

**Education in Interwar Rural England:  
Community, Schooling, and  
Voluntarism**

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## **Declaration**

I, Alice Kirke, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## **Abstract**

Rural education was heavily contested in the interwar years, rooted in diverging ideas about the countryside and rural community. Adopting a broad definition of education, this thesis examines educational initiatives within voluntary organisations, rural schools and progressive schools established in the countryside. Through an examination of these diverse forms of educational activity, this research redresses the marginalisation of the rural in the history of education and enhances historical understanding of the countryside as an educative space. Drawing on archival and documentary sources which have not been used before, it argues that conceptions of 'rurality' and 'rural community' shaped the structure and content of education in the countryside during the interwar years.

It contends that a critical understanding of 'rural education' is needed within the history of education, one that acknowledges the changing representational and physical significance of the countryside. This has importance for a fuller understanding of dominant themes in the field, including progressivism, the expansion of the national education system following the First World War and informal education. This research also contributes to rural history by exposing the different ways in which the rural community was conceptualised among various individuals and groups, in relation to changing ideas about voluntarism, citizenship and gender.

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## **Abbreviations**

<b>AEA</b>	Agricultural Education Association
<b>HMI</b>	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
<b>NCSS</b>	National Council of Social Service
<b>NEF</b>	New Education Fellowship
<b>NFU</b>	National Farmers' Union
<b>NFWI</b>	National Federation of Women's Institutes
<b>NFYFC</b>	National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs
<b>RCC</b>	Rural Community Council
<b>WI</b>	Women's Institute
<b>YFC</b>	Young Farmers' Club

## Introduction

Rural education was heavily contested in the interwar years, rooted in diverging ideas about the countryside and rural community. Fears over agricultural decline and rural depopulation stirred a sense of crisis, which was exacerbated by the upheaval of the First World War and extended beyond the countryside to become a cause of national concern. Rural education was discussed at state level by the Board of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, within voluntary organisations, and through schools, both public and private. Through an examination of these rich, diverse and contested forms of educational activity in the interwar countryside, this thesis redresses the marginalisation of the rural in the history of education and argues that a more critical understanding of ‘rural education’ is needed within the field. I argue that ‘rurality’ was an active influence on educational discourses, particularly the concept of ‘rural community’.

While rural education is defined in this thesis simply as education which took place in rural areas, the meanings of the terms ‘education’ and ‘rural’, and related idioms such as ‘rural community’ are historically contingent, and require some explanation. Language, as cultural critic Raymond Williams has argued, is not just a ‘distinguishable or instrumental but a constitutive faculty’, which shapes what is known about the world.<sup>1</sup> Spoken and written terms, rather than being merely neutral descriptors, carry complex sets of meaning, and are used in pragmatic and context specific ways.<sup>2</sup> The concept of discourse refers to the categories and principles underlying and organising whatever could be thought, written or said in a given period of time, and is

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 24

<sup>2</sup> Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History* (London: Routledge, 2008); Luca Gasparri and Diego Marconi, ‘Word Meaning’ in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2016 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/word-meaning/>.



often associated with the work of Michel Foucault.<sup>3</sup> Though ‘discourse’ is a slippery term, it can usefully be understood as a body of ‘statements’, defined by their intrinsic content, as well as the people, actions, or objects which they relate to externally, in a dynamic ‘mutually conditioning relationship’.<sup>4</sup> While this thesis does not maintain an explicitly Foucauldian approach, it engages with the notion of ‘discourse’ as a way to stimulate analysis and ‘open up a space of research’,<sup>5</sup> in order to examine how and why understandings of ‘education’ and ‘rural’ have shifted over time in relation to broader social, cultural and economic changes.

Ideas about what is ‘educational’ depend on particular choices about the value of certain skills, knowledge, or practices.<sup>6</sup> Education was largely equated with the development of modern systems of schooling in early histories,<sup>7</sup> but has subsequently been understood in broader terms embracing subject matters such as childhood, family and literacy.<sup>8</sup> This thesis considers initiatives in which education was integrated with leisure and work, and adopts the broad definition of education given by American historian of education Lawrence Cremin, who saw it as a ‘deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities’.<sup>9</sup> This description captures the

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘The Order of Discourse’, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed., R Young (Boston, Mass: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1981), 51-78; Peter Schottler, ‘Historians and Discourse Analysis’, *History Workshop Journal* 27, no. 1 (1989): 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> Gavin Kendall & Gary Wickham, ‘My head is spinning; doesn't history have to be more orderly than this?’, in *Introducing Qualitative Methods: Using Foucault's Methods* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 1999), 21-56.

<sup>5</sup> Foucault, ‘Questions of method’ in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed., G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 74; Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 125.

<sup>7</sup> For example Stanley James Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (London: University Tutorial Press, 1948).

<sup>8</sup> Gary McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education* (London: Routledge, 2011), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *Public Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 29.

breadth of education as a process which can occur in a range of settings for a variety of purposes, without being so broad as to encompass all human experience; education is a conscious action, which seeks to influence. Cremin's 'ecology of education' stressed the importance of 'configurations of education', agencies such as the mass media, youth clubs, libraries, museums, churches and communities, and argued that historians should attend to how individuals have interacted with these institutions, how society has sustained them, and how they have changed over time.<sup>10</sup> Though Cremin's approach has not been adopted widely within the UK historiography, this study of the relationships between different educational agencies in the countryside engages with his notion of 'educational configurations' in order to expand existing interpretations of rural education.

Debates on rural education were rooted in particular conceptions of the rural as well as ideas about education. The idea of rurality is well established in discourses about space, place and society in the West.<sup>11</sup> It is made up of a varied nomenclature, including terms such as rural, countryside, country and agriculture. Each of these words subtly makes a different 'statement' which is underpinned by particular locations, economic pressures and social identities. Defined most basically as 'relating to, or characteristic of the countryside rather than the town',<sup>12</sup> the term 'rural' is both a physical place, with shifting boundaries and material conditions, and an imaginative space, with competing associations ranging from the idyllic to the oppressive.<sup>13</sup> Within English literature images have gathered and generalised around the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 33, 59; V.P. Franklin, 'Education in Urban Communities in the United States: Exploring the Legacy of Lawrence A. Cremin', *Paedagogica Historica* 39, no. 1 (2003): 153-163.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Cloke, 'Conceptualizing Rurality' in *Handbook of Rural Studies*, ed., Paul Cloke, Terry Marsden and Patrick Mooney (London: Sage, 2006), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (St Albans: Paladin, 1975); Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HaperCollins, 1995).

countryside as a place of peace, innocence, backwardness and ignorance.<sup>14</sup> In particular, it has been associated with the 'south country', a metaphor evoking an array of timeless and tranquil images: thatched cottages, medieval churches, manor houses, rolling hills and a patchwork of fields.<sup>15</sup>

The countryside has long been depicted as an ideal space to educate the child, offering a healthy environment and stimulating curiosity through contact with nature.<sup>16</sup> In Buckinghamshire in 1917, for example, Isabel Fry (1869-1958) founded the Farmhouse School, and Lucy Winifred Nicholls (1869-1962) established the Garden School. They were two of many 'experimental' schools loosely associated with the New Education Fellowship (NEF), established in Britain in 1921 as a broad alliance of educationists who sought to provide a curriculum based on 'relevance, more tolerant discipline, encouragement of the arts and crafts, and a reliance upon the new science of psychology'.<sup>17</sup> Setting themselves against the nationalist and imperialistic ethos of traditional fee-paying public schools,<sup>18</sup> the progressive public schools of the interwar period experimented with new models of citizenship and internationalism.<sup>19</sup> Activities outside of the classroom, especially in rural

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<sup>14</sup> Williams, *The Country*.

<sup>15</sup> Alun Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', in *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920*, ed., Robert Colls and Philip Dodd. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 62-88.

<sup>16</sup> John Darling, *Child-Centred Education and its Critics* (London: Paul Chapman, 1994), 8; see also Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, 'Environment' in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family, Volume 6: In the Modern Age*, ed., Joseph M. Hawes and Ray Hiner (University of Kansas: Berg Publishers, 2010), 81.

<sup>17</sup> John Howlett, *Progressive Education: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Gary McCulloch and Colin McCaig, 'Reinventing the Past: the Case of the English Tradition of Education', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 50, no. 2 (2002): 238-253. See also Chriss Bull, et al., 'Land, Identity, School: Exploring Women's Identity with Land in Scotland through the Experience of Boarding School', *Oral History* 36, no. 2 (Autumn 2008): 75-88.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Watkins, 'Inventing International Citizenship: Badminton School and the Progressive Tradition between the Wars', *History of Education* 36, no. 3 (2007): 315-338.

settings, were important to their educational agenda,<sup>20</sup> but the relationship between their place and pedagogy is under-examined in the history of education.

Accounts of education in the countryside, discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter, have largely focused on dilapidated village schools. Certainly, difficulties associated with limited resources and poverty, which adversely affected the development of schooling more generally, were exacerbated in remote rural areas.<sup>21</sup> The organisation of schooling from the late-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century was shaped by the social class concerns of Victorian elites.<sup>22</sup> The 1870 Elementary Education Act provided for the formation of school boards under the control of district authorities to ensure that there were school places for all children aged between five and thirteen, filling the gaps in educational provision left by competing Anglican and non-conformist organisations, as well as various 'dame schools'.<sup>23</sup> Subsequent legislation made school attendance compulsory. However, school boards were slow to become established in rural areas, and school attendance committees were notoriously ineffective.<sup>24</sup> The 1902 Education

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 158; Darling, *Child-Centred Education*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Pamela Horn, *Education in Rural England, 1800-1914* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978); Caitlin Adams, 'Rural Education and Reform Between the Wars', in *The English Countryside between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?*, ed., Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 37-38.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Woodin, Gary McCulloch and Steven Cowan, 'Chapter 3, Framework for ROSLA: Establishing Compulsion' in *Secondary Education and the Raising of the School-Leaving Age: Coming of Age?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 33-54; Brian Simon, 'Systematisation and Segmentation in Education: The case of England', in *The Rise Of The Modern Educational System: Structural Change And Social Reproduction 1870-1920* ed., Detlef K. Muller, Fritz Ringer and Brian Simon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 88-108.

<sup>23</sup> Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960); Philip Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England: The People's Education* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> L. M. Davison, 'Rural Education in the Late Victorian Era: Some Attendance Committees in the East Riding of Yorkshire, 1881-1903', *History of Education Society Bulletin* 45 (1990):

Act replaced school boards with local education authorities (LEAs), overseen by the Board of Education, the central government department responsible for education.<sup>25</sup> The Act permitted LEAs to make provision for post-elementary education, but the growth of secondary schools halted with the outbreak of war in 1914.<sup>26</sup>

After the First World War, education became a matter of public concern in relation to demands for reconstruction.<sup>27</sup> The 1918 Education Act, drafted by H. A. L. Fisher, the Liberal President of the Board of Education, planned to raise the school leaving age to fourteen, to be implemented in 1921, and to develop education beyond the elementary stage through continuation schools. The organisation of schooling was influenced by the reports of the Board's consultative committee, under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Hadow. *The Education of the Adolescent* (1926) recommended that all-age schools should be reorganised into separate primary and secondary schools with a break at the age of eleven,<sup>28</sup> and *The Primary School* (1931) recommended that education within primary schools should be related to the environment of the child.<sup>29</sup> Drawing on ideas from the discipline of psychology, and encompassing a somewhat romantic view of the child, the reports advocated a 'child-centred' approach to education, which shared much in common with the aims of the NEF.<sup>30</sup>

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7-24; K. B. Bailey, 'Rural School Boards: A Reappraisal of the Work of Small School Boards based on a Buckinghamshire Study,' *History of Education Society Bulletin* 28 (1981): 24-37.

<sup>25</sup> A. S. Bishop, *The Rise of a Central Authority in English Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> Woodin et al., *Secondary Education*, 46-47.

<sup>27</sup> Ross McKibbin, 'Education and Mobility' in *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1998), 206-207.

<sup>28</sup> Board of Education Consultative Committee, *The Education of the Adolescent* (London: HMSO, 1926).

<sup>29</sup> Board of Education Consultative Committee, *The Primary School* (London: HMSO, 1931).

<sup>30</sup> Howlett, *Progressive Education*, 113-114; Roger Moore, 'Hadow Reorganization in a Community Setting: A. H. Whipple and the William Crane School in Nottingham 1931- 38' *History of Education* 30, no. 4 (2001): 383.

While the school increasingly became a dominant educational institution with the expansion of educational legislation, the degree to which the state should intervene was contested. Employers, parents, teachers and others projected various ambitions onto education, stimulating a range of educational initiatives outside of institutional settings. However, a focus on schooling in the history of education has overshadowed these developments,<sup>31</sup> especially within rural areas. This follows a particular view of the interwar countryside as a period and place of decline, rooted in the diminishing economic importance of agriculture and the dwindling rural population.<sup>32</sup> While there were aspects of decline in the interwar countryside, however, revisionist historians have drawn attention to growth and innovation within agriculture and rural society.<sup>33</sup>

The history of the countryside has been 'astonishingly varied', with complex relationships between continuity and change, traditionalism and modernity, or as Alun Howkins puts it, 'death and re-birth' in the interwar period.<sup>34</sup> The voluntary Women's Institute (WI) and Young Farmers' Club (YFC) movements, for example, provided education and recreation for social groups which had previously been neglected in the countryside.<sup>35</sup> Beginning in 1915 to aid food production during the First World War, the WI increased the educational and leisure opportunities available to rural women, with a diverse educational programme geared towards agriculture, handicrafts and

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<sup>31</sup> Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon, 'Is there any Place for the History of " Education" in the "History of Education"? A Plea for the History of Everyday Educational Reality in and outside Schools' *Paedagogica Historica* 31, no.1 (1995): 9-16.

<sup>32</sup> See for example, Richard Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson, 'Introduction' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 1-9.

<sup>34</sup> Alun Howkins, 'Death and Rebirth? English Rural Society, 1920-1940' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 10-25.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England since 1880* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002) 144.

citizenship.<sup>36</sup> The YFC was initiated in 1921 to provide agricultural education and leisure for young people, through a range of activities revolving around stock-keeping.<sup>37</sup> The WI and YFC were part of a wider rural community movement, a close-linked network of individuals and voluntary organisations, working to regenerate rural life by deepening a sense of community and rural identity in the countryside.<sup>38</sup>

The term 'rural community' was not widely used before the interwar period,<sup>39</sup> and requires detailed consideration. Community is a 'warmly persuasive' word,<sup>40</sup> referring to people who collectively share geographical space or common characteristics and ideas.<sup>41</sup> It carries a sense of belonging which can disguise diversity and conflict.<sup>42</sup> In a rural context, functionalist conceptions of community denoted the existence of stable, harmonious and orderly relationships between paternalistic landlords, their tenants and deferential labourers, acted out in the small-scale environment of the village,<sup>43</sup> in contrast to the supposedly disordered, impersonal character of modern towns and cities.<sup>44</sup> In his extensive research into the interwar rural

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<sup>36</sup> Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> F E Shields, *50 Not Out!: A History of Young Farmers in England and Wales; 1 Essentially for Clubs* (Stoneleigh: National Federation of Young Farmer's Clubs, 1970), 17.

<sup>38</sup> Jeremy Burchardt, 'Rethinking the Rural Idyll: The English Rural Community Movement 1913-26', *Cultural and Social History* 8, no.1 (2011): 73-94; ---, 'Reconstructing the Rural Community: Village Halls and the National Council of Social Service 1919 to 1939', *Rural History* 10, no. 2 (1999): 193-216.

<sup>39</sup> Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 149.

<sup>40</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1976), 66.

<sup>41</sup> Tom Woodin, David Crook and Vincent Carpentier, *Community and Mutual Ownership: A Historical Review* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010), 7.

<sup>42</sup> George A. Hillery, 'Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement', *Rural Sociology* 20 (1955): 111-123.

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Liepins, 'New Energies for an Old Idea: Reworking Approaches to 'Community' in Contemporary Rural Studies', *Journal of Rural Studies* 16, no.1 (2000): 24.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Miller, 'Urban Dreams and Rural Reality: Land and Landscape in English Culture, 1920-45', *Rural History* 6, no. 1 (1995): 89-102.

community movement, Jeremy Burchardt has argued that it advanced a new understanding of the relationship between the countryside and community, based on democracy and citizenship.<sup>45</sup>

As well as being a public status, carrying the right and responsibility to vote, citizenship has been understood in terms of private, moral self-improvement, available in theory to everyone.<sup>46</sup> With the emphasis on duty and service to the nation during the First World War, historians have argued that citizenship was strongly associated with a sense of 'Englishness', encompassing the nation and empire.<sup>47</sup> However, this focus on national identity has recently been challenged. Tom Hulme has argued that citizenship was formulated through the activities of civic associations and local government, and though he concentrates on urban environments, his focus on practices of citizenship, rather than notions of identity, has relevance for an understanding of the ways in which citizenship was produced in the countryside. Burchardt has shown, for example, that 'ordinary villagers', including women, played an active role in the management of village halls in the 1920s, furthering democratisation and broadening participation in rural life.<sup>48</sup>

While the interwar period as a whole remained divided by class, gender and religion, voluntary organisations encouraged social mixing, engendering 'a democratising logic', which made social boundaries more permeable.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Burchardt, 'Rethinking the Rural Idyll'.

<sup>46</sup> Tom Hulme, *Civic Culture and Citizenship: the Nature of Urban Governance in Interwar Manchester and Chicago* (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Leicester, September 2013), 2; B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870- 1939', *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 2 (2008): 204-205.

<sup>47</sup> Brian Doyle. 'The Invention of English', in Colls and Dodd, *Englishness*, 113-140; Richard Weight and Abigail Beach eds., *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930-1960* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988).

<sup>48</sup> Jeremy Burchardt, "'A new rural civilization": Village Halls, Community and Citizenship in the 1920s', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 26-35.

<sup>49</sup> Helen McCarthy, 'Associational Voluntarism in Interwar Britain', in *The Ages of Voluntarism: How we got to the Big Society*, ed. Matthew Hilton and James McKay (Oxford: British Academy, 2011. British Academy Scholarship Online, 2013).



Groupings of social class did not always map easily onto the interwar countryside, and this thesis maintains a focus on class as an influential, restraining, but also shifting category. Understandings of class have interacted with concepts of gender, which have also taken on specific meanings in rural settings. Feminist geographer Anne Hughes regards gender as both a historical and spatial construct, in which meanings are continually being 'constituted, reproduced, and contested at particular times in particular places'.<sup>50</sup> Land work, for example, has long been associated with masculinity,<sup>51</sup> and Victorian ideologies of womanhood, condemned it as degrading for women.<sup>52</sup> The 'lighter branches' of agriculture, such as poultry-keeping, bee-keeping, dairy work, and fruit growing were held to be more appropriate for maintaining respectability.<sup>53</sup> Despite this ideal, the rural economy, and many families, could not function without women's labour,<sup>54</sup> and a 'hidden workforce' of rural women continued into the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Anne Hughes, 'Rurality and Cultures of Womanhood: Recovering the Domestic Experiences of Rural Women', in *Contested Countryside Cultures: Rurality and Socio-cultural Marginalization*, ed., Paul Cloke and Jo Little (London: Routledge, 1997), 125-6.

<sup>51</sup> G. E. Mingay, *A Social History of the English Countryside* (London: Routledge, 1990), 85; John Field, *Working Men's Bodies: Work Camps in Britain, 1880-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Alun Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England 1850-1925: A Social History* (London, HarperCollins, 1991), 104.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Nicola Verdon '... subjects deserving of the highest praise': Farmers' Wives and the Farm Economy in England, c. 1700–1850', *Agricultural History Review* 51, no.1 (2003): 39; ---, *Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth-Century England: Gender, Work and Wages* (Boydell: Woodbridge, 2002); Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 102;

<sup>55</sup> Celia Miller, 'The Hidden Workforce: Female Field Workers in Gloucestershire, 1870-1901', *Southern History*, 6 (1984): 139-61; Alun Howkins and Nicola Verdon, 'Adaptable and Sustainable? Male Farm Service and the Agricultural Labour Force in Midland and Southern England, c.1850-1925', *Economic History Review* 61, no.2 (2008): 471; Nicola Verdon, 'Agricultural Labour and the Contested Nature of Women's Work in Interwar England and Wales', *The Historical Journal* 52, no.1 (2009), 111.

Women's work in agriculture adopted new meanings with changing economic and social circumstances in the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> During the First World War, for example, the Women's Land Army recruited women from rural and urban areas to assist with land work in the place of men who had been conscripted, and went some way towards dispelling the image of agricultural labour as unskilled and unsuitable for women.<sup>57</sup> There were also efforts to reframe farming as 'modern' and suitable for women in career advice manuals aimed at middle-class girls in the interwar years.<sup>58</sup> Alison Light's study of femininity, literature and conservatism between the wars is helpful for understanding these alternative versions of modernity. Departing from an emphasis on the artistic and literary achievements of 'the men of 1914' in the history of modernism, Light examined the work of upper-middle-class women writers such as Virginia Woolf, a feminist and central figure in the Bloomsbury Group, and Agatha Christie, known for her detective fiction, and argued that their work similarly emerged from a set of 'shared historical concerns'.<sup>59</sup> Traditional attitudes towards middle-class femininity were not rejected outright, but were recast and took new forms, shaped by the dislocating experience of war, a tension in English social life which Light calls 'conservative modernity'.<sup>60</sup>

This oxymoron has broader significance for an understanding of social and cultural life during the interwar years, a period which Harold Perkin has described as a 'halfway house', which accommodated remnants of Victorianism with harbingers of the future.<sup>61</sup> Tensions between traditionalism and modernity permeated the English countryside. Howkins has described

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<sup>56</sup> Nicola Verdon, 'Business and Pleasure: Middle Class Women's Work and the Professionalization of Farming in England, 1890–1939', *The Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012): 393-415.

<sup>57</sup> Verdon, 'Agricultural Labour', 124.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>59</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1800*, new ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 218.

the 'janus face' of rural England, with elements of traditional and even backward agricultural practice coexisting with others which were mechanised, modern and efficient.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Christopher Bailey has argued that the Rural Industries Bureau, which promoted small-scale craft-based production in the countryside, supported images of the countryside both as England's lost past, and as a 'seedbed of reinvention and regeneration'.<sup>63</sup>

Changing ideas about the rural community, and relatedly citizenship, class, gender and modernity are important themes in this study, since they informed conceptions of education in the countryside. By considering the relationships between different educational configurations, this research develops existing interpretations of rural education, highlighting the significance of voluntarism in the history of education, and contributing to an enhanced understanding of education within the rural community movement. This thesis examines the ways in which rural education developed through the state, schools and voluntary initiatives. Specifically:

1. How did rural education develop within schools, and in the practices of educationists themselves, with particular reference to the Farmhouse School and the Garden School?
2. What were the key issues and tensions in the development of state policy towards rural education?
3. How was rural education conceived and contested within voluntary organisations, specifically the Women's Institute and the Young Farmer's Club?

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<sup>62</sup> Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: a Social History of the Countryside Since 1900*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 7-10; See also S. A Counce, 'Mechanisation and Society in English Agriculture: The Experience of the North-East, 1850–1914' *Rural History* 17, no. 1 (2006): 23-45.

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Bailey, 'Rural Industries and the Image of the Countryside' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 132-149.

The rest of this chapter introduces the methods and sources used to address these research questions, and explains the structure of the thesis.

## Methodology

Historical research involves studying the past in order to give an account of what happened, and approaches taken to conduct it depend on epistemological judgements over the nature of historical truth; what we can 'know' about the past.<sup>64</sup> Debates over the 'pursuit of history' have been characterised in simplified terms as a conflict between 'common sense' empirical history,<sup>65</sup> and postmodern relativism.<sup>66</sup> Broadly, the 'common sense' approach to history advocated by 'reconstructionist' historians such as Arthur Marwick maintains that historical facts can be ascertained from evidence within primary sources and rests on the assumption that the historian can empathise with historical actors.<sup>67</sup> However, interpretations of events can vary widely even at their moment of occurrence, and the archive itself, housing selected and consciously chosen documentation, is unbalanced, historically contingent and contestable.<sup>68</sup> In contrast to hermeneutic approaches, discourse analysis seeks to interpret documents by investigating the linguistic elements of the text itself, rooted in the conviction that there are multiple versions of the past. Approaches which elevate 'discourse' and 'representation', however, risk overlooking the wider historical context in which it operates as well as diminishing the agency of historical

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<sup>64</sup> Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>65</sup> For example, Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (Granta Books, 1997).

<sup>66</sup> Marc Depaepe characterises it in this manner in 'The Ten Commandments of Good Practices in History of Education Research', *Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Historiographie* 16, no.1 (2010): 31-49.

<sup>67</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (London: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

actors and their capacity, as individuals and a collective, to mediate and negotiate power forms in their everyday lives.<sup>69</sup>

In recent years there has been a movement towards reconciliation which acknowledges insights from both approaches, opening up various 'reading strategies'.<sup>70</sup> I adopted a pragmatic approach in this thesis, not least because as Ludmilla Jordanova has pointed out, to *do* history it is necessary to act: to look, read, think, and most importantly, write.<sup>71</sup> While maintaining a commitment to authenticity and accuracy, my interpretive and critical framework acknowledges the subjectivity of historical research and writing, following a conviction that 'truth' does not necessarily equate to universally verifiable facts, that documents are socially constructed, and that their interpretation depends on particular beliefs, perspectives and motivations. More specifically, primary source analysis was guided by the techniques suggested by Gary McCulloch and William Richardson,<sup>72</sup> which are geared towards historical research in educational settings, and by Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann,<sup>73</sup> whose recommendations build on approaches associated with the 'linguistic turn'. These authors encourage the historian to engage with issues relating to the authenticity, credibility and representativeness of documentary sources, by establishing their authorship, provenance and intended audience,<sup>74</sup> while considering the discursive and representative function of texts, in order to interpret the meaning of sources in relation to the wider social, economic and political context in which they were produced. In reading documents I paid close attention to the

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<sup>69</sup> Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3-11.

<sup>70</sup> Dobson and Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources*.

<sup>71</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Gary McCulloch and William Richardson, *Historical Research in Educational Settings* (Buckingham: Open UP, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Dobson and Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources*.

<sup>74</sup> Gary McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004); McCulloch and Richardson, *Historical Research*.

connotations of particular terms within texts, alongside a careful consideration of the external circumstances in which they operated.

The majority of archival and documentary sources chosen for my thesis had not been used before, and were selected on the basis of their interest, relevance and availability, with a conscious effort to obtain a wide range of perspectives. Related published documents, including books, magazines and press reports, allowed for an 'inter-textual' analysis, which was useful to achieve 'methodological pluralism'.<sup>75</sup> Particular types of documents used in this analysis, such as diaries, magazines and policy documents, raise specific questions, which are addressed in detail in the next section of this chapter, outlining the thesis structure. While I mainly used archives and documents, photographs were valuable not only for enabling me to 'imagine' the past more vividly,<sup>76</sup> but also for presenting a particular 'gaze' on the cultural encounters they documented.<sup>77</sup> As Peter Burke has pointed out, while photographs appear to capture and preserve a particular historical moment, and can therefore seem closer to the 'truth' than documentary sources,<sup>78</sup> they need to be subjected to the same critical scrutiny with regard to their context, reliability and function.<sup>79</sup>

The focus on rurality within this research meets with broader methodological approaches within cultural geography and the humanities which raise questions about spatiality, materiality and performativity. The concept of spatiality, an idea developed within cultural geography, is helpful for developing understandings of how space and place inform social identities

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<sup>75</sup> McCulloch, *Documentary Research*, 38,110; Steven J Taylor and Robert Bogdan, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York; Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 80; McCulloch, *Documentary Research*, 109.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Use of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion, 2001), 13.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-22.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15; See also Raphael Samuel, 'The Eye of History', in his *Theatres of Memory: Volume 1, Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*. (London: Verso, 1994), 315-36.

and experiences.<sup>80</sup> Recent work by Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl, for example, connects geographical approaches with historical research in order to generate fresh perspectives on the history of education within diverse spaces.<sup>81</sup> They argue that sites of informal education derive from, but also produce, inform and resist socio-political processes, an insight which is important when considering the significance of the rural in shaping educational ideas and practices.

