, ‘Painters’ preferred places’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 11 (1985), 138–54; P. Howard, *Landscapes: The artists’ vision* (London, 1991); A. Secord, ‘Science in the pub: Artisan botanists in nineteenth-century Lancashire’, *History of Science*, 32 (1994), 269–315; D. E. Allen, *The naturalist in Britain: A social history*, 2nd edn (Princeton, 1994 [London, 1976]), 67–70; Watson, *Literary tourist*; P. Readman, ‘The place of the past in English culture, c. 1890–1914’, *Past & Present*, 186 (2005), 147–99; J. Taylor, *A dream of England: Landscape, photography and the tourist’s imagination* (Manchester, 1995); H. Taylor, *A claim on the countryside: A history of the British outdoor movement* (London, 1997); C. Bryant, A. Burns and P. Readman (eds.), *Walking histories, 1800–1914* (Basingstoke, 2016); J. Marsh, *Back to the land: The pastoral impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (London, 1982); J. Burchardt, *Paradise lost: Rural idyll and social change in England since 1800* (London, 2002); Helmreich, *English garden*; M. Tebbutt, ‘Rambling and manly identity in Derbyshire’s Dark Peak, 1880s–1920s’, *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 1125–53; R. W. Clark, *The Victorian mountaineers* (London, 1953); S. Thompson, *Unjustifiable risk? The story of British climbing* (Milnthorpe, 2010).

⁵¹ P. Readman, ‘Preserving the English landscape, 1870–1914’, *Cultural and Social History*, 5 (2008), 197–218.

⁵² R. Hunter, ‘The movements for the inclosure and preservation of open lands’, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 60 (1897), 400–2. For Epping Forest, see E. Baigent, ‘A “Splendid pleasure ground [for] the elevation and refinement of the people of London”: Geographical aspects of the history of Epping Forest’, in E. Baigent and R. J. Mayhew (eds.), *English Geographies 1600–1950: Historical essays on English customs, cultures, and communities in honour of Jack Langton* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 104–26.

whom had been and continued to be active participants in protests over commons and rights of way.⁵³

It seems, then, that while engagement with landscape and the rural can certainly be exaggerated, it was nevertheless a central element of English cultural life (for all that its more alienated and nostalgic manifestations were unrepresentative of prevailing attitudes, as Mandler has demonstrated). The lived environment of modern Britain was increasingly urban and industrial, but this only served further to elevate the cultural significance of the non-urban and non-industrial. As Raymond Williams pointed out many years ago,

So much of the past of the country, its feelings and its literature, was involved with rural experience, and so many of its ideas of how to live well ... persisted and even were strengthened [from the later nineteenth century], that there is almost an inverse proportion ... between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas.⁵⁴

Thus, while most Englishmen and women lived in towns and cities from the mid nineteenth century on, discourses of rural Englishness remained integral to their experience of modernity. Embodying continuity with the past, these discourses constituted an important means by which a recognisable, historically rooted understanding of national identity was articulated at a time of significant social, economic and technological change. Although in some of their manifestations these rural expressions of Englishness may have been founded on myth, consciously or unconsciously eliding the squalor that could lurk in the most picturesque of rose-embowered cottages, they nonetheless had a powerful real-world effect. Their influence was evident in a range of areas, including the preservation of landscape and open spaces, ‘back-to-the-land’ and agrarian reform initiatives, tourism and recreation, changing trends in art and architecture, and of course fictional and

⁵³ Readman, ‘Preserving’; P. Readman, ‘Octavia Hill and the English landscape’, in E. Baigent and B. Cowell (eds.), *Nobler imaginings and mightier struggles: Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (London, 2016), pp. 163–84; E. Baigent, ‘Octavia Hill, nature and open space: Crowning success or campaigning “utterly without result”’, in Baigent and Cowell, *Nobler imaginings*, pp. 141–61.

⁵⁴ R. Williams, *The country and the city* (London, 1973), p. 248.

factual rural writing.⁵⁵ Yet their prevalence should not lead us to conclude that English culture was somehow anti-modern, permeated by a reactionary, conservative-nostalgic mindset. On the contrary, the conceptualisation of rural landscape as national heritage was compatible with a wide range of ideological perspectives – not least those avowedly progressive in complexion – and was accommodated within, and indeed supportive of, the English experience of modernity.