Settings are an integral part of educational ideas and practices, but their chief significance is in how they are used. The 'performative' turn in the humanities has placed the spotlight on the symbolic significance of actions and how words 'make things happen'. Peter Burke relates the concept of 'performance' to Bourdieu's notion of habitus, the principle of regulated improvisation, and distinguishes a stronger and weaker sense of the term.<sup>82</sup> Stronger notions of performance refer to 'framed events' that are set apart from daily life, such as festivals or agricultural shows, and the weaker sense indicates the 'informal scenarios of everyday life,' such as the school day, which involves a series of actions with different roles played by the teacher and pupils. Since this thesis considers education across a range of rural settings, attention to spatiality, materiality and performativity is important for considering the particular significance of the rural in educational discourses and practices.

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<sup>80</sup> Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl, ed., *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 19.

<sup>81</sup> Mills and Kraftl, *Informal Education*; David A Gruenewald, 'The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place', *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 4 (2003): 3-12; Catherine Burke, Peter Cunningham and Ian Grosvenor, Editorial, 'Putting Education in its Place: Space, Place and Materialities in the History of Education', special issue, *History of Education* 39, no. 6 (2010): 677-680; Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor, *School* (London: Reaktion Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Burke, 'Performing History: The Importance of Occasions', *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 9, no.1 (2005): 35-52.

### Sources and thesis structure

After assessing the relevant historiography in chapter one, my analysis of rural education begins in chapter two, with an examination of the diaries of Isabel Fry (1869-1958), who established the Farmhouse School in Buckinghamshire in 1917 and Lucy Winifred Nicholls (1869-1962), who founded the Garden School. The complexity and detail of personal stories accessed through biographical research resonates more widely, providing insights into broader histories,<sup>83</sup> and the diaries of Fry and Nicholls raise questions about the relationships between education, rurality and community. The chapter argues that the rural environment shaped their progressivism; for Fry the farm was an educative space, allowing her to form her own ideal community, which soon attracted others interested in progressive education and farming alike, and for Nicholls, a member of her local WI, village life provided a model community from which to learn about social service.

The Farmhouse School and the Garden School were selected because they were both formed during the First World War and the diaries and notebooks of their founders are available at the Newsam Library and Archives, UCL Institute of Education.<sup>84</sup> In addition, the archive holds *The Garden School Bulletin*, a school magazine aimed at parents,<sup>85</sup> while the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies holds archival material relating to the Farmhouse School. I also read documents such as reports of the schools written by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMI), which had been established in 1839 to report on educational developments.<sup>86</sup> This was less out of concern over

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<sup>83</sup> Jane Martin, 'Interpreting Biography in the History of Education: Past and Present', *History of Education* 41, no.1 (2012): 87-102; Ivor F. Goodson and Pat Sikes, *Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).

<sup>84</sup> Papers of Isabel Fry, FY, Newsam Library and Archives, UCL Institute of Education, hereafter cited as IOE. There are two major gaps in the sequence of her diaries from 1921 to 1934, and 1936 to 1940. Papers of the White Family, WF, IOE.

<sup>85</sup> *The Garden School Bulletin*, WF/6/1-26, IOE.

<sup>86</sup> R. F. Goodings & J. E. Dunford, 'Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools, 1839-1989: the Question of Independence', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 22, no. 1 (1990), 1-3.



the ‘reliability’ of Nicholls’ and Fry’s recollections, because the ‘unreliability’ of memory is in itself interesting, than to gain a greater understanding of their ideas in relation to broader educational discourses.

The personal papers, diaries and notebooks of Fry and Nicholls functioned as a vehicle to work through their thoughts and experiences. Both women were also creative writers, who composed stories and poems illustrated by sketches, often inspired by the countryside. Nicholls used her notebook to write about her educational ideas, developed through her attendance at various conferences, and used her diary to chart the physical, intellectual and emotional development of her daughter Agnes, born in 1907. Fry’s diaries document her experiences of work before and during the founding of her school, and notebooks and loose pieces of paper include poems and short stories. Both women wrote frequently, mostly every day, giving an impression of immediacy, which characterises the diary genre more generally.<sup>87</sup>

Diaries appear to offer direct, day-to-day evidence of thought and action and to ‘show how things actually were’ compared to published sources. However, whilst diaries are not as obviously controlled as other documentary records such as the novel, which conforms to a more distinct format, diarists are still trying to ‘convince’ in some way, by bolstering their self-esteem for instance, or trying to rationalise their actions.<sup>88</sup> As Liz Stanley has explained, there is not a ‘one-to-one referential relationship’ between what is told and the actual events and behaviours being narrated.<sup>89</sup> Fry sometimes noted that she had nothing of interest to record, suggesting that she was consciously writing for posterity, creating a record which could one day be public:

No! I don’t know what to put down today that will be of most- perhaps indeed of any- interest 30 years hence, and yet there are plenty of things which have interested or

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<sup>87</sup> John Tosh and Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Great Britain: Pearson Education, 2006), 72.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 59, 65, 93.

<sup>89</sup> Liz Stanley, ed., *Documents of Life Revisited: Narrative and Biographical Methodology for a 21st Century Critical Humanism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 75.

occupied my mind in a serious way today. Any of them rightly set and focussed could be preserved as a thing of real meaning and content in a later date.... But I have hardly the mental energy tonight. And each one, flowing together with the rest as it does makes the large river of my life and experience, while a single drop would mean very little.<sup>90</sup>

Strikingly, in order to maintain her testimony whilst away on holiday, Nicholls dictated some passages of her diary to a friend. This calls into question the nature of the diary as private, and the notion of the 'self' in autobiographical texts. Judy Simons has pointed out that within diaries 'the dividing line between degrees of privacy is a delicate one', since women often shared their diaries with friends, and saw diary keeping as a form of self-expression, similar to letter writing.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, much of the research on diaries stresses that they are ultimately 'performative texts' which serve as a channel for negotiating the processes of adapting to, and contesting, social conventions.<sup>92</sup>

Diary writing was a social as well as a personal practice, which emerged as part of wider trend associated with a growing sense of self-awareness in Europe from the eighteenth century,<sup>93</sup> and had become fashionable among the middle and upper-middle-classes by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>94</sup> The act of writing a diary provided a means of self-expression and self-realisation unburdened by public expectations within a predominantly

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<sup>90</sup> Diary entry, 9 February 1919, FY/A/12, IOE.

<sup>91</sup> Judy Simons, *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Woolf* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990), 7; Joe Moran, 'Private Lives, Public Histories: The Diary in Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 54, no.1 (2015): 157.

<sup>92</sup> Moran, 'Private Lives, Public Histories', 157; Jennifer Sinor, *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing: Annie Ray's Diary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 12; Christa Hammerle, 'Diaries', in Dobson and Ziemann *Reading Primary Sources*, 147. See also Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

<sup>93</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1990), 51; McCulloch *Documentary Research*, 13.

<sup>94</sup> McCulloch *Documentary Research*, 13.

patriarchal social order.<sup>95</sup> Middle-class girls and women were encouraged to write diaries as part of their education in feminine conduct, in morality, devotion and godliness, and diary-writing retained this religious function in the twentieth century.<sup>96</sup> Certainly, both Fry and Nicholls used their diaries to reflect on their religious beliefs and to analyse their conduct towards other people. When summarising talks given at conferences, Nicholls noted her own disagreements with the views of speakers, even though she may not have vocalised them at the time, giving her a 'space' to contest the views of other speakers and work out her own point of view. Whilst in some respects, both women conformed to the expectations of their societal positions, for example, by reflecting on their moral conduct, they also expressed their sense of difference.

Fry's and Nicholls' ideas on education were bound up in their feelings, experiences and thoughts of everyday life. I argue that, while healthiness and the non-material environment of the countryside proved attractive to Fry and Nicholls, so too did the democratic potential of the rural community. This had wider implications, which I examine in chapter three on rural elementary education. The Board produced several key reports on elementary education in rural areas, often in response to developments on the ground as much as in anticipation of change. Their pamphlets *Rural Education* (1926) and *Education and the Countryside* (1934) made recommendations on the curriculum, and the Lamb Report (1928) investigated the training of country teachers.<sup>97</sup> Educational policy is the outcome of negotiations between

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<sup>95</sup> Harriet Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's Private Diaries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 5.

<sup>96</sup> Hammerle, 'Diaries' in Dobson and Ziemann *Reading Primary Sources*.

<sup>97</sup> Board of Education, *Rural Education: Adaptation of Instruction to the Needs of Rural Areas: A Survey of the Present Position: Educational pamphlets no.46* (London: HMSO, 1926); ---, *Education and the Countryside: Educational Pamphlets no. 99* (London: HMSO, 1934); ---, *Report of the Departmental Committee on The Training of Rural Teachers* (London: HMSO, 1928).

different governmental factions and interest groups,<sup>98</sup> and the development of policy on rural elementary education has to be considered in relation to the broader concerns of the Ministry of Agriculture as well as the Board.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Act, 1919, reformulated the Board of Agriculture's pre-war role of monitoring and policing developments in agriculture in more proactive terms,<sup>99</sup> but the extent to which it should intervene in agriculture, and to what end, were contested.<sup>100</sup> In planning for the reconstruction of agriculture after 1918, policymakers projected a range of ambitions onto it, from preservation, to regeneration, to modernisation.<sup>101</sup> An interdepartmental committee composed of 'responsible officers' from the Ministry and the Board had been formed in 1902 to correlate their duties with regard to agricultural education,<sup>102</sup> and they formed close links during the First World War when they oversaw the employment of elementary school children in agriculture.<sup>103</sup> During the interwar years, the two departments continued to work together to review educational legislation in relation to the countryside and agriculture through their interdepartmental committee meetings.<sup>104</sup> Traces of policy-making processes are evident in unpublished records held at the National Archives in Kew, including memoranda, correspondence and minutes from meetings.

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<sup>98</sup> Gary McCulloch, 'Spens v Norwood': Contesting the Educational State? *History of Education* 22, no.2 (1993): 163-180.

<sup>99</sup> John Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 110, 153.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>101</sup> Clare Griffiths, 'Farming in the Public Interest: Constructing and Reconstructing Agriculture on the Political Left', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 167.

<sup>102</sup> Board of Education 'Memorandum of arrangements between the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Board of Education in regard to Agricultural Education in England and Wales', 22 September 1902, ED 22/52, The National Archives, Kew, hereafter cited as TNA.

<sup>103</sup> Pamela Horn, 'The Employment of Elementary Schoolchildren in Agriculture, 1914-1918', *History of Education* 12, no. 3 (1983): 203-15.

<sup>104</sup> Interdepartmental Committee files, Board of Education and Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 1926-1934, ED 11/187, TNA.

Assessing the main arguments around rural education within this wider policy context, I argue that the rural elementary school was increasingly conceptualised as a 'social institution', which served the distinctive cultural life of the community, rather than the technical needs of the agricultural industry. Rural teachers were advised to develop a 'rural bias' in the curriculum, teaching the same subjects as urban schools but with reference to the rural environment. Just as understandings and practices of nature study have changed over time in relation to shifting conceptions of science,<sup>105</sup> ideas about rural bias changed in relation to different notions of agriculture and rural life, but this has not been studied systematically in the history of education.

The chapter considers examples of curricular 'experiments' detailed in HMI reports on rural education in two village schools, Staunton Church of England School in Nottinghamshire, and Ashley Green Church of England School in Buckinghamshire.<sup>106</sup> HMI was a semi-autonomous body,<sup>107</sup> which not only monitored the efficiency of schools in relation to the aims of central government, but also mediated between the state and communities, guiding the direction it felt the schools should take.<sup>108</sup> Reports written by its members could be very thorough, revealing details not only about teaching methods, but also the wider social significance of the school. Rural elementary schools were very different to the progressive public schools examined in chapter two. They catered for working-class children who lived locally, mostly the

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<sup>105</sup> E. W. Jenkins, 'Science, Sentimentalism or Social Control? The Nature Study Movement in England and Wales, 1899-1914', *History of Education* 10, no. 1 (1981): 33-43.

<sup>106</sup> Board of Education, *Education in Rural Schools*, February 1937, ED 77/226, TNA. This file included reports by HMI on two different schools; L. F. Gibbon (HMI), 'Nottinghamshire: An Account of Weaving as a School Craft in Staunton C. E. School' (1934) and 'Pedagogue or Server of Tables: An Experiment in a Buckinghamshire Rural School' (1936), on Ashley Green Church of England School, Buckinghamshire.

<sup>107</sup> Goodings and Dunford, 'Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools', 1; H. G. Williams, 'Nation State versus National Identity: State and Inspectorate in Mid-Victorian Wales', *History of Education Quarterly* 40, No. 2 (Summer, 2000): 145-168.

<sup>108</sup> Williams, 'Nation State versus National Identity', 146.

sons and daughters of those who worked in agriculture or rural trades. However, in common with Fry and Nicholls, the headmistresses of the village schools investigated by HMI shared a renewed interest in the rural community and the 'place' of their school within it.

Debates over the nature of rural schooling were informed by plans for continuation education in rural areas, discussed in chapter four. Continuation education was mainly linked to agriculture, as the dominant industry in the countryside. Extending the scope of agricultural education involved developing a 'fresh conception' of its meaning and purpose,<sup>109</sup> which accommodated the needs of agricultural labourers and women, who had both been neglected by policymakers in the past. The interdepartmental committee, for instance, set up a sub-committee in 1928 to investigate the 'education of women and girls for rural life' under WI President Lady Denman,<sup>110</sup> and the Ministry established a scholarship scheme for the sons' and daughters' of agricultural workers.<sup>111</sup> Drawing on archival material and published reports on agricultural education, I argue that continuation education, like elementary education, came to be understood as central to the development of the rural community, as well as fundamental to improving technical skills in agriculture. As a result, it was increasingly organised as a collaborative effort, with the involvement of the state, county authorities, agricultural societies and the voluntary sector, specifically the YFC and WI.

Since literature on post-elementary education has tended to focus on institutional settings, developments in agricultural instruction have been overlooked. The YFC was a significant force in agricultural education for boys and girls aged between ten and twenty-one, and remains so today, and

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<sup>109</sup> Inter-Departmental Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Board of Education, *The Practical Education of Women for Rural Life* (London: HMSO, 1928). Hereafter cited as *Denman Report*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> D. A. Piggot, 'Agricultural Scholarships for Rural Youth in England and Wales', 1922-58', *History of Education Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1990): 17-45.

it was therefore an important organisation to study in this thesis. Its educational programme is considered in detail in chapter five, and I argue that, further to its role in developing agricultural skills, its chief significance was the way in which it sought to rework the relationship between farmers and the rural community, shaping young farmers into future leaders of the countryside. Drawing on the archives of individual clubs as well as published sources, I consider the aims and organisation of the movement as well as how it functioned in practice,<sup>112</sup> before reflecting on the significance of club life for individual members.

The historical records of the YFC are patchy, especially for the early period, from 1921 until 1929. Individual clubs were affiliated to a county federation, which linked up to the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (NFYFC). Although some records of the NFYFC have been deposited at the library of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, they were not accessible to researchers, and local records are also fairly scarce. The records of the Bures & District Young Farmers' Club held at Suffolk Record Office include minutes, monthly bulletins, letters from members and circulars from the NFYFC,<sup>113</sup> and the East Sussex Record Office and Somerset Heritage Centre contain minutes from meetings of their county federations,<sup>114</sup> providing valuable insights into the organisation of the movement at a local level. I supplemented this archival research with published documentary sources including educational booklets and the YFC journal *The Young Farmer*, published monthly from 1929.<sup>115</sup> The journal reported on developments in agricultural research and reiterated the traits of the ideal

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<sup>112</sup> Mills and Kraftl, 'Introduction', in Mills and Kraftl, *Informal Education*, 9.

<sup>113</sup> Bures & District Young Farmers' Club, Papers of Ernest Batten, HC502/98, Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch, hereafter cited as SRO.

<sup>114</sup> East Sussex County Federation Executive Committee Minutes, YFC/1/1/1-2, East Sussex Record Office, The Keep, East Sussex, hereafter cited as ESRO; Somerset County Federation Executive Committee Minutes, A/APW, Somerset Heritage Centre, hereafter cited as SHC.

<sup>115</sup> It was produced quarterly from February 1932, costing one shilling for an annual subscription.

young farmer, fostering a sense of common purpose between different clubs.<sup>116</sup> As Nicola Verdon has argued, the agricultural press is a 'rich and varied source...yet to be fully explored by historians',<sup>117</sup> and her approach, encouraging attention to the format and layout of the magazine, its contributors, content and silences has particular relevance for my analysis of *The Young Farmer*.

In common with the YFC, the WI was a voluntary, self-governing organisation promoting education and recreation. It attracted a much larger membership than the YFC, and has received more attention in the historiography. However, chapter six examines the work of its little known 'Guild of Learners', established within the movement in 1921 to organise the teaching and exhibiting of rural handicrafts.<sup>118</sup> The Guild aimed to preserve and reinvigorate the practice of home handicrafts through the teaching and exhibiting of craft skills. The institutional archive of the WI at the London School of Economics is extensive, although material relating to the interwar years is relatively scarce.<sup>119</sup> The archive contains a range of documentary sources relating to the activity of the Guild in the interwar period, including reports from the handicrafts sub-committee, annual reports, press cuttings, pamphlets and exhibition handbooks, and the Guild was reported on in the magazine of the WI, *Home and Country*.

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<sup>116</sup> Some county federations also published their own journals, mirroring the structure and content of *The Young Farmer*, though this was mainly a later development. The *Essex Young Farmer*, for example, ran from 1947.

<sup>117</sup> Nicola Verdon, 'The Modern Countrywoman': Farm Women, Domesticity and Social Change in Interwar Britain', *History Workshop Journal* 70 (Autumn 2010) 87-88; See also Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>118</sup> Anne Stamper, 'Teaching and Preserving Crafts: The Women's Institute' Paper given at Hand Made Tales: Women and Domestic Crafts Study Day, at The Women's Library, November 2010; Jane Robinson, *A Force to be Reckoned With: A History of the Women's Institutes*, (London: Virago, 2012), 124-126.

<sup>119</sup> Records of the Women's Institute, 5FWI, The Women's Library, London School of Economics Library and Archives, hereafter cited as LSE.



WI craft exhibitions placed everyday objects usually made for their utility, like children's clothes or make-and-mend trousers, outside of the 'private' domain of the rural home and into the 'public' space of the urban exhibition hall, celebrating the skill involved in their making.<sup>120</sup> Exhibitions are 'performative' in that the curation of objects on display creates meaning, which is interpreted differently depending on pre-existing knowledge and the interaction between 'social and museological narratives'.<sup>121</sup> The meanings attached to crafts, as with all objects, are contingent and determined by social groups.<sup>122</sup> Whilst the process of exhibiting handicraft objects raised their status, elevating the ordinary domestic concerns of women, it removed them from the context in which they were originally made, subjecting them to external criteria and leaving them open to criticism.<sup>123</sup> As well as looking at the 'social function' of craft work, Pat Kirkham has argued for asserting the importance of the craft object itself and the process of making, since it gave women the opportunity to be creative in their leisure time and justified collective time together.<sup>124</sup>

Chapter six argues that the process of making craft products was construed by the middle-class organisers of the Guild as a form of community building,

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<sup>120</sup> Maggie Morgan, 'Jam Making, Cuthbert Rabbit and Cakes: Redefining Domestic Labour in the Women's Institute, 1915–60', *Rural History* 7, no. 2 (1996): 214.

<sup>121</sup> Alyson Mercer, 'The Changing Face of Exhibiting Women's Wartime Work at the Imperial War Museum', *Women's History Review* 22, no. 2 (2013): 332; Eilean Hooper-Greenhill *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), 77.

<sup>122</sup> Paul Glennie, 'Consumption Within Historical Studies' in *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* ed., Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1996), 179; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), 7.

<sup>123</sup> Pat Kirkham, 'Women and the Interwar Handicrafts Revival' in *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* ed., Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London: Women's Press, 1989), 177; Janice Helland, 'Rural Women and Urban Extravagance in Late Nineteenth Century Britain' *Rural History* 13 (2002): 179-197; Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1991).

<sup>124</sup> Kirkham 'Women and the Interwar Handicrafts Revival'; Fiona Hackeny, 'CAREful or CAREless? Collaborative Making and Social Engagement through Craft', *Engage 33: Critical Craft* (Winter 2013); Morgan, 'Jam Making, Cuthbert Rabbit and Cakes', 215.

with significance for both the countryside and the nation. It was a way for the Guild to root citizenship in everyday life, and assert the value of the skills possessed by rural women to a national audience. However the educative function of the craft object detracted from its commercial potential, working against the development of co-operative craft industries as a way to provide a much-needed income for rural women.

Some conclusions are offered in chapter seven. I argue that the concept of rural community was central to the educational initiatives examined in this thesis. It informed progressive approaches to education as well as the Board's conception of 'rural bias', and was fundamental to continuation education in agriculture, which as a result, was increasingly pursued as a collaborative effort between the state and voluntary sector. I contend that, in redressing the marginalisation of rurality in the history of education, this thesis opens up areas for further research, specifically relating to the significance of rural environments in progressive education; changes in the meaning of 'rural bias' over time; the importance of rural voluntary organisations in influencing education policy; and the ongoing significance of the YFC and WI in the provision of education in the countryside.

## Chapter 1

### Literature Review

Rural education has been conceptualised in the history of education as education *in* the countryside, with urban educationists drawn to the natural world, and education *of* the countryside, intended to prepare people for rural life and work through schooling and agricultural education. These different forms of education have been treated separately, with little attempt at synthesis which would develop a more critical understanding of rurality and connect the history of education to broader historiographies. Furthermore, the interwar countryside is primarily associated with inactivity and decline in the history of education, yet recent research in rural history maintains that it was characterised by ‘growth and innovation’.<sup>1</sup> This review examines scholarship on education in interwar rural England, and argues for a more nuanced understanding of rural education within the history of education.

By looking at various educational initiatives and assessing their social significance, this thesis challenges the assumption that educational change in the interwar countryside was slow. This builds on research by David Parker, whose case study of Hertfordshire highlights the active influence of the rural on local education policy,<sup>2</sup> and Jeremy Burchardt, who has studied the rural community movement.<sup>3</sup> It is informed by wider secondary literature in the history of education on progressive education, technical instruction and informal learning,<sup>4</sup> as well as work by agricultural and rural historians on

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<sup>1</sup> Brassley et al. ‘Conclusion’ in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 235.

<sup>2</sup> David Parker, *Hertfordshire Children in War and Peace, 1914-1939* (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 2007); ---, “‘A Taste for Country Life’: The Policy and Practice of Bias in English Rural Education, 1918–1939”, *The Vocational Aspect of Education* 47, no. 3 (1995): 227-245.

<sup>3</sup> Burchardt, ‘Rethinking the Rural Idyll’; ---, ‘Reconstructing the Rural Community’.

<sup>4</sup> Howlett, *Progressive Education*; Kevin J. Brehony, ‘From the Particular to the General, the Continuous to the Discontinuous: Progressive Education Revisited’, *History of Education* 30, no. 5 (2001): 413-432; Keith Burgess, ‘Education Policy in Relation to Employment in Britain, 1935-45: A Decade of ‘missed opportunities’?’, *History of Education* 22, no. 4 (1993): 365-390; Mills and Kraftl, *Informal Education*.

farming and agricultural education.<sup>5</sup> This research contributes to these various areas of study by showing that education did not simply follow urban provision; rurality, and particularly the concept of rural community, shaped the structure and content of education in the countryside in the interwar years. Studying the cultural choices involved in defining and pursuing education generates insights into social change more broadly,<sup>6</sup> and this research also contributes to rural history by exposing the different ways in which the rural community was conceptualised among policymakers, voluntary organisations and individual commentators, in relation to changing ideas about voluntarism, citizenship and gender.

### **The rural idyll and the interwar countryside**

Within popular culture, the countryside has been identified with timelessness, and the city with progress, on a linear spectrum of social and cultural change.<sup>7</sup> This discourse of rural traditionalism and urban modernity has found currency in the history of education. The rapid urbanisation of England and the fundamental concern in the field with examining the connection between education and social change has led to strong links with urban history,<sup>8</sup> and historians of education have studied urban learning communities: their buildings, technologies and the experiences of their teachers.<sup>9</sup> The idea of the city ‘an achieved centre: of learning,

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<sup>5</sup> Howkins, ‘Part 2, The “locust years”, 1921-1939’, in *The Death of Rural England*, 43-95; Richard W. Hoyle, ed., *The Farmer in England, 1650–1980* (London: Routledge, 2016); Verdon, ‘The Modern Countrywoman’, 87-107; Lynne Thompson, ‘Agricultural Education in the Interwar Years’, in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 53-72; Paul Brassley, ‘Agricultural Education, Training and Advice in the UK, 1850-2000’, in *The State and Rural Societies: Policy and Education in Europe, 1750-2000* ed., Nadine Vivier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 259-278.

<sup>6</sup> McCulloch, *The Struggle*, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, *The Country*.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Aldrich, ‘Central Issues in History of Education: An English Perspective’, in *History of Education: Major Themes, Volume 1*, ed., Roy Lowe (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2000), 255-257.

<sup>9</sup> Ian Grosvenor and Ruth Watts, ‘Urbanisation and Education: The City as a Light and Beacon?’, *Paedagogica Historica* 39, no. 1 (2003): 1-4.

communication, light', which stood 'symbolically, culturally and politically as the opposite of traditional rural values',<sup>10</sup> has reinforced associations between educational progress and the city, and by implication, educational decline and the countryside. However, this ignores the shifting representational significance of the countryside following the First World War.

The interwar publishing boom in popular guidebooks, photo essays, novels and autobiographies about the countryside supported 'structures of feeling' which celebrated the rural while masking the experiences of those who lived there.<sup>11</sup> The rural novel, which reached the peak of its popularity in Britain during the interwar period, dramatised social change in the countryside following a declinist narrative in which rural life and work were associated with an older generation.<sup>12</sup> A revival of interest in folk music harked back to an imagined harmonious period with an active village leisure culture,<sup>13</sup> and the countryside was increasingly viewed in non-economic terms as a source of amenities for a predominantly urban population.<sup>14</sup>

Increasing interest in particular areas of national life is often a reaction to the acceleration of social and cultural change,<sup>15</sup> and there were certainly aspects of decline in rural England. Following long-running trends of rural depopulation those who worked in agriculture were a minority of the rural

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Burchardt, 'Editorial: Rurality, Modernity and National Identity between the Wars', *Rural History* 21, no. 2 (2010): 148; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 231-69; Marion Shaw, 'Cold Comfort Times: Women Writers in the Interwar Period', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 73-86. See for example George Bourne, *The Wheelwright's Shop* (Cambridge University Press, 1930); Fred Kitchen, *Brother to the Ox* (Caliban Books, 1940).

<sup>12</sup> Shaw, 'Cold Comfort Times', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 73-86.

<sup>13</sup> Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Burchardt, 'Editorial', 146.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 87; Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1996).

population by 1931, and agriculture was employing more men over the age of 55 than any other occupational group.<sup>16</sup> With an international fall in the price of wheat, the total area of arable land decreased by around two million acres from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s, leaving abandoned land which presented a powerful image of decline.<sup>17</sup> The fall in employment of those working in agriculture, as well as the advent of mass produced goods, led to the perception that rural trades and crafts were in danger of dying out.<sup>18</sup> Books such as George Bourne's *The Wheelwright's Shop* documented the loss of rural crafts due to mechanisation, encouraging the idea that the village was a repository of important skills and values.<sup>19</sup> British literary critics Frank Raymond Leavis and Denys Thompson drew heavily on Bourne's work in *Culture and Environment* (1933), in order to educate the consumer about the threat of commercialised leisure, mass production and standardisation, and they saw agricultural workers and village craftsmen as part of an 'organic community', which was threatened by urbanisation and modernity.<sup>20</sup>

This sense of change was reinforced by changing patterns of landownership. The heavy losses suffered by the gentry during the war facilitated the break-up of large estates as landowners, deprived of heirs, were encouraged to put their land on the market.<sup>21</sup> The significance of ownership extended into wider social relationships and stimulated a range of 'subjective meanings, feelings

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<sup>16</sup> Howkins, 'Death and Rebirth?' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 10-25.

<sup>17</sup> Whetham, *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, 14; R. J. Moore-Colyer, "Back To Basics: Rolf Gardiner, H. J. Massingham and 'A Kinship in Husbandry'", *Rural History* 12, no. 1 (2001): 85-6.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Brassley, 'The Wheelwright, The Carpenter, Two Ladies from Oxford, and the Construction of Socio-economic Change in the Countryside Between the Wars', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 213.

<sup>19</sup> Bourne, *The Wheelwright's Shop*; Brassley, 'The Wheelwright', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 217.

<sup>20</sup> Frank Raymond Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*, new ed. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Penguin, 2005).

and emotions'.<sup>22</sup> Although in most cases the buyers were the tenant farmers, urban speculators were the most remarked upon. In Adrian Bell's novel *Silver Ley*, for example, syndicates of buyers are presented as villains coming in from outside to buy over the heads of sitting farmer tenants.<sup>23</sup> Agricultural historian F. M. L. Thompson calculated that twenty-five per cent of land changed hands in this period, and has characterised this shift in social and economic power away from the aristocracy and gentry and towards the farmers as a 'social revolution in the countryside'.<sup>24</sup> John Beckett and Michael Turner have since revised the figures detailing the amount of land which changed hands,<sup>25</sup> but sales of famous aristocratic estates reported in the press were widely commented on at the time, and encouraged the idea that vast changes were taking place in the countryside heralding the 'end of the old order'.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, agriculture and the countryside were accommodated within progressive visions of social and economic reconstruction during the interwar years.<sup>27</sup> While traditionally farmers were closely associated with individualism, which was problematic for the political left,<sup>28</sup> from the mid-1920s the countryside was identified as a key electoral battleground.<sup>29</sup> The Labour Party began to conceptualise agriculture in terms of 'public service',

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<sup>22</sup> Tom Woodin, David Crook and Vincent Carpentier, *Community and Mutual Ownership: A Historical Review* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Adrian Bell, *Silver Ley* (London, 1932), 140; Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 280.

<sup>24</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 333.

<sup>25</sup> John Beckett and Michael Turner, 'End of the Old Order? F. M. L. Thompson, the Land Question, and the Burden of Ownership in England, c. 1880 – c. 1925', *Agricultural History Review* 55 (2007): 269-288.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Clare Griffiths, 'Farming in the Public Interest' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 164-167.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>29</sup> Clare Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007).

relating farming to the common good.<sup>30</sup> Specifically, instead of supporting large-scale arable farming in competition with the output of prairie farms abroad, they emphasised the need for farmers to focus on other branches of agriculture, such as poultry farming, stock breeding, meat production and pig rearing.<sup>31</sup> Policies such as land nationalisation were presented as a means to achieve a more favourable economic setting, giving farmers a new role and status as working on behalf of the community and nation.<sup>32</sup>

The significance of this heightened interest in the countryside is contested among historians. It has been situated as part of a broader Western disillusionment with 'modern rationalism, mechanism and commercialism',<sup>33</sup> yet the volume and breadth of writing on the countryside had a particularly strong hold on English literary culture.<sup>34</sup> Following Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973), it became 'almost axiomatic' that the countryside was central to English national identity, and a range of consequences has been attributed to this culturally dominant 'rural nostalgia', from economic decline to political conservatism.<sup>35</sup> Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin famously declared in 1926 that 'England is the country, and the country is England', and historians such as Howkins have argued that the countryside was at the heart of 'Englishness' by the early twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> Martin Wiener linked this to a broader reaction against industrialism, which, he claimed, hampered

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<sup>30</sup> Griffiths, 'Farming in the Public Interest', 166.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 172

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 171

<sup>33</sup> Frank Trentmann, 'Civilization and its Discontents: English Neo-Romanticism and the Transformation of Anti-Modernism in Twentieth-Century Western Culture', *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 625.

<sup>34</sup> Williams, *The Country*.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy Burchardt, 'Agricultural History, Rural History, or Countryside History?', *The Historical Journal* 50 (2007): 474.

<sup>36</sup> Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England' in Colls and Dodd, *Englishness*, 62-88; Miller, 'Urban Dreams and Rural Reality'.



the development of technical education suitable for a predominantly urban society.<sup>37</sup>

Wiener's assessment of 'Englishness', however, relies heavily on literary sources, which could have been interpreted in numerous ways by those reading them.<sup>38</sup> Preservationist ideas of the past were not straightforwardly backwards looking, but instead made specific comments on contemporary trends.<sup>39</sup> Cultural geographer David Matless, for example, has argued that there were modern and forward looking elements to the preservationist and planning movements.<sup>40</sup> Ruralism was more complex than nostalgia for a lost past and there are many aspects of attitudes to the countryside which have little or nothing to do with the nation.<sup>41</sup> Ideas about the countryside connected with discourses relating to health and wholesomeness, for instance, which had significance for the organisation of education.

### **Education *in* the countryside: Idyllic educational environments**

The Farmhouse School and the Garden School, examined in the subsequent chapter of this thesis, drew on open-air principles and progressive educational theories, both of which valued rural environments. The open-air school movement, which in Britain began in 1907 and lasted until the late 1930s as means to promote child health, built on concerns about the ill

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<sup>37</sup> Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985); See also David Allsobrook, *Schools for the Shires: The Reform of Middle-class Education in Mid-Victorian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Hartmut Berghoff, 'Public Schools and the Decline of the British Economy', *Past and Present* 129, (1990): 148-67.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7, (1997): 155-175.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Readman, 'Landscape Preservation, "Advertising Disfigurement", and English National Identity, c. 1890-1914', *Rural History* 12, no.1 (2001): 64, 75.

<sup>40</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion, 1998), 62-102.

<sup>41</sup> Burchardt, 'Agricultural History, Rural History, or Countryside History?', 476; See also Hester Barron, '“Little prisoners of city streets”: London Elementary Schools and the School Journey Movement, 1918-1939', *History of Education* (2012): 1-16; John Ahier, *Industry, Children and the Nation: an Analysis of National Identity in School Textbooks* (London: Falmer, 1988).

effects of the 'industrial revolution' that stretched back to the nineteenth century. Fresh air and sunshine were seen as therapeutic, particularly for those suffering from tuberculosis,<sup>42</sup> and instruction in activities such as gardening, which would create a permanent interest in outdoor life, were thought to be particularly beneficial.<sup>43</sup> Most of the open-air day schools were on the outskirts of towns, and the recommendation of George Newman, Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education, was that they should be south-facing.<sup>44</sup>

The countryside was attractive to educators in terms of its capacity to strengthen character, as well as its association with physical healthiness. Rural childhood was held to be more organic and authentic than that of the town,<sup>45</sup> and within progressive education, the non-material world of the countryside as opposed to the city was seen as a preferable environment for impressionable young people. An early influence on progressive educational theory was advanced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) in *Emile, or On Education* in 1792 in which he declared that Emile, and even more so his sister Sophie, were to be brought up in an isolated, controlled rural environment, uncorrupted by mainstream social life.<sup>46</sup> This was bolstered by scientific thinking on the development of the mind and human evolution in the late-nineteenth century, which held that the biological development of the

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<sup>42</sup> M. Cruickshank, 'The Open-Air School Movement in English Education', *Paedagogica Historica* 17 (1977): 62-74.

<sup>43</sup> Lynda Bryder, "'Wonderlands of Buttercups and Daisies'" Tuberculosis and the Open Air School Movement in Britain, 1907-1939', in *In the Name of the Child: Health and Welfare, 1880-1940*, ed., Roger Cooter (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 72-95.

<sup>44</sup> Cruickshank, 'The Open-Air School Movement'; See also N. Bakker, 'Sunshine as Medicine: Health Colonies and the Medicalization of Childhood in the Netherlands, c.1900-1960', *History of Education* 36, no. 6 (2007): 659-679; Rodney Lowe, 'The Early Twentieth Century Open-Air Movement: Origins and Implications', in *The Fitness of the Nation: Physical and Health Education in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries*, ed., Nicholas Parry and David McNair (London: History of Education Society, 1983), 86-99.

<sup>45</sup> Riney-Kehrberg, 'Environment', in Hawes and Hiner, *A Cultural History of Childhood*, 81.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Darling, *Child-Centred Education*, 2; Stephen Tomlinson, 'From Rousseau to Evolutionism: Herbert Spencer on the Science of Education', *History of Education* 25, no. 3 (1996): 243.

child recapitulated the history of the species. Since children were seen to be closer to nature and ‘savagery’, the natural world was the most appropriate setting for their education.<sup>47</sup>

In Britain progressive approaches resurfaced with renewed vigour in the twentieth-century. Various philosophies and practices have been described under the banner of progressive education, making it difficult to define,<sup>48</sup> but whilst progressive education was not a homogenous movement, there remained a sense of common purpose.<sup>49</sup> The NEF, the most prominent organisation promoting progressive education in Britain,<sup>50</sup> brought together a range of professionals including teachers, teacher-trainers, academic experts, administrators and psychologists, operating in transnational networks.<sup>51</sup>

Much of the historiography focuses on the origins, theories and impact of progressive education. Early Whiggish approaches traced the ‘development’ of progressive ideas over time, highlighting the better-known, longest-serving

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Fallace, ‘Recapitulation Theory and the New Education: Race, Culture, Imperialism, and Pedagogy, 1894–1916’, *Curriculum Inquiry* 42, no. 4 (2012): 510-533.

<sup>48</sup> Brehony, ‘From the Particular to the General’; Richard Selleck, *English Primary Education and the Progressives, 1914-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Peter Cunningham, ‘Innovators, Networks and Structures: Towards a Prosopography of Progressivism’, *History of Education* 30, no. 5 (2001): 433-451; Roy Lowe, *The Death of Progressive Education: How Teachers Lost Control of the Classroom* (London: Routledge, 2007); For U.S historiography see H. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (London: Routledge, 1995); For comparison with U.S and U.K historiography see, William G. Wraga, ‘Condescension and Critical Sympathy: Historians of Education on Progressive Education in the United States and England’, *Paedagogica Historica* 50, no.1-2 (2014): 59-75.

<sup>49</sup> Selleck, *English Primary Education*; Cunningham, ‘Innovators’.

<sup>50</sup> Brehony, ‘From the Particular to the General’, 416; Celia Jenkins, ‘New Education and its Emancipatory Interests (1920-1950)’, *History of Education* 29, no. 2 (2000): 139-151.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Eckhardt Fuchs, ‘The Creation of New International Networks in Education: The League of Nations and Educational Organizations in the 1920s’, *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 2 (2007): 199-209.

schools.<sup>52</sup> While more recent methodologies have concentrated on the social and cultural contexts in which practitioners operated and the practices of progressivism at the micro-level of the classroom,<sup>53</sup> they do not address the significance of the wider physical environment. Many progressive schools, often labelled 'crank' schools, were established in the countryside during the interwar period,<sup>54</sup> yet the reasons behind this have not been examined in the historiography. In a biography of Fry, for example, Beatrice Curtis Brown celebrated Fry's success and educational ambitions, but offered little critical reflection on the significance of the environment.<sup>55</sup>

The significance of the rural has shifted over time, and longstanding associations between the countryside, healthiness and child-centred approaches following Rousseau, do not adequately explain the attraction of the countryside to progressive educators specifically during the interwar years. A broader perspective, however, is taken in Jan Marsh's synoptic study of the 'pastoral impulse' in English culture between 1880 and 1914. Marsh situates progressive schools such as Bedales and Abbotsholme as part of a broader reaction against technological and social change, alongside garden cities, agrarian communes and the folk revival movement.<sup>56</sup> To explain why the Farmhouse School and the Garden School were both established in leafy Buckinghamshire in 1917, then, it is necessary to consider Fry's and Nicholls' educational ideas not only in relation to

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<sup>52</sup> W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators: Vol.2, Progressive Schools 1881-1967* (London: Macmillan; St.Martin's Press, 1968); Robert Skidelsky, *English Progressive Schools* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

<sup>53</sup> Sol Cohen, 'The Influence of Progressive Education on School Reform in the United States: Redescriptions', in *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Catherine Burke, 'The School Without Tears': E. F. O'Neill of Prestolee', *History of Education* 34, no. 3 (2005): 263-275.

<sup>54</sup> Darling, *Child-Centred Education*.

<sup>55</sup> Beatrice Curtis Brown, *Isabel Fry 1869-1958: Portrait of a Great Teacher* (London: A. Barker, 1960).

<sup>56</sup> Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, 1880-1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), 345-8.

progressivism and open-air principles, but also in terms of their conceptualisation of the countryside.

Certainly, within rural history, progressive schools have been examined with regard to their 'place' in the social, cultural and economic life of the countryside. David Jeremiah, for instance, has assessed Dartington Hall, a progressive school established in 1925, as an 'experiment in rural reconstruction'.<sup>57</sup> Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst bought the run-down Dartington Hall Trust estate with a view to providing a focus for the 'revitalisation of the countryside', which they hoped would be a model in social and economic regeneration for the nation.<sup>58</sup> In renovating the estate, they respected its rural heritage while introducing new elements through modernist architecture.<sup>59</sup> The significance of the school's rurality, however, has been overlooked within the history of education. In their recent review of the work of radical educators in the early twentieth century, for example, Brendan Walsh and John Lalor briefly noted that the Elmhirsts and others were drawn to 'removed or rural settings' since their physical 'separateness' reflected the attempt to move 'outside' the culture of mainstream educational provision.<sup>60</sup> This treats the rural as an empty space, and overshadows the influence of the school's rural setting on the Elmhirsts' ambitions.

Similarly, scholarship on Henry Morris and his renowned village college experiment focuses on Morris' democratic and community ideals, while sidelining his ruralism. Morris had extensive connections with progressive educators, and the Elmhirsts had contributed to the funding of Sawston Village College in Cambridgeshire, opened in 1930, seeing in it something of

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<sup>57</sup> David Jeremiah, 'Dartington Hall: A Landscape of an Experiment in Rural Reconstruction' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 116-131; Adams, 'Rural Education and Reform', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 49.

<sup>58</sup> M. Kidl, *Beyond the Classroom: Dartington's Experiments in Education* (Bideford: Green Books, 1990); Michael Young, *The Elmhirsts of Dartington: The Creation of an Utopian Community* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

<sup>59</sup> Jeremiah, 'Dartington Hall' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 117.

<sup>60</sup> Brendan Walsh and John Lalor 'New Languages of Possibility: Early Experiments in Education as Dissent', *History of Education* 44, no. 5 (2015): 595-617.

their own attempt to create a rural 'utopian community'.<sup>61</sup> Sawston Village College was the realisation of Morris' plans to create an educational institution for the whole community, and the building housed a secondary school, meeting hall and library.<sup>62</sup> It was as much an experiment in rural regeneration as it was in community education. Morris saw it as a manifestation of communal country values, a 'training ground of a rural democracy',<sup>63</sup> which would enable agricultural workers, farmers and small proprietors to build a 'worthy rural civilization'.<sup>64</sup> Members of the governing board at Sawston, however, were appointed by the county council and parish council, instead of being directly elected,<sup>65</sup> and were not particularly representative of different groups and classes.<sup>66</sup>

The wider educational programme lacked resources and innovation, and the village college model did not take off nationwide.<sup>67</sup> Still, it was an ambitious vision of rural education, and Morris' concerns and ideas had broad currency. Many agreed with his observation that the education system offered country children an education 'divorced from the life and habits of the countryside', which encouraged them to leave for the towns, or left them unprepared for rural life if they stayed.<sup>68</sup> How to address this was a key concern within policy on rural elementary education more generally.

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<sup>61</sup> Henry Ree, *Educator Extraordinary: The Life and Achievements of Henry Morris, 1889-1961* (London: Longman, 1973); ---, *The Henry Morris Collection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>62</sup> Adams, 'Rural Education', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 49.

<sup>63</sup> Henry Morris, *The Village College: Being a Memorandum on the Provision of Educational and Social Facilities for the Countryside, with Special Reference to Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*; Tony Jeffs, *Henry Morris: Village Colleges, Community Education and the Ideal Order* (Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> Maurice Dybeck, *The Village College Way: The Relevance of the Cambridgeshire Village College Philosophy to the Present Community Education Movement* (Coventry: Community Education Development Centre, 1981), 30-42.

<sup>66</sup> Adams, 'Rural Education', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 49, 52.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-52.

<sup>68</sup> Morris, *The Village College*, 1-2.

### **Education of the countryside: the village school**

The village school has an iconic significance in English culture, and is often seen as symbolic of community.<sup>69</sup> Yet, this image has disguised class divisions and the fraught nature of elementary education in the countryside.<sup>70</sup> Following the development of compulsory education in the late-nineteenth century, rural employers often suspected schooling of perpetuating an ‘urban bias’, which encouraged the brightest children to leave the countryside.<sup>71</sup> Many farmers relied on children for jobs such as pea-picking, potato-picking, hay-making, and harvesting,<sup>72</sup> and school attendance worsened during the First World War, when the Board and Ministry encouraged LEAs to relax attendance by-laws, freeing up children to help with agricultural work in order to replace the 200-250,000 men who left agriculture for the armed services.<sup>73</sup>

The literature on village schools focuses on ongoing problems with attendance rooted in poverty, rigid social hierarchies and the atomised nature of rural populations. Pamela Horn’s extensive investigation of rural education up to 1914, for example, depicts rural schools as backward and deficient, with decrepit buildings and fewer qualified teachers.<sup>74</sup> Certainly, rural schools used a far higher proportion of uncertified and supplementary teachers than town schools; uncertified teachers had attended a teacher-training college for a short period without passing the examinations, while supplementary teachers had no educational qualifications. The challenges posed by social geography continued to influence the development of education in Britain following the First World War, and the historiography of the interwar period

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<sup>69</sup> Colin Ward, *The Child in the County* (London: Bedford Square Press, 1988), 18; Adams, ‘Rural Education’ in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Ward, *The Child in the County*, 18; Horn, *Education in Rural England*, 269.

<sup>71</sup> Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 142.

<sup>72</sup> Horn, ‘The Employment of Elementary Schoolchildren in Agriculture’, 203-15.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Horn, *Education in Rural England*.

highlights the difficulties associated with the implementation of national education policy.<sup>75</sup>

However, this bleak picture of rural schooling and the limitations of educational legislation has overshadowed initiatives which emerged specifically during the interwar period.<sup>76</sup> David Parker, for example, has shown that Hertfordshire LEA capitalised on the lack of strong central direction in education policy to pursue an educational agenda which, though increasingly out of step with national developments in education, enjoyed significant local support.<sup>77</sup> Only twenty seven per cent of schools in rural areas were reorganised nationally by 1937,<sup>78</sup> and while the literature suggests that this was because LEAs were unable or unwilling to respond to legislation, Parker argues that maintaining the isolation of rural schools was an active part of Hertfordshire LEA's educational policy.<sup>79</sup>

The LEA encouraged a vocational curriculum which aimed to prepare rural children for life and work in the countryside. Working in close partnership with the principal of Oaklands, the county's agricultural institute, as well as teachers and farmers, the LEA developed an internationally celebrated 'Rural Syllabus' in line with the Board's recommendation that rural elementary

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<sup>75</sup> Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform, 1920–1940* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), 294-31; W. Carr and A. Hartnett, *Education and the Struggle for Democracy* (Buckingham: Open University, 1996), 92-101.

<sup>76</sup> David Parker, "Just a stepping stone" - The Growth of Vocationalism in the Elementary School Curriculum, 1914-1939', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 35, no. 1 (2003): 3-21; see also Moore, 'Hadow Reorganization in a Community Setting', 379-399.

<sup>77</sup> Parker, *Hertfordshire Children*. This is mirrored in international scholarship in the history of education. See Tracy L. Steffes, 'Solving the "Rural School Problem": New State Aid, Standards, and Supervision of Local Schools, 1900–1933,' *History of Education Quarterly* 48 (2008): 181. See also S. G. Kohlstedt, "'A better crop of boys and girls": The School Gardening Movement, 1890-1920', *History of Education Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2008): 58-93. See also J. Barrington, 'The School Curriculum, Occupations and Race' in *The School Curriculum in New Zealand: History, Theory, Policy and Practice*, ed., Gary McCulloch (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1992).

<sup>78</sup> ---, "'A Taste for Country Life'", 239.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.



education should have a 'rural bias'.<sup>80</sup> With its emphasis on practical instruction related to the environment and likely future employment of the child, the LEA's education policy was popular among local farmers concerned with dwindling rural working populations. However, as well as giving practical instruction it covered rural poetry and literature, and studies of local geography and history, winning the support of progressive educationalists and teachers who sought to reinvigorate the curriculum and encourage the curiosity of the child.

Parker's case study complicates the assumption that educational change in rural areas was slow. It exposes the extent to which the Board was willing to guide rather than direct the course of education at a local level, and points to the collaborative nature of local policy making, with farmers and the staff at the county's agricultural institute helping to shape elementary education. While Parker emphasises the exceptional nature of Hertfordshire LEA in terms of the intensity with which it pursued a rural bias, his case study raises questions around how rural bias was conceptualised and pursued more broadly, which are addressed in chapter three.

Debates over the nature of rural schooling were informed by plans for the raising of the school leaving age and education beyond the elementary stage. The Education Acts of 1918 and 1921 proposed a system of continuation education for those aged between fourteen and sixteen for a total of 320 hours over the course of a year.<sup>81</sup> Unlike the academic syllabus of the secondary school, which was modeled on the grammar school curriculum, continuation education was intended to relate to industry, commerce or agriculture. However, it was difficult to define agriculture in educational terms, in order to meet the requirements of educationists, agricultural scientists and those working in farming.<sup>82</sup> The development of

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>81</sup> Woodin et al., *Secondary Education*, 56-57; R. H. Tawney, *Secondary Education for All- A Policy for Labour* (London: Labour Party, 1922).

<sup>82</sup> Stewart Richards, 'Masters of Arts and Bachelors of Barley': The Struggle for Agricultural Education in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, *History of Education* 12, no. 3 (1983): 161-175.

continuation education in relation to agriculture is discussed in chapter four of this thesis, which challenges the narrative of failure in much of the literature on technical education, arguing that educational initiatives in agriculture supported by the Ministry of Agriculture have been overlooked. Further, it draws attention to the development of agricultural education within the voluntary YFC and WI movements as part of a broader rural community movement.

### **Agricultural education and rural regeneration**

In a Whiggish account of the history of agricultural education up to 1939, A. Cheesbrough argued that it demonstrated:

ways in which part of our education system, through the discoveries resulting from its own scientific and technological research, and equally important, through its work of disseminating progressive ideas, has made a substantial contribution towards the solution of the nation's economic problems.<sup>83</sup>

This assumed that there was a direct and traceable connection between agricultural education, productivity and economic growth. Much of the historiography on technical education is more critical than Cheesbrough's account, and emphasises its limited development in relation to Britain's stunted economic progress.<sup>84</sup> Explanations focus on the lack of funding available to implement change and the Board's laissez-faire ideology.<sup>85</sup> Ministers and civil servants have also been accused of having an anti-industrial outlook, which maintained the low status of vocational provision.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> A. Cheesbrough, 'A Short History of Agricultural Education up to 1939', *The Vocational Aspect of Education* 18, no. 41 (1966): 181.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Gordon, Richard Aldrich and Dennis Dean, *Education and Policy in Twentieth Century England* (London: Woburn Press, 1991), 59-60; Derek H. Aldcroft, *Education, Training and Economic Performance, 1944 to 1990* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 162.

<sup>85</sup> Andy Green, 'Technical Education and State Formation in Nineteenth Century England and France', *History of Education* 24, no. 2 (1995): 123-39.

<sup>86</sup> Martin Wiener, *English Culture*; Gail L. Savage, 'Social Class and Social Policy: The Civil Service and Secondary Education in England during the Interwar Period', *Journal of*

Such meta-historical explanations have been criticised for not taking sufficient account of the dynamics of the labour market,<sup>87</sup> or complications relating to the local implementation of policy.<sup>88</sup> Many of these issues were exacerbated in the countryside,<sup>89</sup> partly due to the lower rate income local authorities could derive in areas of scattered population, but also to the conservatism of those who lived there. Michael Sanderson, for example, has claimed that Junior Technical Schools failed to take root in rural areas due to the lack of demand for agricultural education, which neither parents nor rural employers valued.<sup>90</sup>

However, this overlooks the rapid expansion of non-institutional agricultural education after the First World War. The need to increase home grown food supplies during the conflict spurred the development of agricultural education, and made many farmers more aware of the benefits of applying scientific research to husbandry.<sup>91</sup> The County War Agricultural Committees, initially formed to aid food production, were reconfigured as county agricultural committees after the war, with education as one of their main responsibilities. Funding for the building of new research institutions and the employment of scientific staff was provided by the Ministry and the Development Commission, formed by the Development and Road

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*Contemporary History* 18 (1983): 271-4; Ron Brookes, *Contemporary Debates in Education: An Historical Perspective* (London: Longman, 1991), 80.

<sup>87</sup> Penny Summerfield and Eric J. Evans, *Technical Education and the State since 1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Burgess, 'Education Policy in Relation to Employment', 365-390.

<sup>88</sup> Gary McCulloch, *The Secondary Technical School: A Usable Past?* (London: Falmer Press, 1989), 21.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Sanderson, *The Missing Stratum: Technical School Education in England 1900-1990s* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), 78-79.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> C. J. Holmes, 'Science and the Farmer: The Development of the Agricultural Advisory Service in England and Wales, 1900-1939', *Agricultural History Review* 36, no. 1 (1988): 85; Timothy DeJager, 'Pure Science and Practical Interests: The Origins of the Agricultural Research Council, 1930-1937', *Minerva* 31, no. 2 (1993): 133.