This is one of the central contentions of the present book. In pursuing it I seek to demonstrate the ideological heterogeneity of patriotic concerns with rural landscapes, and – more particularly – to build on the work of scholarship that has emphasised the plurality of British meanings of modernity. As Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger have pointed out, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British responses to social, economic, technological and cultural change did not necessarily imply an acceptance of a sharp break between past and present. Indeed, as they note, ‘casting the present as uniquely distinct from the past was by no means the only mode of interpreting temporal relations in debates about modernity’.⁵⁶ More often than not, in fact, the accent was less on fundamental transformation or rupture than on continuous development: both in culture and politics, the idea of continuity between the past, present and future was a prominent element of the British experience of modernity.⁵⁷ This rootedness of modernity in the past, in history, was notably evident in cultural engagement with the landscape, particularly the rural landscape – redolent as it was of an older, pre-industrial England. This engagement took various forms, but taken as a whole was powerfully expressive of a desire to maintain a sense of continuity with the national past. The English countryside was prized for its aesthetic qualities, its visual distinctiveness, and this doubtless contributed to its significance in constructions of national identity. But more important still to the nationalist significance of the

⁵⁵ See works cited in n. 50, above, and in addition P. Readman, *Land and nation in England: Patriotism, national identity and the politics of land, 1880–1914* (Woodbridge, 2008).

⁵⁶ B. Rieger and M. Daunton, ‘Introduction’, in M. Daunton and B. Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of modernity: Britain from the late-Victorian era to World War II* (Oxford and New York, 2001), pp. 1–21 (p. 5).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 8ff. On this theme, see also G. K. Behlmer and F. M. Leventhal (eds.), *Singular continuities: Tradition, nostalgia, and identity in modern British culture* (Stanford, 2000), esp. introduction; and Readman, ‘Place of the past’.

English rural landscape was the fact that its features were endowed with potent associational value through their connection with the past, being seen as witnesses to the history of the nation and its continuity over time.

My argument as to the nationalistic significance of landscape in the context of the English experience of nineteenth-century modernity is not, however, confined to discussion of the ‘natural’ environment or the countryside. Acknowledging the falsity of any sharp dichotomy between ‘natural’ and ‘non-natural’ landscape,⁵⁸ this book moves beyond much of the focus of existing scholarship, taking due account of the importance of the rural while insisting that other landscapes also played a key part in the construction of English national identity. The ‘essential England’, to use Kumar’s formulation, could certainly be found in the shires of the home counties, but it could also be found in other places, in urban as well as rural contexts – from the bleak moorlands of the Northumbrian borders to the dirty, awesome and thoroughly man-made landscapes of industry in Manchester and its environs. The common denominator here was the associational value that attached to such environments, and in particular the felt presence of the past. And even if this presence was perhaps not felt as strongly in urban as it was in rural contexts, it was nonetheless there in some force: as Lynda Nead has shown, even in the context of the breakneck pace of improvement in mid Victorian London – the new streets and buildings, the slum clearance schemes, the Underground – ‘modernity leans upon and is haunted by the figure of the past’.⁵⁹ For too long it has been assumed that the epitome of Englishness was the pastoral south country – all chocolate-box thatched cottages, waving fields of corn and quaint country churches. For sure, such idealisations were (and are) powerful, and powerfully supportive of some conceptions of Englishness, but the locations of English identity were more various, more congenial to a range of ideological positions, and thus more effective as a vehicle of nationalist discourse, in all its complexity, than such an incomplete picture might suggest.

⁵⁸ As W. G. Hoskins emphasised long ago, ‘Not much of England, even in its more withdrawn, inhuman places, has escaped being altered by men in some subtle way or other, however untouched we may fancy it is at first sight’: W. G. Hoskins, *The making of the English landscape* (London, 2005 [1955]), p. 3.

⁵⁹ L. Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, streets and images in Victorian London* (New Haven and London, 2000), p. 32.