Improvement Funds Act, 1909, which aimed to raise agricultural productivity.<sup>92</sup> In 1914, thirty-two of the sixty English and Welsh counties employed an agricultural organiser, with a view to developing advisory services for farmers, rising to fifty-five by 1939. Agricultural organisers and county agricultural committees developed schemes of lectures, demonstrations and evening classes, attracting many students in a system which agricultural historian Paul Brassley has described as ‘at best nebulous and at worst confusing’.<sup>93</sup>

This emergent, messy system of agricultural education, forged by experts, was part of a ‘patchy’ process of the professionalisation of English agriculture which emphasised the use of modern scientific methods and conceptualised farming as a career.<sup>94</sup> However, the notion of a formalised, scientific agricultural education clashed with traditional forms of learning, where knowledge was passed on informally through individual instruction and demonstration on the farm.<sup>95</sup> Cynicism about agricultural education related to broader concerns over the implications of scientific and technological change.<sup>96</sup> In his interviews with farmers and labourers in East Anglia in the 1950s, for example, George Ewart Evans found that there were tensions between individual and collective forms of knowledge, in that the ‘real instinct’ of the old farmer was to use the knowledge from ‘the community in which he lives’, rather than the scientific knowledge of expert advisers, and to farm with a view to sustainability rather than profit.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Robert Olby, ‘Social Imperialism and State Support for Agricultural Research in Edwardian Britain’, *Annals of Science* 48, no. 6 (1991): 509-526.

<sup>93</sup> Brassley, ‘Agricultural Education, Training and Advice’, in Vivier, *The State and Rural Societies*, 264;---, ‘Developments in Agricultural Science, Research and Education’ in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume 7, Part 1*, ed., E. J. T Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 595-640.

<sup>94</sup> ---, ‘The Professionalization of English Agriculture?’ *Rural History* 16, no. 2 (2005): 235–51

<sup>95</sup> Cheesbrough, ‘A Short History of Agricultural Education’.

<sup>96</sup> For a discussion of how scientific and technical education relates to broader understandings of science and technology see David Layton, *Science for the People: The Origins of the School Science Curriculum* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973).

<sup>97</sup> George Ewart Evans, *The Horse in the Furrow* (London: Faber, 1960), 16, 49-50.

This concept of communal knowledge was harnessed by the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI), who sought to 'raise the consciousness of countrywomen as to what kinds of agricultural education were possible'.<sup>98</sup> Agricultural education for women was traditionally undeveloped, as policymakers had failed to comprehend the need for it. Although women could attend most farm institutes, which provided short, residential courses in agriculture for those above the age of sixteen, they were mainly geared towards men in terms of the courses on offer, and colleges specifically for women, such as Studley College, opened by Lady Warwick in 1903, were aimed at middle-class women wanting to learn about horticulture.<sup>99</sup> The NFWI challenged this, organising lectures and demonstrations in agriculture, horticulture, poultry-keeping and dairying, which paved the way for more advanced instruction by county staffs and agricultural organisers.<sup>100</sup> This went beyond training women in the production and preservation of food. It was also a means of establishing the influence of women in rural policymaking, since WI members gained representation on the committees organising agricultural education.<sup>101</sup>

Agricultural education in the interwar years, then, expanded with the development of agricultural research as well as with a view to the wider regeneration of the countryside, giving it a distinctive position in the history of

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<sup>98</sup> Thompson, 'Agricultural Education', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 58.

<sup>99</sup> Anne Meredith, *Middle-Class Women and Horticultural Education: 1890-1939*, Unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Sussex, 2001; ---, 'Horticultural Education in England, 1900-40: Middle-Class Women and Private Gardening Schools', *Garden History* 31, no. 1 (2003): 67-79.

<sup>100</sup> Inez Jenkins, *The History of the Women's Institute Movement of England and Wales*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 111; Thompson, 'Agricultural Education', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 58; ---, 'The Golden Thread of Empire': Women's Popular Education in the Lancashire Federation of Women's Institutes 1920-1939'. *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 28, no. 1 (1996): 42-57.

<sup>101</sup> Thompson, 'The Promotion of Agricultural Education for Adults: The Lancashire Federation of Women's Institutes, 1919-45', *Rural History* 10, no. 2 (1999): 217-234.

technical education.<sup>102</sup> In a case study of interwar Devon, for instance, Lynne Thompson found that a ‘collaborative network’, including the LEA, county agricultural education staff, and local branches of the YFC and WI, worked to develop a nationally recognised programme of agricultural education.<sup>103</sup> This raises questions around the nature of collaboration in agricultural education policy at a local and national level, and the role of the voluntary sector, which are addressed in chapter four of this thesis. Following this exploration of how agricultural education policy developed, chapters five and six respectively introduce the educational programmes of the YFC and WI in more detail, and discuss their significance in terms of the rural community.

### **Education, voluntarism and youth: The Young Farmers’ Clubs**

Chapter five argues that as well as providing agricultural education, the YFC sought to train members as public representatives of the agricultural industry and future leaders of the rural community. Whilst the literature in rural history indicates that farmers took on a greater role in the social leadership of the countryside after the First World War, there is little research on how, and to what extent, this occurred ‘on the ground’ as a social and cultural process.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, little is known about farmers as individuals or as a social group.<sup>105</sup> Youth movements act as ‘barometers’ not only of attitudes towards young people but also of broader demographic, cultural and economic trends,<sup>106</sup> and the status of young people as governable and subject to adult control makes child-centred environments key for the study of how social identities

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<sup>102</sup> Cheesbrough, ‘A Short History of Agricultural Education’, 181; Peter H. J. H Gosden, *Education in the Second World War: A Study in Policy and Administration, Volume 7 of Routledge Library Editions: History of Education* (London: Routledge, 2013), 416-418.

<sup>103</sup> Thompson, ‘Agricultural Education’, in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 69-72.

<sup>104</sup> Burchardt, ‘Agricultural History, Rural History, or Countryside History?’.

<sup>105</sup> Richard W. Hoyle, ‘Introduction: Recovering the Farmer’, in Hoyle, *The Farmer in England*, 2.

<sup>106</sup> John Springhall, *Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

are constructed.<sup>107</sup> To assess how the 'social role' of farmers has changed,<sup>108</sup> it is useful to examine the activities of the youth organisation aimed primarily at their sons and daughters.

The farmer has been caught in divergent stereotypes as either uneducated and exploitative, or as 'John Bull', the personification of the nation itself.<sup>109</sup> Farmers emerged from the First World War prosperous and highly valued as the 'nation's saviours' who had maintained the food supply during the conflict.<sup>110</sup> The new-found prosperity of farmers encouraged the growth of the National Farmers' Union (NFU),<sup>111</sup> which had over 100,000 members by the end of the 1920s and was able to influence policy and public opinion through its campaigns. At a local level too, farmers became increasingly assertive, as the traditional ruling elite began to play a less active and more 'ornamental' role. Farmers gradually replaced the local gentry and aristocracy as elected representatives on county councils throughout the 1930s,<sup>112</sup> and they drew on discourses of 'community' and 'agriculture', rather than 'the country gentleman' and 'stewardship' to legitimise their governance of the countryside.<sup>113</sup> The *Farmers Weekly* magazine, which began publication in

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<sup>107</sup> Sarah Mills, "'An Instruction in Good Citizenship": Scouting and the Historical Geographies of Citizenship Education', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38, no. 1 (2013): 120-134.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Jeremy Burchardt, 'Farming and the Countryside', in *Contested Countryside: Rural Politics and Land Controversy in Modern Britain*, ed., Jeremy Burchardt and Philip Conford (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 1.

<sup>110</sup> Clare Griffiths, 'Heroes of the Reconstruction? Images of British Farmers in War and Peace', in *War, Agriculture and Food: Rural Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s*, ed., Paul Brassley, Leen Van Molle and Yves Segers (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 209-228.

<sup>111</sup> Andrew Flynn, Philip Lowe and Michael Winter 'The Political Power of Farmers: An English Perspective,' *Rural History* 7 (1996): 15-32.

<sup>112</sup> Cannadine, *Decline and Fall*, 167.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Woods, 'Discourses of Power and Rurality: Local Politics in Somerset in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century', *Political Geography* 16, no. 6 (1997): 453-478.

1934, included articles on rural life as well as farming, and was symbolic of this new-found confidence.<sup>114</sup>

Farmers also became increasingly influential at central government level. The government increasingly sought the input of experts to inform policy making,<sup>115</sup> giving agricultural policy a modernising impulse, in which stability was pursued not by resisting change, but by achieving a balance between existing practices and new developments.<sup>116</sup> A close 'corporate' relationship was forged between the Ministry and the agricultural industry, through bodies such as the NFU,<sup>117</sup> both of which were represented on the executive committee of the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (NFYFC).

However, the fleeting attention which the YFC has received in rural history focuses on its agricultural education programme, and largely ignores its wider significance. When briefly mentioned in histories of rural leisure, it is sidelined as conservative and marginal.<sup>118</sup> Accounts of the movement rely heavily on a celebratory history written in 1970 by F. E. Shields, who was General Secretary and Treasurer of NFYFC,<sup>119</sup> the findings of G. P. Hirsch of the Oxford Agricultural Economics Research Institute, who conducted a

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<sup>114</sup> Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, 75.

<sup>115</sup> John Sheail, 'Agriculture in Wider Perspective', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 162.

<sup>116</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy, 1912-36: A Study in Conservative Politics* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989), 64-93.

<sup>117</sup> Peter Atkins, 'The Milk in Schools Scheme, 1934-45: 'Nationalization' and Resistance', *History of Education* 34, no. 1 (2005): 1-21; David Marsh and Martin Smith, 'Understanding Policy Networks: Towards a Dialectical Approach', *Political Studies* 48 (2000): 4-21.

<sup>118</sup> H. E. Bracey, *English Rural Life: Village Activities, Organisations and Institutions* (Routledge & K Paul, London, 1959), 229; W. A. Armstrong, 'The Countryside' in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950 Volume 1: Regions and Communities*, ed., F. M. L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 145.

<sup>119</sup> F. E. Shields, *50 Not Out! A History of Young Farmers in England and Wales: No. 1- Essentially for Clubs* (Stoneleigh: National Federation of Young Farmer's Clubs, 1970).



survey of the movement in 1952,<sup>120</sup> and W. H. Pedley's *Labour on the Land* (1942), which deemed it a 'distinctive social experiment', but potentially too narrow and elitist.<sup>121</sup> There has been little research into the movement drawing on club archives, with the recent exception of Sian Edwards' study of its role in providing education for girls in the 1950s.<sup>122</sup> This thesis contributes to the existing literature by assessing the significance of the YFC's broad education programme in terms of the role of the farmer in agriculture, rural life and the nation.

### **Women, voluntarism and education: the Women's Institutes**

The WI was unprecedented in enabling women to meet collectively and engage in social and educational activities of their own making,<sup>123</sup> and they had more than 300,000 members by 1939.<sup>124</sup> Though aimed at adult women, mainly housewives married to farmers and agricultural labourers, the WI also influenced conceptions of agricultural and rural education for girls.

Research within women's history has drawn attention to the movement's feminist dynamic, highlighting the crossover in terms of ideas and personnel with the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century suffrage movement.<sup>125</sup> Casting off their conservative associations with 'jam and Jerusalem', Maggie Andrews has described the movement as the 'acceptable face of feminism'.<sup>126</sup> Although the WIs did not identify as feminist, they campaigned

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<sup>120</sup> G. P. Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs: A Report on a Survey of their History, Organisation and Activities, with Recommendations for their Future Development* (London: National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs, 1952).

<sup>121</sup> W. H. Pedley, *Labour on the Land: A Study of the Developments Between the Two Great Wars* (London: P. S. King & Staples Limited, 1942), 153-154.

<sup>122</sup> Sian Edwards, 'Nothing gets her goat! The Farmer's Wife and the Duality of Rural Femininity in The Young Farmers' Club Movement in 1950s Britain', *Women's History Review* (2016): 1-20. DOI: 10.1080/09612025.2015.1123022

<sup>123</sup> Andrews, *Acceptable Face of Feminism*.

<sup>124</sup> Brassley et al. 'Conclusion' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 238.

<sup>125</sup> Andrews, *Acceptable Face of Feminism*; Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985).

<sup>126</sup> Andrews, *Acceptable Face of Feminism*.

on a range of issues affecting women's lives throughout the interwar years. The franchise was extended to women over thirty in the Representation of the People Act, 1918, and to those over twenty-one in the Equal Franchise Act of 1928, and individuals and groups of women began to play a more active role in public life through campaigning, committee work and learning about politics.<sup>127</sup> Women's voluntary organisations made a significant contribution to public debates around housing, for example,<sup>128</sup> and Caitriona Beaumont argues that they used the terminology of 'citizenship' rather than 'feminism' in order to campaign for women's rights without being associated with what was then a controversial and divisive ideology.<sup>129</sup>

As a whole, the decades following the war have been characterised as a 'backlash' for women, who were ushered back into the home when no longer required in the workplace.<sup>130</sup> Yet, women accounted for a statistically larger part of the population, and the 'home' took on a renewed national significance in the context of reconstruction.<sup>131</sup> Home is a word rich in connotations, and refers not only to domestic space but also to the locality and the nation.<sup>132</sup> The association between women and the home, then, did

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<sup>127</sup> Caitriona Beaumont, 'Where to Park the Pram'? Voluntary Women's Organisations, Citizenship and the Campaign for Better Housing in England, 1928 – 1945', *Women's History Review* 22, no. 1 (2013): 75-96.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. See also, Mark Llewellyn 'Designed by Women and Designing Women: Gender, Planning and the Geographies of the Kitchen in Britain 1917-1946', *Cultural Geographies* 11, no. 1 (2004): 42-60.

<sup>129</sup> Caitriona Beaumont, 'Citizens not Feminists: The Boundary Negotiated Between Citizenship and Feminism by Mainstream Women's Organisations in England, 1928-39', *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000): 411-429.

<sup>130</sup> Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918–1939* (London: Pandora, 1989).

<sup>131</sup> Light, *Forever England*.

<sup>132</sup> Michael Skey, "'Thank God, I'm Back!': (Re)defining the Nation as a Homely Place in Relation to Journeys Abroad', *Journal of Cultural Geography* 28 (2011): 233–252; Ian Grosvenor, 'There's no place like home': Education and the Making of National Identity', *History of Education* 28, no.3 (1999): 235-250; Alison Blunt, 'Cultural Geography: Cultural Geographies of Home', *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no.4 (2005): 505-515; Maggie

not necessarily represent an attempt to push women back into the 'private' sphere.<sup>133</sup> The rural context adds further complexity to the concept of 'home', which extended beyond the house to include the farm, smallholding or cottage garden. In her analysis of the 'home' pages of the farming press, for example, Verdon argues that domestic tasks and rural crafts were portrayed as skilled and worthwhile, essential to the 'family enterprise' of farming, in which husbands and wives held complementary but differentiated responsibilities.<sup>134</sup>

Handicrafts, such as embroidery, needlework, toy-making and weaving, became an increasingly popular aspect of the WI's agenda. This was part of a wider revival of interest in crafts during the 1920s and 1930s, when the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, which advocated social and economic reform through a reinvigorated vernacular craft culture, resurfaced in response to mass produced goods, giving handmade items once considered mundane a renewed value. The strong emphasis on 'good taste',<sup>135</sup> and 'everyday things' within the crafts revival had important implications for women's work.<sup>136</sup> Andrews argues that national handicraft exhibitions organised by the Guild of Learners and NFWI enabled the WI to 'renegotiate domesticity' by redefining crafts associated with the rural home as skilled.<sup>137</sup> In doing so, the WI's handicraft policy was part of their broader

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Andrews, 'Homes Both Sides of the Microphone: The Wireless and Domestic Space in Intewar Britain', *Women's History Review* 21, no.4 (2012): 605-621.

<sup>133</sup> Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 383-414; Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', *The Journal of American History* 75, no.1 (1988): 9-39.

<sup>134</sup> Verdon, 'The Modern Countrywoman', 91.

<sup>135</sup> Bruce Holdsworth, 'English Art Education between the Wars', *Journal of Design Education* 3, no. 2 (1984): 163.

<sup>136</sup> Julian Holder, 'Design in Everyday Things', Promoting Modernism in Britain, 1912-1944', in *Modernism in Design* ed., Paul Greehalgh (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 123-144.

<sup>137</sup> Maggie Morgan [Maggie Andrews], 'Jam Making, Cuthbert Rabbit and Cakes: Redefining Domestic Labour in the Women's Institute, 1915-60', *Rural History* 7, no. 2 (1996): 207-219. Andrews' former name was Morgan.

'feminist' agenda and met with their work in developing citizenship, in that it challenged the low status of women's work, and asserted the national value of skills held by rural women. Chapter six examines this curious connection between handicrafts and citizenship in more detail.

It is timely to look closely at the WI and their work in handicrafts. Contemporary debates about the nature of feminism, specifically concerns over exclusion and differentiation, have given the collaborative and non-confrontational organisation of the WI contemporary salience. In 2015, the WIs celebrated the centenary of their formation, and were portrayed as 'radical' on a BBC2 series celebrating the 'influence of women through the centuries'.<sup>138</sup> This popular history trails the celebratory tone of academic histories of the movement, which have reclaimed the organisation as a 'force to be reckoned with'.<sup>139</sup> Whereas needlework, knitting and other 'domestic arts' were rejected by second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s as being associated with oppressive domestic labour, a 'new generation of feminist voices' of the 1990s, sometimes labelled 'third-wave' or 'post-feminism', sought to re-value them within popular culture as works of feminist expression.<sup>140</sup> Many groups of women currently align themselves with this 'feminist reclamation' of crafts, which aims to reconnect women with their heritage whilst providing a way of engaging in the 'quiet activism of everyday making'.<sup>141</sup> Within these accounts of the radicalism of the WI and the feminist nature of crafts, there is scope for a more detailed and critical assessment, which acknowledges the tensions between the commercial and educative function of crafts in relation to social class.

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<sup>138</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2014/bbc-two-women-influence-through-centuries>

<sup>139</sup> Robinson, *A Force to be Reckoned With*.

<sup>140</sup> Ricia A. Chansky, 'A Stitch in Time: Third-Wave Feminist Reclamation of Needed Imagery', *Journal Of Popular Culture* 43, no. 4 (2010): 681-700; Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford, 'Genealogies and Generations: The Politics and Praxis of Third Wave Feminism', *Women's History Review* 13, no. 2 (2004): 165-182.

<sup>141</sup> Fiona Hackney, 'Quiet Activism and the New Amateur: The Power of Home and Hobby Crafts', *Design and Culture* 5, no. 2 (2013): 169 -193.

### The rural community movement

In catering specifically for ‘young farmers’ and ‘rural housewives’, the YFC and WI were part of a broader rural community movement. By examining their educational programmes, chapters five and six build on existing research into the networks, ideas and personnel associated with the rural community movement. The key figures within the movement were William George Stewart Adams (1874-1966), Gladstone Professor of Political Theory and Institutions at the University of Oxford,<sup>142</sup> and Grace Hadow (1875-1940), secretary of the social studies foundation Barnett House and vice-chairman of the WI.<sup>143</sup> Grace was also the sister of Sir William Henry Hadow, who chaired the Board of Education’s consultative committee. The champion of agricultural co-operation Sir Horace Plunkett (1854-1932) also provided inspiration and ideas. Adams and Hadow established the first Rural Community Council (RCC) in Oxfordshire in 1921, with the aim of coordinating voluntary activity in villages.<sup>144</sup> Ultimately, they wanted to forge a ‘new rural civilization,’ and bound up with this was the hope of developing citizenship and democracy in the countryside.<sup>145</sup>

As discussed earlier in this chapter, consideration of the rural in assessments of national identity and citizenship have focused on literary sources, and the distinction they made between the ‘organic community’ of the past, and the disordered nature of urban life in the present. However, Burchardt argues that in the rural community movement, distinctions between the rural and urban were conceptualised sociologically, as two forms of society potentially

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<sup>142</sup> Adams became chair of the NFYFC in 1928. Brian Harrison, ‘Adams, William George Stewart (1874-1966)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30336>, accessed 30 Nov 2015.

<sup>143</sup> Teresa Smith, ‘Hadow, Grace Eleanor (1875-1940)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33630>, accessed 30 Nov 2015.

<sup>144</sup> Burchardt, ‘State and Society in the English Countryside: The Rural Community Movement 1918–39’, *Rural History* 23, no. 1 (2012): 81–106.

<sup>145</sup> ---, “A new rural civilization” in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*.

existing alongside each other, rather than historically.<sup>146</sup> The intellectual origins of this change in emphasis lay in American rural sociology and British idealist philosophy.<sup>147</sup> Drawing on Jeffersonian traditions of the independent small farmer, the 'Chicago School' of rural sociology held that small-scale, face-to-face rural communities had an inherently democratic nature and should remain distinct from urban society.<sup>148</sup> The University of Chicago was the leading centre for sociological research in the USA, and Adams lectured there in economic and social theory in 1902-3.<sup>149</sup>

The idealist philosophy of Thomas Hill Green, who had an extensive impact on social policy and philosophy during the first half of the twentieth century,<sup>150</sup> was also an important influence. Green argued that local democratic participation was fundamental to civil liberty and that it was the duty of the state to ensure the conditions in which this could flourish. His emphasis on the common good was compatible with social reconstruction throughout the 1920s,<sup>151</sup> and inspired the emergence of a 'new social discourse of leisure and citizenship' in which leisure and voluntarism were valued as providing a training ground in citizenship.<sup>152</sup> While traditionally voluntarism had focused on the relief of distress, there was a shift in focus towards the educational and cultural development of communities.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> ---, 'Rethinking the Rural Idyll', 76.

<sup>147</sup> ---, 'Rethinking the Rural Idyll', 79.

<sup>148</sup> This was also influential in H. C. D. Somerset, *Littledene: Patterns of Change* (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1974). The first edition was published in 1938.

<sup>149</sup> Burchardt, 'Rethinking the Rural Idyll', 80.

<sup>150</sup> Matt Carter, *T. H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003).

<sup>151</sup> Jose Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy', *Past and Present* 135 (1992): 116-141.

<sup>152</sup> Robert Snape, 'The New Leisure, Voluntarism and Social Reconstruction in Interwar Britain', *Contemporary British History* 29, no.1 (2015): 51-83.

<sup>153</sup> Peter Grant, 'Voluntarism and the Impact of the First World War', In *The Ages of Voluntarism: How we got to the Big Society* ed., Matthew Hilton, and James McKay (Oxford: British Academy, 2011), 27-46.

New ideas about the purpose, practice and professionalism of voluntary action were encompassed in the formation of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), established in 1919.<sup>154</sup> The NCSS aimed to improve the coordination and efficiency of voluntary social action, by channelling finances and information between the government and society.<sup>155</sup> Guided by Adams, the NCSS took a keen interest in the RCCs through their department specifically concerned with rural work. The NCSS understood community as a distinctly rural quality, 'for it is in the country village more than anywhere else that the meaning of 'community' and the fact of common interest can be most readily realized'.<sup>156</sup> The village was small enough for people to stand in a clearly defined relationship to one another, in contrast to urban areas. With the support of the NCSS and grant aid from the Development Commission and the Carnegie UK Trust, one of the UK's wealthiest charitable organisations which was specifically concerned with 'cultural development in the countryside',<sup>157</sup> RCCs had been formed in 20 counties by 1934.<sup>158</sup>

Adams, Hadow and other individuals involved in RCCs were part of an increasingly influential middle-class group of 'professionals' who emphasised the importance of public service. The key tenets of professionalism: impartiality, efficiency, expertise, and public service, pervaded the rural community movement.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, the rural community tended to be cast in a neutral, apolitical light, which did not effectively challenge existing social structures, and Burchardt has argued that as a result, they in fact worked to

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<sup>154</sup> Snape, 'The New Leisure', 55; Margaret Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action. A History of The National Council of Social Service 1919-1969* (London, 1969).

<sup>155</sup> Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the Rural Community', 193-216; ---, "A new rural civilization", in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 29.

<sup>156</sup> cited in Burchardt, "A new rural civilization", in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 31.

<sup>157</sup> William Robertson, *Welfare in Trust: A History of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, 1913-1963*, (Dunfermline: Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, 1964).

<sup>158</sup> Burchardt, 'State and Society in the English Countryside'.

<sup>159</sup> Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, 218.

perpetuate inequality and undermine potentially more radical initiatives.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, Nicholas Mansfield has suggested that the YFC and WI were ‘neo-paternalistic’ in stance,<sup>161</sup> in that they sought to *provide* recreational opportunities for rural workers, rather than encourage initiative.

However, though the rural community movement was organised by middle-class ‘professionals’, it facilitated wider social participation, and was stimulated and sustained by changes in the outlook and attitude of rural workers themselves.<sup>162</sup> Following the First World War, it was widely reported that the mood of returning villagers was one of discontent with the expectation of something better, whether men coming back from fighting or women from work in munitions factories,<sup>163</sup> and the rural community movement was, in part, a response to this. Chapters five and six contribute to the existing literature by exploring the ways in which the educational programmes of the YFC and the WI were constructed and contested in relation to social class, and changing ideas about citizenship, voluntarism and community.

## Conclusion

Literature in the history of education and rural history raises questions about how rurality influenced educational ideas and practices, particularly in relation to the concept of ‘rural community’. While research in the history of education touches upon different areas of rural education through research on progressive education, village colleges and agricultural instruction, the topic has not been examined systematically for the interwar period. The

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<sup>160</sup> Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 147; John Lowerson, ‘Battles for the Countryside’ in *Class, Culture and Social Change: A View of the 1930s*, ed., F. Gloversmith (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 265.

<sup>161</sup> Nicholas Mansfield, ‘Paternalistic Consumer Co-operatives in Rural England, 1870–1930’, *Rural History* 23 (2012): 205–211. See also Nicholas Mansfield, ‘Farmworkers, Local Identity and Conservatism, 1914–1930’, in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 176–186.

<sup>162</sup> Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 143.

<sup>163</sup> Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 144; Keith Grieves, ‘Common Meeting Places and the Brightening of Rural Life: Local Debates on Village Halls in Sussex After the First World War’, *Rural History*, 10 (2008): 171–192.



reasons behind the establishment of public progressive schools in the countryside, for instance, rest on assumptions about the links between the countryside and healthiness, rather than research into the motivations of the schools' founders. Village schools are often characterised as under-resourced to the point of being ineffective as agents of change, and Parker's research on Hertfordshire stresses the exceptional nature of the county's education policy. With little specific attention paid to the countryside in histories of continuation and technical education, the historiography has overlooked much of the 'grass roots' activity in the provision of agricultural education which was supported by the Ministry rather than the Board, and was organised in collaboration with the voluntary sector.<sup>164</sup>

This research addresses these areas of neglect. As well as connecting different areas of historiography in the history of education and rural history, it contributes to both fields through archival research into experiments within progressive education, rural schooling and voluntary organisations. In doing so it develops new understandings of rural education, which draw out the wider relevance of the concept of 'rural community' as an attribute of the contemporary countryside.

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<sup>164</sup> Thompson, 'Agricultural Education', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 72.

## Chapter 2

### **‘An educational experiment in the village’: progressive schools and the countryside**

The countryside has long been seen as an idyllic environment for the ‘natural’ development of the child, with open space and fresh air promoting intellectual curiosity and physical healthiness. While progressive public schools established in rural areas tended to be remote from their local communities, the widespread interest in rural life following the First World War motivated some progressive educators to venture out into the locality beyond their grounds. This chapter argues that the sites of the farm and the village, and the modes of work and leisure associated with them, informed the educational philosophies of Fry and Nicholls, by providing them with a ‘place’, literally and imaginatively, in which to work out their ideas about community, citizenship and social change.