Much scholarship on landscape and national identity has a contemporary or twentieth-century focus. The chronological focus of this book, by contrast, is the nineteenth century – or more precisely the period between the last few decades of the eighteenth century and the outbreak of the First World War. Although it is undoubtedly a hackneyed observation, it is worth pointing out that this period – what might be termed the very long nineteenth century – was a time of great and transformative change. Industrialisation, democratisation (or at any rate the emergence of a politics less dominated by crown and aristocracy), the growth of the newspaper press and the development of new technologies of communication – the penny post, the railway, the telegraph – all had profound cultural as well as social and economic effects. One of the most significant of these was the impetus given to the construction of national identity. The spread of what Benedict Anderson has called ‘print capitalism’, the increased mobility of the population and other processes of modernisation made possible, as never before, the imagining of an English national community.⁶⁰ It was in this period that modern-day understandings of Englishness came into being and were diffused across a wide cross-section of society. It may well be that conceptualisations of an English ‘nation’ existed before the end of the eighteenth century: there is certainly a case to be made for tracing the origins of a sense of English nationhood to the medieval period.⁶¹ But for all that some members of a literate, intellectual minority may have discerned the existence of an English nation, and made generalisations about the common characteristics of the English people – Bede or Henry of Huntingdon are exemplary figures here – it seems undeniable that a widely felt sense of English identity was a distinctive feature of post-Enlightenment modernity. Nations have little reality before relatively large numbers of people come to see themselves as sharing a

⁶⁰ See B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 2006 [1991]).

⁶¹ See, e.g., A. Hastings, *The construction of nationhood: Ethnicity, religion and nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997), esp. Chapters 1–2; J. Gillingham, ‘Henry of Huntingdon and the twelfth-century revival of the English nation’, in J. Gillingham (ed.), *The English in the twelfth century: Imperialism, national identity, and political values* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 123–44; R. R. Davies, ‘The peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100–1400, 1: identities’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 4 (1994), 1–20.

common national identity.⁶² This is not to say that nationalist ideologies did not draw upon medieval and early modern myths, traditions and histories, but it is to insist, as Smith has put it, that

Nations are modern, as is nationalism, even when their members think they are very old and even when they are in part created out of pre-modern cultures and memories. They have not been there all the time. It is possible that something like modern nations emerged here and there in the ancient and medieval worlds ... But, in general, nations are modern.⁶³

As elsewhere in Europe, it was the period from the later eighteenth century that saw the forging of modern British identities, including the identity of the English. And in England, landscape was of central and critical importance to this process – particularly insofar as it was associated with the past and with the imagined continuities of the nation. Bearing in mind Daniels's point that it is specific places, not territory in general, that do most to 'give shape to the imagined community of the nation',⁶⁴ this argument is developed through a series of detailed case studies of individual, quite different, landscapes: the cliffs of Dover, the Northumbrian borderland, the Lake District, the New Forest, the city of Manchester, and the River Thames. Taken together, these case studies illustrate the depth and significance of the relationship between landscape and English national identity, in its crucial formative period between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Part I of the book explores the relationship between national identity and two English border landscapes. In a wide range of contexts, borders and borderlands have long been recognised as doing important work in the construction, affirmation and definition of identities, and those of the British Isles are no exception. It is at borders that national territories begin and end, and partly as a consequence of this they have often formed the focus of especially overt articulations of nationalist discourse and ideas. The cliffs of Dover, which are the focus of the first chapter, are one such landscape. Although the cliffs had not attracted very significant cultural comment before the late eighteenth

⁶² See W. Connor, 'When is a nation?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 13 (1990), 92–103.

⁶³ Smith, 'Memory and modernity', 385.

⁶⁴ Daniels, *Fields of vision*, p. 5.

century, they subsequently became closely associated with historically constructed conceptions of the national homeland and its defence: the landscape of the cliffs came to symbolise the continuous integrity of the nation over centuries. Moreover, the patriotic associations with which the cliffs were bound up spoke to British as well as English sentiments of belonging, illustrating how the Englishness of English landscapes could support not only an English sense of identity, but a wider sense of Britishness.