The Farmhouse School and the Garden School were geographically close together, situated in ‘Leafy Bucks’, a county in the south east of England commonly regarded as an idyllic rural landscape.<sup>1</sup> Historically, agriculture was the county’s main industry, though its proximity to London and the establishment of the railway spurred the growth of several cottage industries. The town of High Wycombe for example became known for chair making, and its population rose from 13,000 in 1881, to 29,000 in 1928. The county’s popularity encouraged the growth of suburban areas, and the railway brought ‘weekender’ visitors from London, keen to walk and picnic in the beautiful, rolling Chiltern Hills.<sup>2</sup>

Fry and Nicholls were part of this tide of people who moved into the county, attracted by its rurality and rail connections, which enabled easy access to their schools for pupils travelling from London and other parts of the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Uttley, *Buckinghamshire* (Oxford: Hale, 1950), 148.

<sup>2</sup> David Green and Ruth Beckley, *High Wycombe: Buckinghamshire Historic Towns Assessment Report* (Buckinghamshire County Council and English Heritage, 2011).

Nicholls even had shares in the Great Western Railway Company.<sup>3</sup> She originally founded the Garden School, a co-educational day school, in London in 1917 and was principal until she retired in 1937. When the lease on the London property expired in 1920, the school moved to Ballinger near Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire, and became a boarding school for girls aged between five and eighteen years, before moving again to nearby Lane End in Wycombe in 1927.<sup>4</sup> The Farmhouse School was established in 1917 in Mayortorne Manor, an eighteenth-century red-brick manor house in Aylesbury, near Wendover. It was a co-educational boarding and day school with a working dairy farm. Livestock, which included sheep, pigs, goats and horses as well as cows, were bought and sold locally at Aylesbury market.<sup>5</sup>

Though in close proximity, the two schools differed in their approach. Fry and Nicholls had very different family backgrounds, and once they arrived in Buckinghamshire their lives followed diverging trajectories. Born in London, Fry was from a wealthy and influential Quaker family, and her well-known siblings included Sara Margery Fry (1874-1958), penal reformer,<sup>6</sup> and Roger Eliot Fry (1866-1934), artist and critic.<sup>7</sup> Her obituary in *The Times* claimed that her sixty first cousins included practically all those who had ‘built up the tradition of intellectual liberalism, learning, social pioneering and science’ over the last half of the nineteenth century, giving her a valuable ‘network of

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<sup>3</sup> *Great Western Railway shareholders 1835-1932: Volume 207, Folio 9*. Transcription. (<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=gbor%2fgwr%2f00440236>, accessed 17 October, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> R.M Fletcher and J. D. Archibald, HMI, ‘The Garden School: Full Inspection’, 1932, ED 109/243, TNA.

<sup>5</sup> Stock books AR 87/2005, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, hereafter cited as CBS.

<sup>6</sup> Sara Margery Fry was one of the first women magistrates and was Principal of Somerville College, Oxford from 1926 to 1931. See Thomas L. Hodgkin, ‘Fry, (Sara) Margery (1874-1958)’, rev. Mark Pottle, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2007) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33286>, accessed 3 Feb 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Anne-Pascale Bruneau, ‘Fry, Roger Eliot (1866–1934)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2014) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33285>, accessed 3 Feb 2017.

relationships' from both sides of her family.<sup>8</sup> She grew up surrounded by cousins and visitors, and had come to understand family as a wide network which could include individuals who were not related by blood.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Lucy Winifred Nicholls, known as Winnie, was born into a middle-class family. Her father, Robert White (1825-1887) was a timber merchant, her mother Louisa Makin (1836-1912) was a housewife and they lived in a 'fashionable' suburban area.<sup>10</sup> Nicholls was privately educated at Sheffield High School,<sup>11</sup> and went on to teach elocution and history of art at various schools in London.<sup>12</sup>

Following her comfortable but less privileged background, Nicholls wanted to make her school more accessible than other private boarding schools such as Dartington, which she noted was 'very costly & "posh"!'. Her fees were £40 per term for those aged under twelve years, and £50 for those over, with one bursary available annually for pupils in 'special circumstances'.<sup>13</sup> This was relatively inexpensive compared to the Farmhouse School, at 120 guineas (£126) per term for those under twelve, and 130 guineas (£136. 5s) for those over. Both schools, however, were included alongside other experimental schools such as Beacon Hill, Abbotsholme, Bedales, Dartington and Summerhill in the *Modern Schools Handbook* (1934), a survey of

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<sup>8</sup> Miss Isabel Fry', *The Times* March 31<sup>st</sup> 1958, re-printed in the school magazine *The Farmhouse Review*, 2 (Summer, 1959) AR 92/2001, CBS.

<sup>9</sup> 'Cousins', transcript of a broadcast by Fry made on the Home Service, 8 January, 1954, FY/A/3, IOE.

<sup>10</sup> In the 1881 census Robert White added that he employed 20 men and 4 boys. They had a live-in servant and a gardener.

<sup>11</sup> They also had another sister, Agnes Sarah (1873-1882). Winnie married Charles Henry Nicholls in 1902 and they had a daughter, (born after the death of a first child) named Agnes Margaret (Poppy) Nicholls (1907-1993). Charles, known in the school as Poppa was a Fellow of the Linnean Society and worked in the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. See 'Obituary: Charles Henry Nicholls', *The Bulletin*, Autumn 1937, WF/6/15, IOE.

<sup>12</sup> Book of referees, WF/4/248, IOE.

<sup>13</sup> Advertising pamphlet, c.1930s, 8, WF/6/35, IOE.

‘modern movements in education’.<sup>14</sup> Intended for parents of prospective pupils, it included a description by the heads of twenty-one ‘experimental’ schools, detailing the curriculum of their schools and the type of ‘citizen’ they ultimately sought to nurture. It explained that these schools had ‘sprung up’ all over the country out of discontent with the aims and methods of the conventional public school, whose traditions they mirrored and inverted. They encouraged internationalism over Englishness, spiritualism over ‘muscular Christianity’, and community over hierarchy, and pupils were trained for public service as responsible citizens.

The entries for both the Garden School and the Farmhouse School stressed the importance of location for meeting the pedagogical and social aims of their founders. In her copy of the *Handbook*, Nicholls jotted down her intentions for the Garden School:

1. Education should have a spiritual basis.
2. Methods should be in accordance with the findings of modern psychology.
3. Great attention should be paid to healthy physical development.
4. Internationalism should be stressed in theory and practice.
5. Creative activity of every kind should have full scope, on the grounds that it is the finest of all educational instruments.<sup>15</sup>

These aims accorded with the ‘emancipatory interests’ of the NEF, which sought to develop new pedagogic strategies based around the concepts of freedom and transformation.<sup>16</sup> The school was registered as an ‘efficient’ school at the ‘Bureau International des Ecoles Nouvelles’ in Geneva, and Nicholls’ obituary in the *New Era* celebrated her as a ‘pioneer’ in new education.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nicholls’ copy of Trevor Blewitt (ed), *The Modern Schools Handbook* (London: Gollancz, 1934), WF/6/38, IOE.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jenkins, ‘New Education and its Emancipatory Interests’.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Obituary: Winifred Nicholls of The Garden School’, *The New Era in Home and School* 43, no. 9 (1962), WF/2/4, IOE.

While the educational networks of the NEF were important for developing her educational aims, so too was village life. Nicholls stressed the importance of the school's physical environment, stating that space, air and light, maximised through open-air lessons and exercise out of doors, encouraged healthy physical development and an appreciation of the spirituality underlying nature. But to develop 'internationalism' and citizenship, pupils needed to have an understanding of broader social relationships beyond the school, and the village offered an ideal community from which to learn. Nicholls ensured that the school was 'in as close contact as possible with life outside it', both 'politically', by reading and discussing the news and current events with her pupils, and 'socially', by participating in village activities.<sup>18</sup> The school's rural location was therefore important to its progressive aims, both in terms of its closeness to nature and to village life.

The entry for the Farmhouse School in the *Handbook* similarly highlighted the importance of the environment. Norah Laycock, Fry's friend who took over as principal in 1929, described Fry's original aim of turning out 'good and useful citizens' who would contribute to the 'general welfare' of society,<sup>19</sup> and explained that the farm was crucial to achieving this. The farm educated children through 'practical work and experience as well as by books', and 'introduces them, almost unconsciously, to some of the simplest, healthiest, and most fundamental things in the world'.<sup>20</sup> The rural environment was important to Fry and Nicholls in terms of the ways of life associated with it as well as its proximity to nature. The description of both schools in the *Handbook* highlighted the significance of place, specifically the sites of the farm and the village. They were not merely sites for a pre-planned curriculum, but functioned as educational configurations in themselves, both for Fry and Nicholls, and their pupils.

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<sup>18</sup> Nicholls' copy of *The Modern Schools Handbook*, WF/6/38, IOE.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

### **The Farmhouse School: 'a community of picked people'**

Fry's 'penetrating and exciting curiosity' about nature was fundamental to her interest in farming and the 'simple' life it entailed. Nature was a dominant theme in her stories and poems, and she was remembered cycling around the countryside, stopping to paint watercolours of hedges and field flowers with 'power and exquisite precision'.<sup>21</sup> When in London, she sought out the natural, and wrote about the contrasting sensory experiences of the city and the countryside. She noted the difference in the smell of London's air by night, when it was possible to detect the 'dim scents' of foliage, and by day, when the smell of cooking, tobacco and soot reminded her of the thousands of people crowded around her.<sup>22</sup> In another passage, a vegetable cart full of cabbages brought her 'back to the simple facts of life', reminding her of the relationship between the country and the city; 'London must be fed by some such primitive means'.<sup>23</sup> These jottings evoke a sense of place and testify to Fry's strong identification with rural environments.

Her depictions of the environment corresponded with broader social anxieties. While her writing tended to focus on the pleasantries of the countryside, she could become apprehensive at the sight of nature, and what it represented. In 1916 for example, the sight of her untended garden, which had been neglected due to her war work, made her apprehensive:

The mulberry stands with a suggestion of indigenoussness in the long hay grass of the lawn. A few years of this sort of thing and the wilderness of nature will begin its invasion. A description of the way in which Europe – about the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century fell back into savagery, cultivated land becoming forest or desert over vast tracts... now appeals to one as an actual possibility.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 'Miss Isabel Fry', *The Times* March 31<sup>st</sup> 1958, re-printed in the school magazine *The Farmhouse Review*, 2 (Summer, 1959) AR 92/2001, CBS.

<sup>22</sup> Notebook, FY/A/3, IOE.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Diary entry, 24 June 1916, FY/A/10, IOE.

Whilst this interpretation of a growing mulberry was hyperbolic, unkempt landscapes were widely commented upon at the time in relation to rural, and national, decline.<sup>25</sup> It upset ideas about linear progress and linked the 'country' as a nation to the 'country' as a rural area. Just as Roman Europe fell 'back into savgery', civilization was again under threat by the destruction of the war. The cultivation of land was a way of controlling the environment and guarding against the 'wilderness of nature', which to Fry seemed to be creeping in as the very foundation of civilization was falling apart.

Fry's ideas about the relationship between the land, its cultivation and civilization were further informed by her experience as a trainee farm labourer for four weeks in 1916. She took part in physical labour, including weeding and cinder-sifting as well as completing farm accounts, activities which nurtured conflicting views of working life. The freedom she enjoyed as part of a wealthy family made her feel uncomfortable at being in the position of a labourer, where she felt like a 'slave' trapped in a 'prison' rather than a 'real person',<sup>26</sup> and she begrudged the lack of privacy in 'communal life'.<sup>27</sup> She also complained about the bullying attitude of other workers, who were impatient of explaining tasks which the 'learner may reasonably be ignorant of'.<sup>28</sup> Yet, despite the hard work she later insisted that she wanted the children to 'know the real life of the workman',<sup>29</sup> and her experience of agricultural work convinced her of the value of the farm as an educative space.

Farming contrasted with other, more modern types of work and social organisation, which Fry wanted to distance herself from. Her position as welfare officer in a munitions factory during the latter stages of the war further shaped her identity as an educator and her belief in the importance of understanding the 'real life of the workman'. She was shocked by the

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<sup>25</sup> Moore-Colyer, 'Back To Basics', 85-108.

<sup>26</sup> Diary entry, 24 February, 1916, FY/A/10, IOE.

<sup>27</sup> Diary entry, 20 February, 1916, FY/A/10, IOE.

<sup>28</sup> Diary entry, 15 February, 1916, FY/A/10, IOE.

<sup>29</sup> Diary entry, 5 February, 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.



'business' outlook of the women who managed the factory, in that they took care of their employees 'with a view to increasing efficiency', rather than for more 'philanthropic' reasons.<sup>30</sup> They were:

Emphatically good kind and progressive people, reformers, but they have some view of employing others which at present shocks me. It may be that without it business is impossible. It may be that business is nevertheless good. I have to learn... Every day I feel I am more sure of being an educationalist rather than anything else.<sup>31</sup>

Through her exposure to various work places, Fry realised that 'reformers' could have a range of motivations, with greater 'efficiency' and productivity being, in her opinion, a lower motive than philanthropy and charity. Her wartime experiences forced her to reflect on her notion of 'progressive' and how to give it form, and it was in this context of travelling around the countryside and working in different settings during the war that her plans for a 'school farm' matured.<sup>32</sup>

This belief in the educative value of farming was shared more widely. Fry was asked to write a short article about her school for the YFC in their journal, *The Young Farmer*. In it, she explained that children needed something 'real' from their education, and asked 'what could be better, in the way of reality, than farming?' She claimed that it taught her and her pupils so many 'fundamental and wonderful things', such as learning to love and appreciate animals, and learning about business procedure. She expressed her support for the publication, and hoped that it would make other people appreciate 'the value and dignity of a farmer's calling'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Diary entry, 1 March, 1916, FY/A/10, IOE.

<sup>31</sup> Diary entry, 2 March 1916, FY/A/10, IOE.

<sup>32</sup> Diary entry, 17 June 1916, FY/A/10, IOE. Fry variously calls it 'school-farm' and 'farm school'.

<sup>33</sup> Isabel Fry, 'The Farmhouse School', *The Young Farmer*, August 1929, 167-168. Hereafter cited as *TYF*.

Fry discovered a 'new world of interest' and learning opportunities upon founding her school, and was as much a learner as a teacher herself. She attended the London Dairy Show in October 1919, a 'huge farmyard [which] brings a breath of the countryside to jaded Londoners'.<sup>34</sup> It was a site of both work and leisure, and for those like Fry who were engaged in dairy farming, it was a means to keep in touch with scientific and technical developments. Fry was clearly gratified that the other visitors were 'all country people or foreigners... and all in earnest',<sup>35</sup> rather than just interested voyeurs. She commented that whereas before the war she could not have 'passed one hour intelligently', by 1919 she could spend four or five.<sup>36</sup>

Running a farm as a business was challenging, however, and Fry struggled with financial losses.<sup>37</sup> Many of her diary entries describe the demands of working life, and she often worked seventeen-hour days in cold, wet weather.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, she found much enjoyment in her way of life. For example, her entry for 24 January 1920 described a 'quiet day' when she enjoyed a walk with the 'little ones' in the rain,<sup>39</sup> and at others times she found herself

Absorbed in the details of this wonderful job... trying in a very vague and indirect way to hint to them some of the motives and ideals which seem to me to make life worth living.<sup>40</sup>

Although they represented different tasks, she did not differentiate between her 'job' as a farmer and that as an educator. She saw herself primarily as principal of the school, recording 'principal' rather than 'farmer' as her occupation in the census, but through both she worked towards the same

<sup>34</sup> 'London. The Dairy Show', film ID: 733.34, (British Pathe Film Archive, 1933).

[www.britishpathe.com/video/the-dairy-show](http://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-dairy-show).

<sup>35</sup> Diary entry, 24 October 1919, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Diary entry, 22 October 1919, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>38</sup> Diary entry, 29 January and 4 March, 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>39</sup> Diary entry, 24 January 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>40</sup> Diary entry, 17 October 1919, FY/A/13, IOE.

end.<sup>41</sup> It was the 'simple realness' of life at the school which Fry believed made it 'a true contribution to the education and happiness of the world'.<sup>42</sup> Consistent with ideals within progressive education more generally, the farm dissolved the distinctions between education, work and life, allowing children to learn in an 'indirect' way. However, it was also a vehicle for her 'motives and ideals', which, though Fry made frequent reference to, she rarely articulated explicitly.

To parents, Fry portrayed the aims of her school in a particular way. The prospectus depicted the curriculum as balanced between academic study, creative freedom and physical recreation. Drawing on long-standing associations between the countryside and healthiness, the Farmhouse School was advertised as south east facing and situated in the Chiltern Hills, offering as 'particularly bracing and healthy' climate conducive to 'exceptionally good' health.<sup>43</sup> Pupils had a weekly 'farm talk' on the food, management and diseases of animals, and undertook practical work and book-keeping, supervised by Fry and a 'farm mistress', who was trained at Studley College and held a National Diploma in Dairying. The school organised their own annual agricultural show, and farm produce was used in the schoolhouse.<sup>44</sup> Science, mainly in the form of biology, as well as political economy, civics and mathematics were introduced through work connected with the farm.

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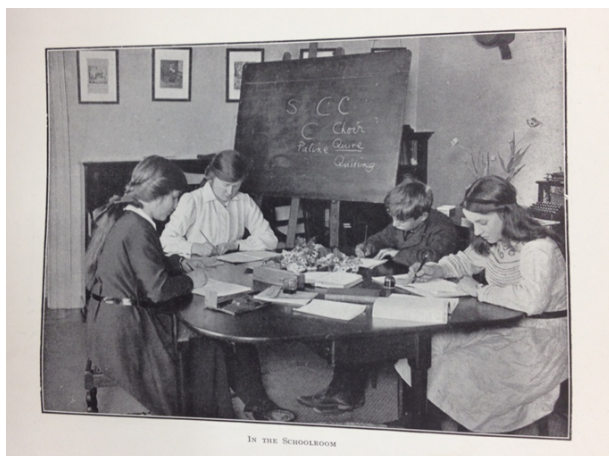
<sup>41</sup> In the 1939 register the Fry household consisted on four people; Isabel Fry, a retired private school mistress, Norah E. Holdsworth (b. 1880) Companion Help, Anne L. James (b. 1911) Assistant School Matron, and Audrey List (Branley) (b. 1923) Domestic Worker Dairyman. 1939 Register, Transcription, Fry Household, Church Farm , Aylesbury R.D., Buckinghamshire, England RG101/2136D/012/17-20 (<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=tna%2fr39%2f2136%2f2136d%2f012%2f17>, accessed 17 October, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Diary entry, 31 October 1920, FY/A/14, IOE.

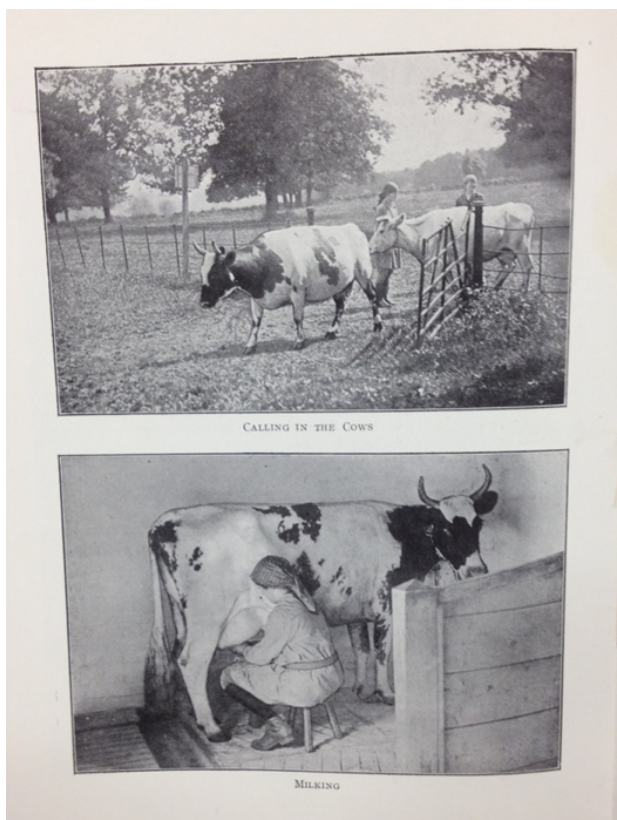
<sup>43</sup> Farmhouse School Prospectus, FY/C/1, IOE.

<sup>44</sup> Norah Laycock, 'The Farmhouse School', in Blewitt, *Modern Schools Handbook*, 237, WF/6/38, IOE.

Fry was keen to present the farm as a useful support to academic subjects, as shown in the images in figures 1 and 2, taken from the school prospectus.



**Figure 1: Pupils 'in the schoolroom'. Image from Farmhouse School prospectus, FY/C/1 (Institute of Education).**



**Figure 2: Pupils 'calling in the cows' and 'milking'. Images from Farmhouse School prospectus, FY/C/1 (UCL Institute of Education).**

These juxtaposed images, showing pupils 'in the schoolroom', and 'calling in the cows' suggest harmony between classroom study and farm work, with

pupils engaging in simple practical tasks and concentrating on their writing. Schoolwork was portrayed as part of everyday life, rather than an arduous task which pupils had to be coerced into. Printed postcards designed for pupils to send home to their parents similarly showed children happily absorbed in light outdoor work. The example in figure 3 shows a girl feeding the ducklings, dressed smartly, but appropriately kitted out with rubber boots.



**Figure 3: Girl feeding ducklings. Postcards, AR 79/2003 (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies).**

The girl in the picture is not obviously posing, though this does not, of course, mean that the photograph was not staged, and the image has a sentimental quality, appearing to capture a snapshot of activity in a similar way to photographs in a family album. The postcard depicted the school as a healthy, controlled rural environment, in which children learnt naturally through their daily activities.

However, HMI disagreed that farm work enriched academic study, claiming that although it offered 'valuable training in responsibility and consideration for living creatures, as well as in initiative and leadership' the 'intellectual' side was weak.<sup>45</sup> Still, in 1933, upon considering HMI's inspection report, the Board of Education judged the school to be 'efficient', meaning that it was

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<sup>45</sup> Board of Education, *Full Inspection Report of the Farmhouse School*, 1933, ED 109/241, TNA.

included on their list of recognised secondary schools.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, work on the farm was judged to confer an unexpected social advantage. The HMI report stated of the premises that:

All the essentials for healthy living are provided but there are no luxuries. Conditions, on the whole, are somewhat Spartan but since the girls all come from comfortable well-to-do homes this is perhaps a good thing.<sup>47</sup>

There was an emphasis on simplicity in terms of the ‘school outfit’: extravagant or ‘showy’ dressing was not allowed and the children were encouraged to engage in ‘simple work’ such as sewing and knitting in their own time. The inspectors seemed to hope that the contrast between the back-to-basics approach of farm life, and the materially wealthy environment those who could afford to attend the school would have been accustomed to, would encourage the pupils to reflect on their own privilege.

Certainly, Fry wanted to create an environment which eliminated the ‘unnatural diffidence and... sentimental difficulties so prevalent in many girls’ schools’.<sup>48</sup> This was particularly significant in relation to her recollections of her own school days in which she felt self-conscious and out of place, partly because of her feelings about marriage and heterosexual relationships. She recalled feeling different to the ‘stupid ordinary girls’, and rather ‘schoolgirly’ over Lesley, a girl who she presumed shared her own trepidations about relationships with men.<sup>49</sup> Close female friendships were framed in a variety of ways during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century,<sup>50</sup> but while they

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<sup>46</sup> Note to the Local Education Authority from A. F. Sharam (Board of Education) regarding the Farmhouse School, 24 January 1934, ED 35/3571, TNA.

<sup>47</sup> Board of Education, *Full Inspection Report of the Farmhouse School*, 1933, ED 109/241, TNA.

<sup>48</sup> Laycock, ‘Farmhouse School’, in Blewitt, *Modern Schools Handbook*, 237, WF/6/38, IOE.

<sup>49</sup> Notebook, c. 1906-1954, FY/A/3, IOE.

<sup>50</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Lesley Hall, ‘Sentimental Follies’ or ‘Instruments of Tremendous Uplift’? Reconsidering Women’s Same-sex Relationships in Interwar Britain’, *Women’s History Review* 25, no. 1 (2016): 124-142.

were encouraged during girlhood as emotional preparation for heterosexual marriage and family obligations, the persistence of such relationships into adulthood could cause unease.<sup>51</sup> Same-sex love was seen as unnatural and subversive, and the potentially dangerous consequences of speaking about or acting on physical desire too openly led many women to remain quiet, or to communicate in code, using metaphors and allusion.<sup>52</sup> During her time at the Farmhouse School, Fry wrote passages in German when describing feelings towards other women, presumably to provide a veil of privacy to experiences which she still wanted to document. In February 1921, for example, she described an intimate experience in the woods with a woman, and she was clearly anxious of the controversy that such a relationship could cause in the school.<sup>53</sup>

Fry intended her farm school to introduce her pupils to 'reality', a way of life away from social norms and expectations, giving them the space, perhaps, to reflect critically on social norms. Significant work was required to sustain the farm, and for every photograph selected for the school prospectus or postcards, there were several showing children covered in mud, dealing with unwieldy farm animals. Figure 4 for example, shows children herding and feeding the pigs.

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<sup>51</sup> Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, xviii.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>53</sup> Diary entry, 12 February 1921, FY/A/15, IOE; For research on women's friendships and same-sex relationships in interwar Britain see Sheila Jeffreys *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1950* (London: Pandora Press, 1985), 102-186; Laura Doan, 'Topsy-turvydom: Gender Inversion, Sapphism, and the Great War', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 4 (2006): 517-42.



**Figure 4: Children feeding the pigs. Photographs, AR 14/ 2004 (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies).**

This image shows the distinction between the controlled, domesticated image of school life Fry sought to portray, and the messier reality of daily life on a farm.

Certainly, Fry felt that there was a disjuncture between what she purported to be working towards, and what she actually sought to achieve. In her diary on 30 December 1920, Fry commented on an ‘amusing’ letter she had received from a friend, who speculated that ‘if the parents of the children at Mayortorne really knew what we were trying to teach them they would all be taken away forthwith!’<sup>54</sup> What Fry was ‘really’ trying to teach the children was not explicitly articulated, but the idea of community was central to her educational vision, which she elaborated on in one of her longer diary entries, written after she had enjoyed a night-time conversation with her close friend and French teacher ‘Gege’, Eugenie Dubois:

<sup>54</sup> Diary entry, 30 December 1920, FY/A/15, IOE.



My dream is a school surrounded by a community of picked people, these people themselves partly at any rate teachers but each pursuing their own avocations, which should be more or less freely open to the children. Thus there would be a farm with a skilled and if possible experimental farmer at the head, a physical and chemical laboratory doing its own progressive work and teaching the children something too. Engineering shops perhaps a factory or so, gravel-pits, brickfields, carpenters and furniture making, studios and very likely a theatre etc. These things are all done separately in one place or another. I should like all children to have such choices put before them and to know the real life of the workman in each kind, a life as purified and idealised as the true teacher in each will feel it ought to be.<sup>55</sup>

A range of influences informed this fascinating, utopian passage. It describes a school surrounded by a community of equal but different, selected people. Following a neat division of labour, people worked autonomously, each specialising in a different type of skill, with an 'experimental' farm at the nucleus. Children roamed freely around the various work spaces, and teaching, working and learning were interrelated processes. It was not rural in a timeless sense; the factories, engineering works and theatre would create a semi-built environment, preserving the farm as a central feature but allowing for development in terms of arts and industry. This corresponded with Patrick Abercrombie's ideas of a rationally planned countryside designed to benefit the majority of people.<sup>56</sup> Fry's 'dream' urged reform, and envisaged agency for a broad range of people, including workers as well as children.

Indeed, Fry complained that many 'rich people' thought that some 'intellectual interest' justified their existence, rather than serving the world in a 'definite' way.<sup>57</sup> Following the experience of war and its aftermath, and in

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<sup>55</sup> Diary entry, 5 February 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>56</sup> Patrick Abercrombie, *Town and Country Planning* (London: T. Butterworth, 1933); David Matless, 'Appropriate Geography: Patrick Abercrombie and the Energy of the World', *Journal of Design History* 6, no. 3 (1993): 167-178.

<sup>57</sup> Diary entry, 23 April 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

line with her Quaker conviction that people should serve others,<sup>58</sup> Fry believed that social relationships needed to be rebuilt in order to create a more equal society. She noted that 'we of the moneyed class, should be ready to go with open hands to the workers' in order to 'refund...something of what has been kept from them'.<sup>59</sup> This was also motivated by anxiety over her social position. The communist revolution in Russia in 1917 convinced many of the 'moneyed class' that treading the path towards reform was preferable to sitting on their riches and risking a revolution. For Fry, farming was an attempt to connect with the 'worker' and respond to change by re-valuing 'simple fundamental things'.<sup>60</sup>

However, running a farm school, as well as her experience of agricultural labour during the war, made her question the notion of service, which she felt made people 'a slave of the community'. Fry valued her independence, and admired it in others. She was particularly inspired for instance, by the 'simple, useful, cheerful individuality' of a 'dear little grey haired woman' who rode her bike to the farm and announced herself as a 'Bee Expert'. When Gege, the French teacher, admitted that in France 'such a little woman would be unthinkable', Fry responded that she was 'proud that we have thousands such in England'.<sup>61</sup>

The Farmhouse School soon became known to other like-minded people, and Fry recalled having a visit from an 'unknown young lady' who wanted advice about taking up farming.<sup>62</sup> She had been impressed by the woman-centered environments in which she worked during the war, noting that the women she had worked with on the farm complained little and maintained friendships despite the long working hours and difficult living conditions. She

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<sup>58</sup> Mark Freeman, 'Fellowship, Service and the "Spirit of Adventure": The Religious Society of Friends and the Outdoors Movement in Britain c.1900-1950', *Quaker Studies* 14 (2009): 72-92.

<sup>59</sup> Diary entry, 13 June 1920, FY/A/14, IOE.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Diary entry, 4 June 1920, FY/A/14, IOE.

<sup>62</sup> Diary entry, 1 June 1920, FY/A/14, IOE.

also admired the ‘frank, independent initiative’ of the younger women who worked in factories during the war,<sup>63</sup> and after working as a labourer felt that she really knew ‘what a servant feels like’. Yet at other points, in common with other women of her social standing, she complained dispassionately about the ‘servant problem’.<sup>64</sup> The continued gulf between her and working women was clear in a fictional story she wrote entitled, ‘A Day of Distress’, in which she imagined the hardships of a woman with a baby, living in a country cottage, fretfully waiting for her husband to come home.<sup>65</sup> Fry idealised and sought to emulate the ‘simple life’, while maintaining her independence as a ‘moneyed’ woman.

Certainly, Fry could feel self-conscious about the ‘humbleness’ of her surroundings. She felt that to one of her visitors, who belonged to a ‘grand well-established Conservative world’ her way of life looked very ‘makeshift’.<sup>66</sup> However, for the most part she enjoyed this contrast. She commented wryly that her cousin, May Pease, was ‘a little shocked’ at her way of ‘entertaining visitors’, when Fry had to deal with Tinker, one of the cows on the farm who had begun calving:

I suppose my way of life does seem even to progressive people rather amazing in its throwing over of the ordinary ‘conveniences’. Anyhow the calf is born... and Tinker is all right.<sup>67</sup>

Her reflections on the unglamorous reality of life on the farm compared to the lives she imagined her visitors led demonstrate different shades of opinion and positioning within progressivism. Life on the farm was constitutive of Fry’s social standpoint. It gave form to her ideas, and she reflected that, although to onlookers she was apt to look like a ‘purely practical-loving

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<sup>63</sup> Diary entry, 22 March 1916, FY/A/10, IOE.

<sup>64</sup> Diary entry, 16 February 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>65</sup> Notebook, c. 1906-1954, FY/A/3, IOE.

<sup>66</sup> Diary entry, 27 January 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>67</sup> Diary entry, 6 November 1919, FY/A/13, IOE. It is likely that May Pease was Marian Fry Pease (1859-1954), herself an educator. She was the daughter of Thomas Pease (1816–1884) and his third wife, Susanna Ann Fry, sister of Sister of Isabel Fry’s father, Edward Fry.

person', her intellect was very much alive, though 'always a little inclined to be in rebellion against orthodoxies and conventionalities'.<sup>68</sup>

Fry had little patience with the alienating norms associated with her class and gender. When she had a visit from Lillian Faithfull of Cheltenham Ladies College, she knew that a degree of deference was expected, but instead greeted her wearing her 'dirtiest' clothes and with the 'calm jocularly of equality':

I hope, and rather think, I gave her some thoughts on education that will stick uncomfortably in her head, and may I trust germinate, for my hopes in life would be fulfilled if I could see before I die, and know that I had had a hand in bringing it about, a change in the system of our education. 'Man does not live by schoolbooks alone', as I said distinctly naughtily to Miss Faithfull'.<sup>69</sup>

In this passage Fry delighted in shocking Faithfull with the mud splattered reality of life at the school farm, and hoped that it would encourage her to rethink her approach to education. She again 'came clashing up against the 'lady-like' ideal in Cicely Lawson Gower', who felt that Fry's view of life and its duties was 'tiresome and unnecessary':

I tried to hint that it wasn't a case of her kindly letting me have my whim if she had hers, but that hers was a false and artificial ideal while mine was a sound and fine plan.<sup>70</sup>

Although Fry experienced feelings of sadness and doubt when her aims and lifestyle were misunderstood, the contrast farm life presented to her peers also reinforced her conviction in her ideas about education, community and social reform. She had forged an environment in which she did not have to conform to the 'lady-like ideal' and in which external norms and conventions carried little weight.

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<sup>68</sup> Diary entry, 12 June 1920, FY/A/14, IOE.

<sup>69</sup> Diary entry, 24 April 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>70</sup> Diary entry, 1 March 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

Fry felt that the views of her more conservative visitors represented those of an older generation, with whom she did not identify. She commented of a parent of one of her pupils that:

She is a younger generation than I am but I can talk her language and she mine. When that ceases to be possible would probably be the time when I ought to give up school marning.<sup>71</sup>

Fry clearly saw her views as aligned with those of the ‘younger generation’, and felt this as central to her life in education. Similarly, she found that another visitor, Lady Winchelsea was ‘tremendously alive to all the movements of the time and possible reforms’ and perhaps ‘a little too anxious to always be right and to know the last thing’.<sup>72</sup> Fry’s aims were personal, pedagogical and political. The farm provided a space away from the expectations associated with her gender and class, but she also hoped it would generate wider social change. The chief significance of the farm, beyond lending reality to dry academic subjects, was the ‘fundamental’ way of life it represented, which Fry hoped would provide a lesson in service.

### **The Garden School**

The rural environment was also important in the Garden School, in supporting the school’s curriculum and shaping Nicholls’ educational ideas. As with Fry and the Farmhouse School, the prospectus gave an impression of orderliness which disguised the often chaotic nature of everyday life in the school, and did not fully represent Nicholls’ motivations. There were significant differences between the schools, though. The Garden School was not recognised as efficient by the Board, and Nicholls was not interested in

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<sup>71</sup> Diary entry, 14 February 1920, FY/A/13, IOE.

<sup>72</sup> Diary entry, 29 February 1920, FY/A/13, IOE. Lady Winchelsea was at the school seeing ‘little Angela Paget’. It is likely that Fry is referring to Angela Sibell Paget (1906–1965) and her mother, Lady Muriel Evelyn Vernon [*née* Finch-Hatton] (1876–1938), a philanthropist, humanitarian relief worker and the daughter of Murray Edward Gordon Finch-Hatton, twelfth earl of Winchelsea see Sybil Oldfield, ‘Paget, Lady Muriel Evelyn Vernon (1876–1938)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35357>. accessed 6 May 2015.

farming or the working practices associated with the countryside. Instead, village life and leisure informed her ideas about community and citizenship.

In line with open-air ideals, which were still strong in the 1920s, The Garden School prospectus boasted that the Wycombe mansion house faced south east. The large windows of its spacious rooms overlooked the garden, tennis courts, playing fields and open country beyond.<sup>73</sup> Set within a site of 61 acres, it was 550 feet above sea level, surrounded by the countryside and within easy reach of London by rail. Outdoor life was an important strand of school life, and *The Garden School Bulletin*, designed to keep parents in touch with the school's activities, always began with an 'Open Air Record', detailing the weather and the students' outdoor activities.<sup>74</sup> Pupils kept graphs recording the number of lessons they spent outside, physical exercises were taken outdoors for fifteen minutes every day, and during the summer, pupils camped outside, took midnight walks with the teachers,<sup>75</sup> and went on 'blackberrying expeditions'.<sup>76</sup>

Children could also tend to small garden plots and rear animal pets to further encourage contact with nature,<sup>77</sup> and every year the school celebrated World Animal Day on 4<sup>th</sup> October, the birthday of St Francis, the patron saint of animals and the environment. The pupils' pets, which included rabbits, guinea-pigs, mice and lizards, were referred to collectively as the school 'zoo', and the *Bulletin* reported that they all lived in 'domestic happiness'.<sup>78</sup> Pupils' involvement with animals at the Garden School was familial and fun: they took care of 'pets', in contrast with the more serious work of looking after 'livestock' at the Farmhouse School. Far from giving her pupils a 'Spartan' experience, Nicholls wanted to create a homely, comfortable environment.

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<sup>73</sup> Advertising pamphlet, c.1930s, WF/6/35, IOE.

<sup>74</sup> See *The Garden School Bulletin*, WF/6/1-26 IOE. Hereafter referred to as *The Bulletin*.

<sup>75</sup> Board of Education, *Report of Inspection of The Garden School*, 6.

<sup>76</sup> *The Bulletin*, Autumn 1938, WF/6/16, IOE.

<sup>77</sup> Board of Education, *Report of Inspection of The Garden School*, 7.

<sup>78</sup> *The Bulletin*, Summer 1928, WF/6/11, IOE.

The school's open-air heritage fused with contemporary concerns over health and advances in scientific knowledge to generate an almost paranoid preoccupation with healthiness. Pupils were required to have a health certificate issued by the school before beginning each term, and parents were urged to allow regular medical inspections of their children.<sup>79</sup> Good hygiene was upheld by a daily hot bath for pupils and staff, and iodine diffusers were installed in dormitories in 1938 following public health research which suggested that iodine was effective at fighting infection.<sup>80</sup>

Such technical efficiency contrasted with the otherwise free flowing pedagogy and homeliness of the school. The prospectus gave the impression of daily life in a disciplined yet happy school, which achieved a balance between academic education and creative freedom.<sup>81</sup> Photographs showed pupils posed around the library, poring over books next to open windows, or duly working at their desks outdoors in the Lyceum Quad, with its neat, manicured gardens and views of the open countryside beyond.<sup>82</sup> There was no homework or testing, following the conviction that children should be allowed to develop with minimal intervention, and Nicholls asserted that the school 'does not believe in pulling up its human plants every month to see how they are getting on'.<sup>83</sup> The space offered by the countryside and the homely environment of the school building was conducive to this process of careful nurturing.

Leisure time was an important aspect of school life for the development of the individual, as well as a sense of community. In a similar vein to the RCCs, the school promoted activities which would stimulate both intellectual and social development, such as conducting regional surveys of the village and its surroundings. They had an ongoing 'Regional Survey of Ballinger and its Neighbourhood' to which pupils of all ages contributed. It included short

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<sup>79</sup> Advertising pamphlet, c.1930s WF/6/35, IOE.

<sup>80</sup> *The Bulletin*, Autumn 1938, WF/6/16, IOE.

<sup>81</sup> Advertising pamphlet, c.1930s WF/6/35, IOE.

<sup>82</sup> Photographs, WF/4/216, IOE.

<sup>83</sup> Note taped into a page of Nicholls' notebook, WF/2/6, IOE.

reports, drawings, photographs and physical specimens, such as fossils.<sup>84</sup> During the summer term in 1926, two pieces of work were added, including a study complete with drawings and snapshots of the Old Church at The-Lee, and rubbings of old mural brasses at the Amersham Parish Church.<sup>85</sup> As well as encouraging the pupils to work together, this brought them into contact with their locality, making them aware of the school's place in relation to the village and wider environment. The older pupils also started their own voluntary group, the Pathfinders, as an alternative to the Girl Guides.<sup>86</sup> They went on expeditions, walks and camping trips, and carried out landwork and gardening on the school estate.<sup>87</sup>

The Pathfinders may well have been associated with the Woodcraft Folk, a British youth organization founded in 1925 to promote equality, friendship and peace.<sup>88</sup> The Woodcraft Folk were a breakaway group of the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift,<sup>89</sup> a camping and woodcraft organisation founded in 1920 as a reaction against the militaristic and imperialistic ethos of the Boy Scouts.<sup>90</sup> The Woodcraft Folk had links with the Labour party and Co-operative movement, and primarily recruited working-class British youth. The Garden School also had their own branch of the Kibbo Kift and called their group the Herons. The sixth annual meeting, or 'Al-Thing' of the Kibbo Kift was held

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<sup>84</sup> *The Bulletin*, Summer 1924, WF/6/2, IOE.

<sup>85</sup> *The Bulletin*, Summer 1926, WF/6/6, IOE.

<sup>86</sup> Lucy Winifred Nicholls, 'The Garden School' in Blewitt, *Modern Schools Handbook*, 254, WF/6/38, IOE.

<sup>87</sup> *The Bulletin*, Spring 1935, WF/6/15, IOE.

<sup>88</sup> Sarah Mills, 'Geographies of Education, Volunteering and the Lifecourse: the Woodcraft Folk in Britain (1925–75)', *Cultural Geographies* 23, no. 1 (2016): 103-119.

<sup>89</sup> Annabella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* (Donlon Books, 2016). Members of the Kibbo Kift included men and women of all ages, led by the artist and writer John Hargrave (1894-1982). The group espoused utopian ideas of pacifism, fellowship, and spiritual enlightenment, inspired by Hargrave's conception of Native American symbolism and ancient Celtic traditions. The Woodcraft Folk were a breakaway group of the Kibbo Kift, formed by Leslie Paul (1905-1985), who challenged Hargrave's authoritarianism.

<sup>90</sup> Gabriel Coxhead, 'Intellectual Barbarians: The Kibbo Kift Kindred', *Exhibition Reviews, Art In America* 104, no. 3 (2016): 153-154.



near West Wycombe during Whitsun weekend in 1925, and twelve members of the Heron tribe attended.<sup>91</sup> During weekly meetings, the Herons were occupied with handicrafts and reading letters from *The Nomad*. As part of their 'service' to the locality and the Kibbo Kift movement, the Herons donated £1 to the Brackenhill School, opened in Bromley near London in 1917 for disadvantaged children,<sup>92</sup> and sent some of their handicrafts to Kibbo Kift exhibitions at Westminster.<sup>93</sup>

Developing service and citizenship was built into the administration of the school. It aspired to be a 'self-governing community', and a committee of five pupils aged over fourteen, elected each term by pupils and staff, participated in running the school. The *Bulletin* claimed that they had a 'considerable influence over the tone and conduct' of the school, and in Summer 1938, after discussions between the committee and pupils without the presence of the staff, the old committee was abolished in favour of a new structure of representation which allowed for young members to be elected and vote.<sup>94</sup> Staff were addressed by their first names and termed 'group advisors' rather than form mistresses.<sup>95</sup> Classes were organised according to ability and the stage of development suitable for each individual child, rather than by age. In 1932 the staff included seven resident members and nine visiting, and the thirty-nine pupils, aged between five and seventeen years, were organised across groups termed the 'Pioneers', the 'Venturers', and the most junior group, the 'Sunbeams'.<sup>96</sup>

The curriculum was flexible and varied weekly, allowing for the child's curiosity to guide their learning. When required to produce a time analysis of the lessons and school day for a 1932 HMI inspection, Nicholls admitted that

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<sup>91</sup> *The Bulletin*, Summer 1925, WF/6/4, IOE.

<sup>92</sup> Chris McNab, *St Christopher School: A Short History* (Shire Publications, 2014).

<sup>93</sup> *The Bulletin*, Spring 1925, WF/6/3, IOE.

<sup>94</sup> *The Bulletin*, Summer 1938, WF/6/15, IOE.

<sup>95</sup> Fletcher and Archibald, 'The Garden School: Full Inspection', 2.

<sup>96</sup> Board of Education, *Report of Inspection of The Garden School* (Board of Education, 1932) ED 109/243, TNA.

it was 'impossible' since the time given to each subject varied so much from week to week. The inspectors noted disparagingly that the curriculum and structure of lessons was 'nebulous' and subject to the dictates of the children's impulses. Though the teachers had an 'intimate and informal' relationship with pupils, they lacked academic qualifications and little of their teaching was conducted on 'recognised modern lines'.<sup>97</sup> What the inspectors meant by 'modern lines' was not clear, but ironically they probably drew on many of the same psychological ideas that were being utilised by the NEF to construct their idea of a modern and 'pioneering' education.<sup>98</sup>

The report also pointed out conflicting practices. Whilst the progressive methods of a trained Montessori teacher engaged the junior class children effectively, the untrained mathematics teacher used out-of-date textbooks with 'heavy, formal and mechanical' instruction, which, in the Board's view was conducive neither to developing the independence of the child's mind or to reaching a minimum level of understanding.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, in science it was noted that although the school had a well-equipped laboratory, there was no sustained or progressive programme of experimental science. The pupils studied animal and plant life using the school grounds, and they visited farms in the area, but science consisted mainly of nature study. These limitations undermined Nicholls' commitment to the 'new' education, since in practice 'progressive' methods were easier to follow in some subjects than in others. Furthermore, the priorities of the fee-paying parents had to be taken into account. The inspector noted the hypocrisy of the fact that every effort was being made along 'old-fashioned lines of cramming' to prepare two girls for the London Matriculation.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Kevin Myers, 'Contesting Certification: Mental Deficiency, Families and the State in Interwar England', *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 6 (2011): 749-766.

<sup>99</sup> Board of Education, *Report of Inspection*.

<sup>100</sup> This was an examination in English, history, geography, chemistry and natural history initially established in 1838 as a test for university entrance, but which gained acceptance as a school-leaving examination. See 'The University of London: The University', in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 1*, ed. J. S. Cockburn, H. P. F. King and K. G. T.

Creativity was valued above academic subjects, with an emphasis on arts and crafts, eurythmics, dancing and music. Pupils engaged in a range of arts and crafts work in the craftroom, including activities such as weaving, spinning, leatherwork, clay-modelling, raffia-work, basketry, carving, jewellery making and embroidery. The school staged a craft exhibition and held demonstrations every term along with musical recitals, and out of forty-five old pupils mentioned in the *School Bulletin* for 1929, twenty-three had taken up some form of artistic work, in either arts and crafts, music or dancing.<sup>101</sup> In 1935 a group of senior pupils attended the Exhibition of British Art in Industry at Burlington House, which taught them much about 'modern interior decoration'.<sup>102</sup> Handicrafts made by the pupils, including cushion covers, scarves and Buckinghamshire lace, were exhibited at a NEF conference in Cheltenham in 1936.<sup>103</sup>

The importance given to creativity was also partly due to Nicholls' faith. She had always been religious, aside from a brief 'period of agnosticism' in her early twenties, and noted in her diary that she had encouraged creativity in her school because 'creative expression comes as near to the fusing of human spirit with the divine'.<sup>104</sup> Her religious ideas were best encapsulated by theosophy, a 'system of modern thought', which valued the transcendental character of contact with nature as a way to explore the origins of, and connection between, divinity, humanity and the world. When in London, the School was affiliated to the Theosophical Educational Trust,<sup>105</sup> and theosophy informed the concept of 'freedom' in the New Education.<sup>106</sup> Other

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McDonnell (London: Victoria County History, 1969), 315-344. *British History Online*, accessed November 8, 2015; Negley Harte, *The University of London, 1836-1986* (The Athlone Press Ltd, London, 1986), 25.

<sup>101</sup> Board of Education, *Report of Inspection*.

<sup>102</sup> *The Bulletin*, Spring 1935, WF/6/15, IOE.

<sup>103</sup> *The Bulletin*, Summer 1936, WF/6/15, IOE.

<sup>104</sup> Biographical Notes, n.d., WF/2/3, IOE.

<sup>105</sup> Board of Education, *Report of Inspection*.

<sup>106</sup> Jenkins, 'New Education and its Emancipatory Interests', 141.

'progressive' educators influenced by theosophy similarly venerated the countryside as a way to stimulate the imagination and cultivate a sense of 'wholeness', such as Rudolf Steiner, who also emphasised the spiritual qualities of nature in his concept of 'biodynamic agriculture'.<sup>107</sup>

Contact with nature was important in nurturing creativity, spirituality and healthiness. HMI acknowledged that this side of school life was well developed, but refused to recognise the school as 'efficient'.<sup>108</sup> The inspectors concluded that the Garden School best served those who found it difficult to adjust to 'ordinary' secondary schools. The school's homeliness made the pupils 'happy, free and healthy', and with the individual attention and sympathy bestowed by Nicholls children who were found 'impossible' elsewhere 'emerged from their difficulties'.<sup>109</sup> Nicholls was praised as 'thoroughly-devoted, high principled and self-sacrificing' with a mission to 'mother' children who were often from difficult or unhappy homes. But she was 'totally unaware of what is going on in the educational world of today', and, they believed, had no conception of what intellectual work and teaching involved. Her understanding of 'real education' was limited to the emotional and moral.<sup>110</sup>

It is clear that the countryside was an important part of Nicholls' understanding of 'real education'. It gave a sense of freedom, allowing for creative, imaginative engagements with nature as part of theosophical drive to appreciate the connectedness of the world. The children used the environment by exercising and camping outside, visiting local farms and keeping notebooks for nature study, though HMI were disappointed that the openness of the surrounding natural environment had not inspired a more robust programme of science education. It was also a site for leisure activities such as camping and surveying, which cohered with the school's

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<sup>107</sup> Thomas Nielsen, 'Tracing the Origin of Rudolf Steiner's Pedagogy of Imagination', *History of Education Review* 36, 1 (2007): 49-60.

<sup>108</sup> Fletcher and Archibald, 'The Garden School', 4.

<sup>109</sup> Obituary, *New Era*.

<sup>110</sup> Fletcher and Archibald, 'The Garden School', 1-2.

aspiration to develop citizenship and service. At face value, these outdoor activities represented quite passive engagements with the environment. The grounds, countryside and village provided a convenient setting for pre-decided schemes, rather than being constitutive of educational ideas and practices. Related activities occurred in other schools, and they are not specific to the interwar years. However, more so than in the public records of the prospectus and inspection report, the significance of the environment is outlined in Nicholls' diaries and notebooks. Used to record her thoughts and memories, they animate the rurality of the school and suggest that a more dynamic relationship existed between its progressivism and location.

Nicholls' reflections constructed connections between her educational ideas, her childhood memories and the school's rural setting. Freedom, for example, was fundamental to her progressive philosophy and to that of the NEF, and was a feeling she strongly associated with being outside in the countryside. She composed poems celebrating this association; 'I breathe with more freedom the fresh country air', compared to the 'bustle and din' of the city,<sup>111</sup> and she wrote of the 'perfect freedom' of camping, 'up here, on the hill, away from everybody and everything'.<sup>112</sup> She valued opportunities for learning outside, and recalled doing Nature Study with Poppy, observing 'trees of every shade of green'.<sup>113</sup> Nicholls' attention had been drawn to the connection between the countryside and healthiness in 1920, when the school was still based in London, after a doctor advised her to take Poppy to the countryside for a year to improve her health.<sup>114</sup> Her diary provided a vehicle for her to contemplate her experience of being in different physical environments, which enlivened key concepts used in progressive education. Nicholls associated the countryside with freedom, healthiness and creativity, and conceptualised it as an ideal learning environment.

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<sup>111</sup> Diary entry, 31 August 1918, WF/1/1/11, IOE.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Diary entry 1 March 1920, WF/1/1/11, IOE.

The location of the school had significance beyond open-air and NEF ideals. Its southerly orientation corresponded with the re-imagined geographies of Nicholls' childhood, framed by an idealised rural England, which celebrated the aesthetic of the southeast. Nicholls had enjoyed the countryside as a site of leisure during her childhood and as a young adult, and wrote fondly of her holidays in an idyllic rural England:

My earliest recollection is of a large [sunny] field [probably facing South] on a hillside, sloping down to a valley through which serpented what looked [at that distance] like a toy railway.<sup>115</sup>

This description of the landscape resonates strongly with the description and photographs of the school's setting in the prospectus: south facing and close to a railway. Though Nicholls was not sure whether the field she recalled faced south, she chose to describe it as such, shaping her memories in relation to her current experience of her environment. An appreciation of the aesthetics of the countryside ran through the school. To celebrate the school's twenty-first birthday in 1938, for example, one of the teachers made a cake in the form of a 'wonderful cottage', giving form to the idea of the school as homely and rural.<sup>116</sup>

Nicholls was also sensitive to the ways in which place related to wealth and status. During her childhood in Yorkshire in the north of England, she noted that they went from 'Brocco Bank to Brightside [a great social come-down!]'. Brocco Bank was a fashionable suburb of Sheffield, whereas Brightside was more industrial. Nicholls then lived and worked in London, before moving to rural Buckinghamshire, and at the Wycombe mansion she was part of the group of 'new countrymen and women' who were *in* the country but were not, at least in the traditional sense, *of* the country.<sup>117</sup> Still, Nicholls considered the school to be mindful of country affairs. In 1926, for example, a school

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<sup>115</sup> Square brackets indicate a later annotation by Nicholls. Biographical Notes, n. d., WF/2/3, IOE.

<sup>116</sup> *The Bulletin*, Autumn 1938, WF/6/16, IOE.

<sup>117</sup> Howkins, 'Death and Rebirth?', 21.

play told the story of a visitor from the town who, being 'ignorant of the ways of the country', left the gate of a farmer's field open with dire consequences, for 'Farmer Lavender' as well as a family of mice living in the field.<sup>118</sup> There was a gulf, however, between some of the cottages around Wycombe and the facilities of the school. Whereas the school had central heating and electric lighting, an 'excellent water supply' and a 'modern drainage system', as late as 1943 the Buckinghamshire County Federation of Women's Institutes campaigned for all village schools to have water and modern sanitation.<sup>119</sup>

Despite this separation, Nicholls became involved in village life, linking the school with the community. She served on the management committee of the village hall and was a member of the Ballinger WI. Once a year, Nicholls gave members a lecture on 'beautiful pictures',<sup>120</sup> and in autumn 1927 a teacher from the school coached WI members in folk dancing, in return for which they presented her with a purse bag at their Christmas party. The school was involved in local activities such as village fêtes, where they had stalls and performed music and maypole dancing.<sup>121</sup> In October 1930, the school organised entertainment at the village hall in aid of the Lane End church tower restoration fund, and Mrs Ormrod, who became Principal in 1937, conducted a women's choir which was 'often called upon' to entertain at village functions.<sup>122</sup> Pupils and teachers also attended a meeting of the Lane End branch of the League of Nations Union at the village hall, and Nicholls spoke about the significance of the league from a women's point of view.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *The Bulletin*, Summer 1926, WF/6/6, IOE.