The interdependence of the relationship between English and British identities was even more apparent in the landscape of the English border with Scotland, which is discussed in Chapter 2. Here, the history of cross-border enmity between the two nations was indelibly inscribed in the landscape. With its blood-soaked battlefields, ruined castles and martial ballad culture, it was a place closely associated with inter-community conflict and division. Yet these associations came to support a distinctive expression of Englishness, one that fed into wider discourses of Unionist-nationalism present on both sides of the border. They also supported a version of Englishness quite different from that of the shires of the south country, which is so often thought to be dominant. Austere and rugged, the windswept moorlands and remote valleys of the Northumberland borderland were nothing like the pastoral home counties, yet this landscape was an important element of the topography of Englishness – a topography that, as this book argues throughout, was more variously and pluralistically located than is often assumed.

The strong relationship between landscape, the past and national identity had important implications. Perhaps most notably, the growing tendency to value landscape on account of its associations with the past was a key factor behind the emergence of the movement for landscape preservation, early institutional expressions of this development being the establishment of the Commons Preservation Society (1865) and the National Trust (1894), as well as the formation of a plethora of smaller organisations. In an increasingly democratic political context, a new idea of amenity emerged. This was founded on a patriotic appreciation of landscape as national for two interrelated reasons. First, because of its association with the English past, and second, because of its being perceived as an inheritance to which the whole people – the nation – now had a rightful claim. Landscape was increasingly understood to be ‘national property’.

Two key sites for the development of this understanding are explored in the pair of chapters that make up Part II of the book, which has as its focus the development of the movement for landscape preservation. Chapter 3 examines patriotic readings of the Lake District landscape and its associations, showing how these readings were instrumental in motivating the agenda of preservationists. Predicated on the idea of valued landscape as belonging to the nation in a moral if not strictly proprietorial sense, the patriotism of preservation came into conflict with other conceptions of the public/national interest in landscape. Chapter 4 offers a case study of a landscape, the New Forest, over which just such a conflict developed. Here, an understanding of the forest – which was crown land – as of national value as a source of timber (and state revenue) collided with the interests both of forest commoners and of those who saw the place as of great amenity value as an historic cultural landscape. The outcome of this debate reveals much about the character of the patriotic ideas animating the preservationist dispensation as it developed in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Oriented towards the past, it was nevertheless expressive of a distinctively English modernity. Indeed, preoccupation with the past, as it was inscribed in a landscape such as the New Forest, was no repudiation of the ‘industrial spirit’; it was a positive, accommodative response to the contemporary experience of social, cultural and technological change.

The modernity of nineteenth-century patriotic concern with landscape is not only evident from case studies of rural or mainly rural places, however. Part III of the book, ‘Beyond the South Country’, seeks to extend the preoccupations of much existing scholarship on landscape and nation by emphasising the very important connections between national identity and urban – as well as rural – landscapes. As shown in Chapter 5, such connections were discerned and celebrated even in Manchester, ‘shock city’ of the Industrial Revolution. For all that it was a focus of concern over the ‘condition of England’ and the negative effects of industrialisation, ‘Cottonopolis’ – like the New Forest and the Lake District – was a fully integrated element of the geography of Englishness. Indeed, the assertiveness of the patriotic language associated with Manchester reveals the extent to which modern Englishness, as it developed over the course of the long nineteenth century, had local and regional roots. These roots were spread throughout the country; they were not just confined to the south. This

is not to say, however, that the landscape of southern England was unimportant in constructions of national identity. But even here the essence of Englishness was not only to be found in picturesque villages and rolling farmland. Through a study of the River Thames and its hinterland, Chapter 6 acknowledges the appeal of an older, peaceable rural England as embodied in the scenery of the upper river, with its tranquil backwaters, rustic-vernacular cottages and mills, and pervading atmosphere of repose. Yet patriotic appreciation of the Thames was not confined to such scenes. Throughout the period, the river was associated with the nation's long history of commercial prosperity, as well as with the history of the capital city itself: its course from source to sea linked the rural with the urban, the past with the present and future.