<sup>119</sup> Jenny Street, Buckinghamshire County Federation Chairman, 'Welcome to the Buckinghamshire Federation of WI's', Website of the Women's Institute, <http://www.thewi.org.uk/become-a-member/structure-of-the-wi/england/buckinghamshire/about-us>, accessed 10 June 2015.

<sup>120</sup> *The Bulletin*, Autumn 1934, WF/6/15, IOE.

<sup>121</sup> *The Bulletin*, Summer 1926, WF/6/6, IOE.

<sup>122</sup> *The Bulletin*, Autumn 1930, WF/6/15, IOE.

<sup>123</sup> *The Bulletin*, Autumn 1930, WF/6/15, IOE.

These activities were described in the *Bulletin* as charitable ventures into village life, giving an impression of one-sidedness rather than reciprocity. For example, it was noted that Nicholls helped to form a junior branch of village players to raise money for their own wardrobe and scenery props, since previously they had to 'rely on the school for help'.<sup>124</sup> In return 'a few jumble sales' were arranged within the village for the school acting wardrobe, raising £4.3s for materials, tights, wigs and flowers.<sup>125</sup> The way this was reported emphasised the 'help' given by the school to the local community, whose 'few jumble sales' were a well-intentioned, grateful, but inevitably unequal recompense. This subtly highlighted the separation and social standing of the school, in relation to the village.

On the surface then, the relationship between the school and the village was 'neo-paternalistic'.<sup>126</sup> Nicholls was an expert figure, who delivered lectures, whose staff instructed members in country dancing and whose school bestowed the village with loans of materials and resources. Nicholls did not write about her involvement with the WI in her diary, and did not share the sense of ownership and agency felt by the many women who struggled to form the institutes, and fought for the right to spend their time engaged in WI activities. WI members were not a homogenous group and there were tensions in terms of class, but Nicholls, literally removed from village life in her mansion on the hill, was further detached than most. Her role as occasional visitor mimicked that played by the gentry in other rural areas, who attended meetings to fulfil ceremonial roles such as awarding prizes or hosting social events.<sup>127</sup>

In Nicholls' diaries and notebooks, however, the village was far from the passive space portrayed by the *Bulletin*. Her perception of the dynamics of

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<sup>124</sup> *The Bulletin*, Autumn 1934, WF/6/15, IOE.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Mansfield, 'Paternalistic Consumer Co-operatives'.

<sup>127</sup> There are no archive records for Ballinger WI to get an insight of the relationship from their perspective.



village life stimulated reflections on her ideas about community and education. At a conference on 'New Ideals in Education' in April 1927, Nicholls gave a presentation on the Garden School entitled 'An Educational Experiment in the Village', situating it both as part of the 'new' education and as part of rural life.<sup>128</sup> She took notes whilst she was there, then went back and annotated them, giving some indication of the way in which she received and re-formed ideas around education, community and social change. She listened to a presentation by E. Salter Davies for instance, who talked about the county library movement as an attempt to alleviate the 'dullness of country life'.<sup>129</sup> Salter Davies was a trustee of the Carnegie movement and the Director of Education for Kent, who undertook many 'varied services to education'.<sup>130</sup> Nicholls noted however, that he had misunderstood one of the 'new' ideals of education:

The [purpose of the] 'new' ideal which expresses itself in individual work for children is to discover individual gifts and talents with the object of training them for the service of the community.<sup>131</sup>

Davies had stressed the benefit of libraries for various individuals, such as 'the gardener' and the 'young village lad', but Nicholls felt that his emphasis on the individual undermined the idea of service to the community, a point which she underlined to emphasise its importance.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Notebook relating to New Education Fellowship, c. 1920s, WF/2/6, IOE. The 'New Ideals in Education' conference programme is tacked into the front of the notebook.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> 'Obituary: Mr. E. Salter Davies', *The Times* (London, England: 11 June 1955), 10, The Times Digital Archive. Web. 14 Nov. 2015. Ernest Salter Davies (1872-1955) Salter Davies was appointed inspector for higher education in Kent 1904, and became the county's director of education in 1918. He held office as President of the Association of Directors and Secretaries for Education from 1924, President of the New Education Fellowship, English section, for 1932–33, and President of the Library Association from 1935. He was also chairman of trustees of the National Central Library and chairman of the Rural Schools Committee on the Central Council for School Broadcasting, and in 1940 he was appointed a member of the Ministry of Agriculture's Committee on Higher Agricultural Education.

<sup>131</sup> Notebook relating to New Education Fellowship, c. 1920s, WF/2/6, IOE.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

She continually returned to the importance of service to the community in her notes on the conference. For example, J. C. Stobart, Director of Education at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), discussed the 'possibilities of educational broadcasting' as a way to help develop citizenship. As an example, Stobart cited the practice of some WI branches, whose members listened to radio broadcasts at home before discussing them during branch meetings. Nicholls noted that this was a useful way of combining 'individualistic study' with group work, commenting that the 'development of individualism requires reminders of community life'. This prompted her to repeat, with greater clarity, her note from the previous talk, that the 'purpose of individual training is to train whatever individual gifts and talents each child has for the service of the community'.<sup>133</sup> For Nicholls, village life provided a training ground in 'service of the community', a key tenet of her progressive educational agenda.

The notes taken by Nicholls show the breadth of the networks around progressive education. Presentations spanned a range of topics including the secondary curriculum, educational broadcasting and methods of teaching. There was a sense of common purpose between the head teachers of 'crank' schools as well as those, like Davies, who were developing services within adult education as part of the rural community movement. This also extended to those involved in vocational education and training. Nicholls and Davies shared a platform with the Principal of the School for Building Trade Apprentices, from Manchester, who gave a talk on the training of apprentices. He discussed changes in the building industry in terms of mechanisation, which, he argued, had changed the meaning of work. He wanted to cultivate the 'development of aesthetic sense, pride in the history of his craft, responsibility and service in his industry'.<sup>134</sup> This is interesting in relation to the YFC movement, which, as discussed in more detail in chapter

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

five, sought develop pride in the history of farming and to encourage service to the community as a way to mitigate the effects of technological change.

Progressivism is not normally associated with vocational or adult education, but the range of talks given at this local conference shows its various sites in this period. It was connected to local economic and social conditions, as much as to new ideas in educational theory. The external environment of the village and its community shaped Nicholls' progressivism. The entry for the Garden School in the *Modern Schools Handbook* summed up the importance of the village to the school's progressivism and to Nicholls' ideas about social change:

It is our object to discover individual gifts, and to train them for service. Even while at school, the children are encouraged to place their talent at the disposal of others, and some real help has been given to the two villages in which our school has successively been situated. Regular entertainments in support of various village activities, such as the Infant Welfare Centre, the Memorial Hall, the local branch of the League of Nations Union, and personal service in Folk Dance and Dramatic Clubs have been given by our children...The example of staff service in village hall management, Women's Institute and Dramatic Club, is always before the pupils, as well as that given in local or even more remote political, economic, and religious circles, and they constantly have brought to their notice the manifold ways in which capacity may be used for social service.<sup>135</sup>

Nicholls conceptualised the village as a model community from which the pupils could learn about how to use their 'individual gifts' for 'social service'. The school's forays into village life were charitable, in that they provided support for village activities, but they were more geared towards contributing to its cultural development than to alleviating distress, in line with the new impetus in voluntary action more generally. As well as being important for the broader education of her pupils, contributing to the recreational life of the village was educational for Nicholls, in that it shaped her ideas about the

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<sup>135</sup> Nicholls, 'The Garden School' in Blewitt, *Modern Schools Handbook*, 246-247, WF/6/38, IOE.

relationship between the individual and the wider community, and gave form to her notion of 'social service'.

Nicholls' experience of village life remained central as her political ideas developed later on in her life. In her 'interest book', in which she reflected on the Second World War and its aftermath, she asked

Is it possible for the ordinary citizen to help in the building up of world peace? Can we individually, or as a village community, order our own lives in such a way as to decrease the likelihood of war?<sup>136</sup>

The village community continued to serve as an example of citizenship in practice, and became a metaphor for internationalism.

### **Conclusions**

The rural environment supported the curriculum of both the Farmhouse School and the Garden School, providing space for the freedom and creativity which underpinned their child-centred approaches. However, it also informed Nicholls' and Fry's conception of progressive education. Their view of rural life embodied particular notions of community and service, which shaped their attempts to educate young people for citizenship. Pupils at the Garden School were encouraged to participate in village life to learn how to apply their individual qualities for the good of the community, while those at the Farmhouse School engaged in farm work as a way to experience the life of the 'workman' and develop their sense of service. The schools formed their own 'new' and experimental educational communities, and made some attempt to connect with their locality, despite their relative wealth. In managing a farm, Fry was a part of the agricultural life of Aylesbury, where she bought and sold her livestock, and she shared common aims with the YFC movement, while Nicholls was a member of the WI and was proactive within the community life of her village.

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<sup>136</sup> Interest Book, WF/2/5, IOE. Nicholls labeled this notebook her 'interest book', and it contains notes on various subjects, with a focus on international politics from 1945.

Far from being isolated 'crank schools', the discourses around rural life and community which Fry and Nicholls engaged in were shared more widely, within the rural community movement and in education more generally. Child-centred approaches were encouraged in elementary schools, and the 1918 Education Act stipulated that elementary schools should provide some form of practical and advanced instruction, which would prepare pupils for continuation education. In rural schools, these developments were met through giving the curriculum a 'rural bias'. When drawing up the Act, Fisher had vaguely stated that education in rural schools should give pupils a 'taste for country life', through outdoor education and the 'intelligent use' of the countryside,<sup>137</sup> but whether this implied that education should be related to agriculture, or simply to the natural environment of the countryside, was unclear.

Of course, the notion of rural bias in elementary education had very different social implications to the experiments in rural living at the Farmhouse School and the Garden School. While for Fry farm work represented a 'real' alternative to the life course of her peers and an opportunity to give her privileged pupils a 'Spartan' experience, for those attending village schools, low paid farm work was often their most likely future occupation, and the employment of school children in agriculture continued to contribute to low attendance rates in rural schools. Similarly, while forays into village leisure animated Nicholls' views on community and provided a training in social service for her pupils, many rural teachers were expected to take part in village activities as a condition of their employment, giving them more responsibilities than their urban counterparts even though they were generally less well paid.

However, the celebration of the rural community from those in privileged positions such as Fry and Nicholls had the potential to raise the status of the village school. The Board's conception of rural bias encouraged curricular

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<sup>137</sup> H. A. L. Fisher, Commons Speech on Educational Estimates, (19 April, 1917) ED 10/188, TNA.

developments away from an emphasis on future occupations in agriculture and towards an understanding of the rural school as a 'social institution' serving the needs of the rural community, and some rural teachers began to experiment with new ways of engaging pupils with rural 'traditions' and village life. The subsequent chapter charts the changing place of community and agriculture in conceptions of rural bias, and examines educational experiments in the HMI reports of two rural schools.

### Chapter 3

#### Rural bias and the village school

Rural bias had long been considered a means to counteract the supposed urban bias of the school system, and gained renewed vigour in the interwar years with the popularity of child-centred approaches and the need to provide practical instruction in the later stages of elementary education. Stereotypes of the country child and assumptions about the function of the rural school informed competing perspectives on how rural bias should be introduced into the curriculum. For some, it was a way to raise the quality of rural education, paving the way for pupils to live in either the countryside or town, while for others it justified a more utilitarian curriculum, which primed young people for agricultural work. Initially concerned with the requirements of agriculture following the war, by the mid-1930s the Board conceptualised rural schools primarily as 'social institutions' which served the rural community. Though this envisaged a more expansive role for rural schools, what it meant in practice depended on the initiative of individual teachers, and the strength of rural employers to shape education policy at a local level.

The interwar years saw ambitious but frustrated attempts to drive educational change, and the rural context presented particular obstacles to the raft of reports and legislation on elementary education. While late-nineteenth century reformers had been optimistic about education as a panacea for the social ills of the countryside, by the 1920s, 'disillusion has descended like a sour fog'.<sup>1</sup> Surveys by rural sociologists Arthur W. Ashby and Phoebe G. Byles, the educationalist Harry McGuire Burton, and the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT) for example, revealed problems with practically all aspects of rural education, including pupils, parents, teachers, school buildings and the curriculum. These deficiencies were compounded by, and were part of, the 'rural problem', a set of issues relating to social and cultural change in the countryside. Specifically: rural depopulation, agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> Harry McGuire Burton, *The Education of the Countryman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), 9.

decline, the 'mechanisation' of farm work and village industries, and the expansion of urban and suburban areas. The rural problem provided a focus for policymakers, but how to go about solving it was unclear.

### **The country child and experiments in rural education**

Despite the celebration of rural childhood and the idealisation of the countryside as an educative space, country children were often characterised as mentally and physically 'backward' as a natural result of rural depopulation, with the most intelligent people leaving the countryside. A report into rural education in Oxfordshire by Ashby and Byles in 1923, for instance, stated that the county had a:

Distinctive and rather inferior type of population...and an unpleasing dialect...the 'rural exodus' is marked and leaves a natural selection of the least fit....There remain in Oxfordshire a large number of village schools in which at least two-thirds of the pupils are children of farm labourers. This class is one of the most backward of the English race.<sup>2</sup>

In the social Darwinism of the period, those who emigrated from the countryside were seen as the most 'fit'. The authors found that parents had little enthusiasm for education, which they ascribed to low wages, the monotony of farm work, and their intellectual 'inferiority'. The report highlighted widespread rural poverty, with under-nourished, exhausted children living in overcrowded cottages.

Similarly pitiable conditions were found in rural schools. Damp and poorly lit, the basic design of a single schoolroom with a raised platform for the teacher still characterised many rural schools in the interwar years.<sup>3</sup> In 1927, for example, W. H. Perkins described a village school with a thatched roof, low narrow windows giving little light, and a smaller room leading off a narrow

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur W. Ashby and Phoebe G. Byles, *Rural Education* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon press, 1923), 102.

<sup>3</sup> John Proctor, *Village Schools: A History of Rural Elementary Education from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-first century in Prose and Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).



passage for the infant class; the only alteration since it had been built in 1857 was the adaptation of the porch into cloakrooms.<sup>4</sup> Within these impoverished settings, social divisions were often perpetuated and sustained. As late as the 1930s, a girl who attended school in a Kentish village recalled that during the winter months the seats near to the fire were reserved for the offspring of the farmers,<sup>5</sup> and Stan Holmes, a farm labourer's son, remembered having to stand and raise his hat to the squire, farmer, vicar or schoolmaster in his school days in the 1930s, following the 'pecking order' of village life.<sup>6</sup>

While such reports aimed to highlight the poor conditions of schools and the unfair treatment of their pupils with a view to reform, they also identified uniquely rural qualities which romanticised the country child and suggested that they needed a different type of education to the urban child. The country child for instance, was held to possess a distinctive, more authentic intelligence. Ashby and Byles judged that 'they have not the same stimulus to quick thinking, but they are not so superficial, and have greater powers of perseverance and endurance'.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the 'superficial' city child, the country dweller was perceived as earnest and hardworking. H. M. Burton similarly claimed that country children were 'more patient and more reliable' than town children:

A proportion of them appear to hold on to what they have been taught more firmly, even if it took them a little longer to learn it. Their power of concentration, once they have settled down to a job, would surprise the town teacher.<sup>8</sup>

Burton celebrated the dedication and dependability of the future 'genuine countryman'; stoic, wise and sheltered from the urban sprawl.<sup>9</sup> While it was

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<sup>4</sup> W. H. Perkins, 'The problem of the Village School' in J Proctor, *Village Schools*, 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Horn, *Education in Rural England*, 121.

<sup>6</sup> Ward *The Child in the Country*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ashby and Byles, *Rural Education*, 110-111.

<sup>8</sup> Burton, *Education*, 56.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

necessary to improve rural education, then, it was also desirable to retain its distinctiveness in order to maintain an authentically rural population.

The fear that agriculture and ‘traditional’ rural life were in rapid decline was well established by the mid-1920s, and some saw the solution in curtailing rather than improving rural elementary education. Lady Catherine Milnes-Gaskell, for instance, wanted to ‘bring back the sons of cottagers to the land’ and restore ‘pride in manual labour’, and wrote to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education, Katharine Marjory Stewart-Murray, Duchess of Atholl, with her ideas. She suggested that boys should miss a day at school each week in order to work on farms, a practice which was ‘done formerly and with good results’.<sup>10</sup> Gaskell wanted to preserve the agricultural workforce, and her assumptions about the country child and rural life were indebted to a literary heritage. She even offered a first-edition copy of *Wessex Tales* (1888) by Thomas Hardy as an example of the traditions she hoped to restore. The quintessentially English fictional county of Wessex provided the setting of several short stories inspired by Hardy’s experience of life in a small village in Dorsetshire.<sup>11</sup> Hardy wrote knowledgably about economic and technical changes within farming and the struggles with poverty of those who worked in rural occupations, but interpretations of his work did not necessarily pick up on the subtlety of his writing.

Gaskell had entertained Hardy at her home in Wenlock, and was an author herself. One of her tales, *Old Shropshire Life*, written in 1904, was steeped in the romantic, declinist assumptions of the rural novel, but with none of the sensitivity which characterised the best of the genre. The dilemmas faced by her protagonists dramatised the issues she sought to resolve. One of the central characters, Reuben, worked on a farm and was described as ‘big, and burley’, a man who rarely got challenged in the pub, ‘as was the way

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from Lady Catherine Milnes-Gaskell to Katharine Marjory Stewart-Murray, 4 February 1928, and 24 January 1928, ED 11/187, TNA. Born Catherine Henrietta Wallop, daughter of the Earl of Portsmouth, Gaskell (1857-1935) was an author who was married to lawyer and Liberal politician Charles George Milnes Gaskell.

<sup>11</sup> Cloke et al., *Handbook of Rural Studies*, 142.

then, and doubtless is the way now, in spite of the Education Act and general progress'.<sup>12</sup> The 'Education Act' was most likely the 1870 Elementary Education Act, which provided for the education of children aged between five and thirteen.

For Gaskell, the 1918 Education Act was similarly part of the 'general progress' of social reform, which in her view interrupted the codes of conduct and natural working life of those who were born and raised in the countryside, and threatened the stability of rural society. As Reuben, amused at his son's attempts at 'book-larnin' warned, only 'lawyers, clerks and schoolmasters' who were paid to have knowledge should seek it:

Keep in your place, lad...politics for the squire, the land for the farmers, and an honest mug of ales for such as thou and me... Us don't want larnin' on the land...for sure when it comes it will be the end of dacent work.<sup>13</sup>

The phonetic dialogue in this passage, penned in Gaskell's interpretation of a rural-working dialect, underlined the separation not only between her as author and Reuben as a figure of her imagination, but also between her as a landowning aristocrat, and those who worked in agriculture, whose children attended the rural schools she sought to influence. The rural community was caricatured as a simple, tripartite structure, and no mention was made of the education of girls, either in her book or her letter to Atholl, their education presumably being of little consequence. Land work was strongly associated with masculinity, and was fundamentally incompatible with learning, a view which she assumed was widely shared.

Indeed, in her letter to Atholl she claimed to have the support of local farmers and magistrates, and she was not alone in feeling that educating the children of farm labourers was a waste of time. Ashby and Byles had spoken to farmers as well as 'professional' people who lived in the countryside with

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<sup>12</sup> Gaskell, *Old Shropshire Life* (London: John Lane, 1904), 83-84.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

similar views.<sup>14</sup> Although popular support for education following the war made it harder for the wealthy to thwart the extension of education, the Board responded sympathetically to the lingering prejudices in Gaskell's letter. There was no danger of educational legislation being repealed. Atholl pointed out that reverting to a system of part-time education for boys would require a fundamental change in the law, which neither Parliament nor public opinion would support. But she agreed that schooling had tended to divert young people away from the countryside, and assured Gaskell that there were many 'experiments' in rural education which aimed to bring pupils 'into closer touch with reality... by giving more practical instruction'.<sup>15</sup>

Practical instruction was encouraged more generally within elementary education, but particularly in rural schools, where it was thought to have a more direct bearing on everyday life. The Board's 1926 pamphlet *Rural Education* stated that the elementary school should:

Develop skill in those elementary handicrafts, such as woodwork and metalwork, which are fundamental to all civilized life. Educationally these crafts are equally valuable in urban and in rural schools, but in rural schools they have perhaps a more direct bearing upon everyday life, their practical utility is more evident, and there is therefore, in this sense, a certain natural connection between education and vocation.<sup>16</sup>

Vocation was an ambiguous term which merged the boundaries between life and work. It echoed Gaskell's assumptions about the close relationship between work and everyday life, and conceptualised the countryside as a repository of 'fundamental' skills. Rural life was seen as inherently practical; skill in 'elementary handicrafts' retained a more direct relevance to life in the countryside rather than the town, the apex of 'civilized life', where the 'natural connection between education and vocation' had presumably been diluted.

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<sup>14</sup> Ashby and Byles, *Rural Education*, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Atholl to Gaskell, 2 February 1928, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>16</sup> Board of Education, *Rural Education*, 8.

Given the particular link between everyday life, work and education in the countryside, the Board recommended that the curriculum of rural schools should have a rural bias with a practical focus. *Rural Education* outlined suggestions to adapt rural elementary education to the environment of the child, both the physical features of the countryside and the life and work associated with it. Studies of plants and animals, talks on the main features of the countryside and work in a school garden for example, would further children's knowledge of their 'natural surroundings' as well as 'everyday farm and garden operations', relating their education to potential future occupations in agriculture.<sup>17</sup>

The pamphlet recommended giving a rural bias to all subjects in the curriculum. Science could include soil experiments and observations of the weather, germination and fungoid or insect pests, while Mathematics could be coordinated with work in the school garden, with balance sheets kept to calculate associated costs. Geography could include studies of the region's crops and local farming systems, and History could involve local history surveys detailing the development of agriculture local to the school. Following an underlying assumption that girls would stay in the rural home, it was suggested that domestic subjects should use the produce of the school garden and focus on the preservation of local fruit and herbs.<sup>18</sup> As well as relating to future work in the countryside, these recommendations were compatible with the child-centered approaches advocated by the Hadow Reports, and by the mid-1920s lessons such as Nature Study were increasingly designed to encourage children to write, draw or talk about what they had discovered.

While the Board did not directly advocate the introduction of technical agricultural instruction into elementary schools, their insistence on a link between 'education and vocation' and the importance of a rural bias within the curriculum could easily be used to rationalise it. Sir Herbert Matthews for

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 15.

instance, Secretary of the landowner dominated Central Chamber of Agriculture,<sup>19</sup> insisted that rural schools required ‘country-bred’ teachers and should include agricultural instruction led by county agricultural education staff.<sup>20</sup> Matthews saw rural schools as bulwarks against the predominance of urban and commercial interests in national life, which had neglected the countryside and agriculture. His views were strongly tied to his own privileged position within rural society, and he had a strong sense of a distinction between those who were *of* the countryside and those who were *in* the countryside, the latter being unable to truly serve its interests. Representatives of the Board and Ministry were fairly dismissive of Matthews, joking that his distrust of government departments was like a bee which ‘buzzes very loudly in his bonnet’. They did not accept that rural teachers had to be from the countryside and pointed out that in its dealings with local authorities the Board could not ‘insist’, but could only provide ‘information and suggestions’.<sup>21</sup> However, they rejected his suggestions as unfeasible given the already over-burdened workload of the county agricultural education staff, rather than as unacceptable in terms of their implications for the curriculum.

Indeed, the Board was keen to co-operate with the Ministry, who wanted to establish a ‘system of agricultural education and research...beginning in the elementary schools’.<sup>22</sup> *Rural Education* urged a ‘complete mutual understanding’ between county education and county agricultural committees in order to coordinate the curricula of elementary schools with rural secondary schools, farm institutes and the agricultural departments of

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<sup>19</sup> The Central Chamber of Agriculture was an association of farmers formed around 1865 to represent agriculturalists with regard to government policy. It was criticized for being dominated by landlords and failing to represent agriculture and rural affairs as a whole, see Nicholas Goddard, ‘Agricultural Institutions: Societies, Associations and the Press’, in Collins, *Agrarian History*, 662-664.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from H. E. Dale to W. R. Davies, 16 June 1926; reply from E. H. Pelham, 28 June 1926; further reply from H. E. Dale to E. H. Pelham, 30 June 1926, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>21</sup> Minute Sheet, H. E. Dale, 19 July 1926, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>22</sup> Council of Agriculture for England, *Report on Agricultural Policy* (London: HMSO, 1925), 5.

universities or agricultural colleges.<sup>23</sup> With this encouragement, county agricultural education staff became increasingly involved in elementary education. In Somerset, for example, elementary school children received instruction in dairying by county agricultural education staff within school hours, and the County Council planned to introduce elementary school instruction in the keeping of poultry, bees and pigs.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in Cheshire, elementary schoolchildren were occasionally allowed to attend peripatetic classes in dairying arranged by the staff of the School of Agriculture.<sup>25</sup>

The interdepartmental committee regarded such experimentation as important, particularly in light of proposals to raise the school leaving age. As Sir Henry Richards, HM Chief Inspector of Schools explained in 1929, it was necessary to contemplate ‘the provision of instruction which is much more nearly “vocational” than has been customary in the past’ through using the county ‘staff and facilities for agricultural education’.<sup>26</sup> Since children would be kept in school when they previously would have started working, there was a sense that the later stages of elementary education should relate to likely future occupations, which in the countryside often meant agriculture. In some areas therefore, elementary education was increasingly correlated with agricultural education for adults and those aged over fourteen.

Modern ideas about ‘labour efficiency’, which sought to direct people into careers most suited to their abilities and maximise the output of their effort, also informed notions of rural bias in elementary schools. In an ‘experiment in vocational guidance’ at Wye, W. R. Dunlop attempted to match country children with the occupations most suited to them. Children were assessed for ‘native intelligence’ by National Institute of Industrial Psychology (NIIP) tests before observing the operations and environment of agricultural work

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<sup>23</sup> Board of Education, *Rural Education*, 42-3.

<sup>24</sup> Notes for interdepartmental committee meeting held on 24 May 1929, including copy of letter from F. F. Potter, the Director of Education for Cheshire, 23 Jan 1929, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>25</sup> Notes for interdepartmental committee meeting, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum to Divisional Staff, 4 December 1929, ED 11/187, TNA.

‘under modernised conditions’, as well as visiting the railway station to hear about the work of the booking clerk, signalman, lineman and porters.<sup>27</sup> The experiment represented a more expansive view of rural employment than that espoused by Matthews, in that it included careers other than those in agriculture. Dunlop’s conclusions merged long-standing ideas about the country child with modern concepts of ‘efficiency’ in relation to work. He noted that interest in agriculture waned among the less intelligent and that the low prestige of agriculture and low rates of pay partly accounted for the difficulty in arousing interest in agriculture as a career. Dunlop was, however, much more interested in industrial psychology in relation to agriculture than in education itself, and the design of his experiment, as far as HMI were concerned, lacked pedagogical insight.

The extent to which future employment should shape the elementary school curriculum was contested by the authors of the Denman report (1928). Though mainly focused on the education of women, they gave some consideration to elementary education, since it shaped girls’ future interests and aptitudes.<sup>28</sup> The report concluded that, rather than offering technical training in agriculture, the curriculum of rural schools should be taught with reference to the countryside, in line with modern pedagogical approaches which related teaching to the environment of the child.<sup>29</sup> They pointed out, for instance, that a rural bias would stimulate the development of ‘healthy hobbies’, such as gardening or allotment keeping. Indeed, the report broadened its focus on future employment, insisting that elementary education should prepare pupils for leisure as well as work in the countryside

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<sup>27</sup> W. R. Dunlop, ‘Introducing School Children to Agriculture: An Experiment in Vocational Guidance’, 1931, draft of an article sent to the Ministry for inclusion in their journal. Since the content directly concerned the Board, the Ministry sent a copy of the article to the Board to see if they had any objections to it being published, letter 27 October 1931 to W. C. Eaton (Board) from Major E. Garnsey (Ministry). Responses by G.K Sutherland and C. A. Richardson, who doubted the experiment’s pedagogic value, were included in a letter to Garnsey, from Eaton, 10 November 1931, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> *Denman Report*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Denman Report*, Appendix III.



by nurturing an interest in music, literature and handicrafts. The authors insisted that education in 'character' and 'general intelligence' was more important than scientific knowledge or manual dexterity, and conceptualised the rural elementary school primarily as a 'home community rather than an establishment of learning'.

Indeed, by 1929, the interdepartmental committee feared that there was too much emphasis on agricultural work in experiments with rural bias. They felt that there was 'some danger' of 'technical instruction of a vocational nature' being introduced into rural schools. In a memorandum to their divisional inspectors on the 'instruction of elementary school children in agricultural subjects' they attempted to clarify the distinction between rural bias and 'technical vocational instruction'.<sup>30</sup> For example, they pointed out that school visits to farms and public demonstrations to observe practical processes, including those arranged by Young Farmers' Clubs were acceptable, but educating children and adults together was not.<sup>31</sup> Instruction in dairying for adults, for instance, would emphasise techniques in the management of milk, butter-making and cheese-making, showing how the best economic results could be obtained, while a class for children should focus on explaining the properties of milk; why it is opaque and the effect of temperature on butter fat.

The Board asked the consultative committee to consider rural education in their investigation into primary education in 1930, which they agreed to somewhat reluctantly.<sup>32</sup> Tiring of the 'rural problem', the final report gave rural education limited attention and concluded that 'the differences between rural and urban schools are often exaggerated'.<sup>33</sup> It suggested that a rural bias should engage young people with their surroundings without providing a

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<sup>30</sup> Notes for interdepartmental committee meeting, 24 May 1929, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>31</sup> Draft Memorandum to Divisional Inspectors, 'Instruction of Elementary School Children in Agricultural Subjects', August 1929, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> B. Swinnerton, 'The 1931 Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School: Tensions and Contradictions', *History of Education* 25, no. 1 (1996): 73-90.

<sup>33</sup> Board of Education Consultative Committee, *The Primary School*, 135.

'special curriculum' with different subjects to town schools.<sup>34</sup> They recommended, for instance, that Nature Study should be enough to encourage a 'breadth of outlook and grasp of essentials which raises the value and increases the dignity of rural occupations'.<sup>35</sup> This recommendation was geared towards raising an interest in country life and work in general, rather than actively encouraging the pursuit of careers in agriculture specifically.

Debates over elementary education in relation to the 'rural problem' raged into the 1930s, when the economic depression put the spotlight on agricultural decline. Reminiscent of Gaskell's earlier suggestion to revert to a half-time system of education, the NFU wrote to the Board in 1934 with the 'tentative' suggestion of giving children over 12 the option of receiving practical instruction on approved farms for 3 half days a week. They acknowledged the complications of their proposal, but used it as a way to open up discussion about the still contested place of agricultural instruction within the education system. Those who left school, they argued, were not equipped to deal with the 'increasingly technical work on the modern farm'.<sup>36</sup> An article in *The Schoolmaster and Woman Teacher's Chronicle*, however, condemned this 'reactionary rural proposal' as an attempt to maintain a cheap supply of labour.<sup>37</sup>

Faced with criticism from teachers and ongoing frustration from rural employers, the Board's 1934 pamphlet, *Education and the Countryside*, indicated a shift in emphasis. They were not primarily concerned with the:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, xxiii.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 182-183.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from NFU Education Committee to Board, 18 May 1934, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>37</sup> Article clipping from *The Schoolmaster and Woman Teacher's Chronicle*, July 26 1934, ED 11/187, TNA.

Vocational training of those who will earn their livelihood in the country districts but with the various ways in which schools are making the environment of their pupils contribute to the fashioning of a good general education.<sup>38</sup>

The term 'rural education' was judged to be too ambiguous since it connoted both 'specific training for rural occupations' as well as a 'general education given in a rural environment'. While the Ministry was responsible for the development of technical instruction in agriculture, horticulture and other forms of 'strictly vocational training' for those above the age of fourteen, the Board explained that they were primarily concerned with 'general education' given in the countryside. The requirements of the agricultural industry were to be met by the Ministry through continuation education, though in close co-operation with the Board.

Instead of providing instruction in agriculture, the rural curriculum was to be rooted in the broader environment of the pupils. As well as relating to the countryside, the report recommended that the curriculum should include 'the unfamiliar, the remote and the abstract' in order to broaden the intellectual horizons of country children, underlining the fact that education in rural schools went beyond the requirements of the agricultural industry. Instead of equating the 'rural community' with farming, which diminished differences between those living in rural areas and implied a common interest, they clarified that the term referred to 'the separate individuals composing it'.<sup>39</sup>

The Board continued to justify the provision of a rural bias at the elementary stage, but attempted to broaden its purpose:

First, children are interested in the processes going on around them and country life and processes are both fundamental to civilization and the basis of much that is best in the cultural life of the community; and second, schools, and particularly those in the country districts, should be regarded not merely as ad hoc institutions designed solely for the formal training of the immature, but rather as social institutions evolved

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<sup>38</sup> Board of Education, *Education and the Countryside*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

by a community for the preservation of its distinctive life and for the satisfaction of its cultural and other needs.<sup>40</sup>

This drew on the Denman report's ideal of the rural school as a homely institution preparing pupils for both life and work, rather than an institution serving the technical needs of industry. While *Rural Education* had claimed that there was a 'natural connection between education and vocation' in rural life, *Education in the Countryside* prioritised the link between education and the distinctive 'cultural life of the community'. The shift in emphasis is indicative of the changing way in which the school was conceptualised in relation to agriculture and the rural community.

Labelling the schools 'social institutions' gave them a more expansive role in the countryside, but there remained ambiguity over what this meant for the curriculum. The report included the findings of a survey of southern counties, which found that sixty-three per cent of boys left village schools to work on farms or in rural trades, and seventy per cent of girls took up domestic work. The figures were higher for more isolated villages, at eighty-seven and eight-eight per cent respectively.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, this suggested that there was little need to worry about rural depopulation and agricultural decline, and therefore no need to contrive the rural curriculum to encourage country boys and girls to stay in the countryside. Yet, since the report conceded that 'some knowledge of the principles underlying the future work of the majority of children' should be taught in rural schools, it could also be used to justify a continued focus on agriculture within rural bias.<sup>42</sup> Certainly, the pressure to maintain a rural population intensified towards the end of the 1930s, with growing anxiety about another war. In 1938 the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry stated that the aim of rural education should be to 'keep country-

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 8-11.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

bred children in country work and make workers in agriculture more content with their lot'.<sup>43</sup>

### **Country teachers and rural bias in practice**

The particular requirements of the rural curriculum raised questions over the recruitment and training of country teachers. A range of views had been heard by the Lamb Committee, appointed in 1927 to consider 'courses of training specially suitable for teachers interested in country life and occupations'.<sup>44</sup> It heard from 47 witnesses, one of whom was WI president Lady Denman, and recognised the problems particular to teaching in rural schools. Opinions on the pupil-teacher system epitomised much of the debate. The pupil-teacher model of apprenticeship allowed bright, aspiring elementary school pupils to 'learn on the job' through classroom observation and practical experience of supervised teaching before entering a training college, but they were often exploited and overworked, with little time given to their professional or intellectual development.<sup>45</sup> Some witnesses felt that it should be preserved in rural schools, to ensure that they retained teachers with a 'natural sympathy with country life', while others saw it as an obstacle to the broader regeneration of the countryside. One witness for instance, felt that it was 'totally inadequate' as a way of preparing teachers to give rural children the 'intellectual and social training which the rapidly awakening community consciousness in our country villages so imperatively needs today'.<sup>46</sup> In common with the village college model, there was a sense that a trained outsider was needed to guide the 'community consciousness' which was stirring in the villages.

Certainly, teachers were expected to play an active part in village life through helping with voluntary organisations such as Women's Institutes, Girls'

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<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, *Rural Education in Relation to the Drift from the Land*. Note by Parliamentary Secretary, July 1938, ED 22/204, TNA.

<sup>44</sup> Board of Education, *The Training of Rural Teachers*.

<sup>45</sup> Wendy Robinson, 'Expert and Novice in the Pupil-Teacher System of the later Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 28, no. 2, (1996), 129-130.

<sup>46</sup> Board of Education, *The Training of Rural Teachers*, 13.

Clubs, Allotment Associations or Bee-keeping Associations, giving them a range of responsibilities beyond those of the average town teacher.<sup>47</sup> Despite this, they were often paid less. In 1932 county schools paying the lowest salaries employed 10,370 women and just 2,647 men. Furthermore, most rural LEAs preferred to employ men for larger schools. In Oxfordshire for example, women were only allowed to run schools with up to a maximum of sixty students.<sup>48</sup> The NUWT therefore regarded rural education as ‘in the main a women teachers’ problem’,<sup>49</sup> and their 1932 pamphlet, *A Survey of the Problem of Education in Rural Areas*, highlighted ongoing problems around staffing.<sup>50</sup>

HMI reported on education in rural schools in the mid-1930s, and their accounts of Staunton Church of England School in Nottinghamshire, and Ashley Green Church of England School in Buckinghamshire show examples of how rural bias operated in practice.<sup>51</sup> Both of these schools encompassed many aspects of the ‘rural problem’ which policy makers sought to address: they were small schools catering for a range of age groups, they lacked qualified teachers, and the children in attendance had little interest in school work. However, the introduction of weaving as a craft in both schools was described as having a transformative effect on the pupils, teachers and locality, strengthening the role of the school as a ‘social institution’ serving the ‘cultural’ needs of the community. The reports of these two experiments in rural bias show how old ideas about the country child and the relationship between education and agriculture intersected with modern approaches to education and new ways of thinking about the rural community to produce curricular innovations which, though celebrated by HMI, did little to address the fundamental problems of rural education.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 12, 45.

<sup>48</sup> Ashby and Byles, *Rural Education*, 62.

<sup>49</sup> E. E. Crosby, *A Survey of the Problem of Education in Rural Areas* (London: NUWT, 1932).

<sup>50</sup> Board of Education, ‘Interview Memorandum: A deputation from the National Union of Women Teachers’, 12 May 1932, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>51</sup> Board of Education, *Education in Rural Schools*, February 1937, ED 77/226, TNA.

Staunton school was in an isolated rural area, three-and-a-half miles from a station or shop, and eight miles from a town. It was staffed by a certified headmistress and a supplementary teacher, and two-thirds of its pupils were boys, who would mostly go on to find employment 'of a practical sort, in connexion with farming and village crafts'.<sup>52</sup> With the 'voluntary help of her husband', the headmistress had introduced various crafts, including raffia, cane, rush and pewter work, wood and light-metal work, soldering and light repairs. These crafts gave the boys an 'early training in accurate measurement, finger manipulation and the use of tools', but the pupils had consistently lost interest. The girls, isolated because of their smaller number, disliked needlework, conceivably because of its low, gender-specific status compared to the crafts associated with the more numerous boys, so also worked in raffia, pewter, cane and rush. Crafts had never been popular with the pupils before weaving was introduced as an 'experimental course' into the curriculum in winter 1931.<sup>53</sup>

The report noted that unlike the previous crafts, weaving was popular with all pupils. It encouraged harmony between boys and girls, since they could get involved in one aspect of the whole process. At the end of the summer term in 1933, material woven by the boys was made into trousers by the girls, and 'for the first time the boys took an interest in the girls' sewing'.<sup>54</sup> Further, 'the smaller boys and girls made cardboard heddles and wove ties and halters, in the manner- as they discovered later- that the German peasants make braid'.<sup>55</sup> This description of the young pupils making their own looms and articles has echoes of recapitulation theory, in that a supposedly indigenous 'peasant' behavior came naturally to the younger children. It also drew on the

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<sup>52</sup> Gibbon 'Weaving as a School Craft', 1, ED 77/226, TNA. For those over the age of 11, she had tried raffia work, cane, rush, pewter-work and bookbinding, wood and light-metal work, soldering and household repair work. Those below the age of 11 were taught to measure, draw plans and build models in cardboard and plywood.

<sup>53</sup> Gibbon, 'Weaving as a School Craft', 2, ED 77/226, TNA.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

idea of a pan-European rural culture in popular narratives of the countryside, such as the folk revival movement.<sup>56</sup> The headmistress had in fact learnt weaving from a friend trained at the London School of Weaving before teaching the children, complicating the idea of weaving as a 'peasant' craft. Certainly, the interwar years saw renewed interest in the nineteenth century 'Arts and Craft' movement, in which 'traditional' crafts were re-learned or sustained in order to revive the values such practices were held to embody.<sup>57</sup> Part of the value of weaving, according to the report, was the harmony it fostered between boys and girls, and its supposedly natural connection to rural traditions.

Weaving was portrayed as an act of community building, steeped in tradition yet formed a new context, which enlivened the curriculum. Pupils initially made their own looms out of cardboard before the headmistress used school funds to purchase a nine-inch braid loom. Books on weaving were loaned from the County Library and were lent to the children, who began to make their own looms out of cardboard, and showed the 'true craftsmen's spirit' by constantly trying to improve their designs and articles at home.<sup>58</sup> During the lighter summer months, the pupils apparently even asked to return to school in the evening to continue their craftwork.<sup>59</sup> Weaving was also an ongoing learning experience for the headmistress and her husband. She experimented with different designs and eventually learnt to spin, while he practised making looms. Difficulties experienced in dyeing wool brought the headmistress into contact with the textile department of Nottingham University, and she joined adult classes to further her knowledge of weaving and spinning.<sup>60</sup> In March 1932, a bigger thirty-inch loom was made using wood from derelict school desks, a task which the whole school took part in, from the infants upwards. By the end of the summer term, the boys all wore

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<sup>56</sup> Boyes, *The Imagined Village*.

<sup>57</sup> Holdsworth, 'English Art Education between the Wars'.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3, 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



hand-woven ties in the school colours, the girls possessed hand-woven scarves and the headmistress wore a home-spun skirt.<sup>61</sup>

As well as developing a sense of community within the school, the experiment in weaving gave the school a new social significance by strengthening connections with local residents. The school's activities expanded after a spinning wheel was purchased with money raised by a jumble sale, and alongside weaving, children were taught to spin with wool sourced locally.<sup>62</sup> The report noted that, following an 'Open Day' in the village in 1932, 'enthusiastic interest has been raised in the village', and parents and others visited the school to see examples of the children's work.<sup>63</sup> In January 1933, for instance, an 'interested farmer', who's sons had been pupils at the school, sheared a black sheep to enable the pupils to weave a 'shepherd's check', the fleeced animal being 'condemned to live in a duck house until the warm weather came'.<sup>64</sup> The LEA also supported the venture, and agreed to cover the cost of materials and refund half the cost of a spinning wheel. After the headmistress arranged for the children's handiwork to be sold, she was able to purchase a bigger and better loom, and by 1936 the pupils were attempting new designs with fabric samples obtained from spinners around the country. Such was the scale of the operation, the looms were re-erected in the house adjoining the school, which the headmistress rented but no longer lived in, in order to allow room for its continued expansion.<sup>65</sup>

Weaving therefore extended the scope of the school, literally, in that it required the use of more space and involved all the pupils, and in terms of its role within the community. The report emphasised the social and cultural benefits of weaving in forging a 'little community' of craftsmen over its pedagogic value, but also claimed that it had 'quickenened' the intelligence of pupils and improved their powers of concentration, to the benefit of the more

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 4, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 5. Shepherd's check is a black and white tartan check pattern.

<sup>65</sup> Addendum to report, 12 November 1936, ED 77/226, TNA.

formal aspects of the curriculum.<sup>66</sup> Other schools came to visit Staunton to see the results of their work, providing them with a rare opportunity to meet and converse with people and making them more self-confident and 'articulate'. Gibbon concluded that the 'self-expression, individuality and feeling for design' born of their 'resourcefulness' and 'good craftsmanship' was reflected in all their subjects.<sup>67</sup> Further, the inspector felt that 'it is of interest to note that the most backward boy, judged by normal academic standards, was the first to make... a 12 inch four heddle loom'.<sup>68</sup> This alluded to assumptions about the particular type of intelligence possessed by the country child, and implied that it was almost inappropriate to judge the 'backward' country boy in terms of 'normal academic standards'. Weaving supposedly enabled the country child to flourish into articulate, confident individuals since it related to the distinctive cultural life of the rural community.

This was the type of 'rural bias' the Board sought to encourage. It nurtured general characteristics over specifically vocational skills and served the community as a whole. At the same time, it did not alienate rural employers, as it still offered a form of practical instruction. It was not an isolated example, and HMI reported on a similar 'experiment' in weaving at Ashley Green Church of England School, situated in the Chiltern plateau near the border of Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. The title, 'pedagogue or server of tables?', drew attention to the social as well as the educative function of the school. It referred specifically to the efforts of its formidable headmistress, Mrs James, to ensure the health of her pupils by 'serving their tables' with hot school meals while trying to teach, improve the school's notoriously poor attendance rate, and contribute towards village life.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Gibbon, 'Weaving as a School Craft', 7, ED 77/226, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> 'Pedagogue- or server of tables? An Experiment in a Buckinghamshire Rural School', ED 77/226, TNA.

The description of the school's location highlighted its isolation, both geographically and by being cut off from the modern world:

All the roads in the district follow the lines of Saxon forest paths, along which the swineherds drove their charges from clearing to clearing, the latter becoming, in the course of time, the many scattered hamlets now existing.<sup>70</sup>

The image of swineherds driving their beasts from one tract of land to another, which became the 'scattered hamlets' of the region, conjures a sense of timelessness, and is reminiscent of Stanley Baldwin's description of an idyllic rural environment in his 1924 *The Sounds of England* speech:

The sight of a plough team coming over the brow of a hill.... the one eternal sight of England... the smell of wood smoke... that our ancestors, tens of thousands of years ago, must have caught on the air when they were still nomads, and when they were still roaming the forests and the plains of the continent of Europe.<sup>71</sup>

Baldwin evoked the idea of continuity as a contrast to the instability of England in the 1920s, rooting national identity in the historic countryside. HMI's reference to 'Saxon forest paths' similarly emphasised the historic nature of the school's environment, and linked it to Baldwin's 'eternal England' by highlighting the continuity between the sights and geographies of interwar rural England, and the ancient past.

Both passages resonated with the image of the Staunton school children, weaving in the manner of German peasants, placing the rural school on a continuum of life and work in the countryside which flowed from the past to the present. This conceptualisation of the rural school was consistent with the idea in *Education and the Countryside* that 'country life and processes' were 'fundamental to civilization', and suggested that rural education was in-keeping with the timeless traditions of country life. Yet, weaving was also

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>71</sup> Stanley Baldwin, 'The Sounds of England', London 6 May 1924, edited transcript, in *The Penguin Book of Modern Speeches*, ed., Brian MacArthur. Rev ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 95-6.

described as an 'experiment' that reinvigorated the school, and brought it into contact with the village. The rural school was therefore valued in these reports not only as a link to the past, to the beginnings of 'civilization', but also as a central feature of the modern countryside.

A 'native of Westmorland', a historic county now part of Cumbria, the headmistress, Mrs James, was also described in terms of a rural, regional stereotype. She was a:

Typical daleswoman, broadened in outlook by contact with the wider world; strongly domesticated, energetic, forceful, and indefatigable; a great advocate and a sturdy fighter for the causes she espouses.<sup>72</sup>

James was portrayed as earnest and hardworking, if a little slow. The inspector elaborated that she was not a 'first-rate pedagogue' with a 'first class brain'. It was in qualities of 'heart rather than of head' that she was outstanding, and the inspector suspected that 'if she could really choose her own lot in life' she would face the more challenging position of 'Head Master of a Senior Boys' School'.<sup>73</sup> Her fortitude and ambition were not seen as threatening or perverse, however, since they were accommodated within the overall trait of resilience common to the 'typical daleswoman', who lived and worked in the harsh, hilly terrain of the north west of England.

The description of James' forthright personality framed the story of her 'worthily begun' work at the school,<sup>74</sup> which had been the 'despair' of her predecessors.<sup>75</sup> In common with many rural schools at the time, the school's premises were inadequate to accommodate the sixty pupils in attendance in 1936.<sup>76</sup> It consisted of a two-roomed building with an adjoining teacher's house and a corrugated iron hut across the playground used as the infant

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<sup>72</sup> 'Pedagogue- or server of tables?', 2, ED 77/226, TNA.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 1.

classroom, which was not officially recognised by the Board but which had been furnished by the LEA in the absence of an alternative.<sup>77</sup> James was supported by an uncertificated teacher, and an art teacher, 'a girl of good education', but without a qualification or any previous teaching experience.<sup>78</sup> Agriculture and market gardening were the local industries, and during busy seasons it was common for both parents to be employed all day, every day doing field or garden work, with 'disastrous results to the health of the children'.<sup>79</sup> The number of pupils in attendance had fluctuated between thirty-five and seventy over the preceding five years,<sup>80</sup> and HMI had condemned the pupils as 'ill-mannered', 'noisy' and 'naughty', with an unusually high number categorised as 'mentally defective or dull and backward'.<sup>81</sup>

The report documented James' charitable work within the school, and its beneficial impact on the health of the school child and their family. James decided that behavioural problems were largely down to under-nourishment resulting from poverty, and moved an electric cooking stove from her house into one of the classrooms before enlisting the help of the older children with the preparation of 'Northern dishes such as hot-pot and cottage pie', using ingredients supplied by James.<sup>82</sup> After a month, the Assistant Secretary to the LEA visited the school and sent supplies of china, linen, cooking utensils and cutlery, and after three winters, the attendance, behaviour and school work of James' pupils improved dramatically. The pupil body increased to the point that James and the older pupils could no longer provide hot meals, though pupils were still provided with cups of cocoa or malted milk at school.<sup>83</sup> The inspector, however, believed that James' lesson in nutrition had been passed on from the children to their parents and that, through 'force of example', the children were receiving better meals at home than formerly.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 1, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 3.

Indeed, the Board and local authorities were slow to facilitate the provision of school meals for undernourished children, and by 1939 less than half of all local authorities were providing school meals.<sup>84</sup>

James' endeavours to help her pupils followed traditions of charitable voluntary action. The Victorian country teacher was often expected to take part in voluntary activities and employment outside of school, for the benefit of the village and local farmers,<sup>85</sup> and to an extent James, being 'domesticated' and 'broadened in outlook', followed suit. For example, she unearthed a dormant 'Educational Trust', which provided the school and one in an adjoining hamlet with an annual sum of £60 to be spent on the 'physical and social welfare of the children', including the provision of clothes and books for those who gained scholarships to secondary schools.<sup>86</sup> However, in line with wider developments in voluntarism and social reconstruction in the interwar period,<sup>87</sup> James concerned herself not only with relieving poverty but also with developing local amenities and village social life. She established a 'social club' in 1933, for instance, which had over 100 members and had 'begged' the 'Lord of the Manor', Lord Chesham, for some land to enlarge the space in which they could meet. Nothing is known of the nature of this 'social club', but a membership of 100 was significant in an area of small population.<sup>88</sup> The village football and cricket pitches, two of each, also owed their existence largely to James' encouragement, and she religiously attended matches. During an annual Spring musical festival, which

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<sup>84</sup> David Garner, 'Education and the Welfare State: The School Meals and Milk Service, 1944-1980', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 17, no. 2 (1985): 63-68; David Gillard, 'Food for Thought: Child Nutrition, the School Dinner and the Food Industry' (2003) [www.educationengland.org.uk/articles/22food.html](http://www.educationengland.org.uk/articles/22food.html)

<sup>85</sup> Pamela Horn, 'The Recruitment, Role and Status of the Victorian Country Teacher', *History of Education* 9, no. 2 (1980): 129-141.

<sup>86</sup> 'Pedagogue- or Server of Tables?', 6, ED 77/226, TNA.

<sup>87</sup> Snape, 'The New Leisure'.

<sup>88</sup> 'Pedagogue- or Server of Tables?', 6, ED 77/226, TNA.

brought up to 1200 children into Chesham, James provided all of the food 'without turning a hair'.<sup>89</sup>

Following her conviction that village schools were central to the recreational as well as the educational life of the community, James fought against school reorganisation, with a dislike of Hadow 'beyond the power of words to express'.<sup>90</sup> She was firmly of the opinion that sending country children to be educated in the town was 'destroying the countryside', and argued that in the surrounding 'decapitated' villages young men and women sought recreation in the towns, leaving their locality deprived of any form of communal life. Largely as a result of her strong advocacy, the LEA had shelved proposals to reorganise the school.<sup>91</sup>

Her curricular 'experiment' in weaving further strengthened links between the school and community. In common with the headmistress of Staunton School in Nottinghamshire, James' predecessor had found that other crafts such as woodwork had failed to capture the interest of the pupils, and was not well suited to girls.<sup>92</sup> James therefore introduced weaving into the curriculum for those aged between nine and fourteen, and pupils made their own looms. The use of manufactured wool was rarely allowed, since James believed to be a craftsman, the child should carry out the whole process, from raw wool to finished article.<sup>93</sup> Remembering her 'early experiences in the dales' James instructed her pupils to collect tufts of wool stuck on wire fences and thorn hedges, and they washed, dyed and spun the wool themselves.<sup>94</sup> The dyeing was done in 'traditional fashion', using locally sourced ingredients including 'moss, bracken tops, apple and elder bark, soot sloes, carrots, onion skins', and spinning was conducted using various 'odd tools' such as pieces of

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 3.

wood weighted with clay, boys' spinning tops and home-made spindles.<sup>95</sup>

This description of locally sourced ingredients and traditional methods accommodated the school and its experiment in weaving within the broader economic, social and cultural environment of the locality.

The school's capacity to conduct weaving expanded through a mixture of self-help and local patronage. A resident gave the school some pieces of an old spinning wheel, which was repaired using an illustration from a historical reader, and James and the older pupils carried out further historical research to construct bigger and better looms.<sup>96</sup> Rather than being a meaningless curricular novelty, weaving was portrayed as a revival of tradition for modern purposes. To celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of a 'very good friend' of the school, Major Norman McLeod, pupils made a scarf in the McLeod tartan, and people of Scottish ancestry for miles around the school asked for scarves and ties in their clan tartans.<sup>97</sup> The school also made 40 ties over the course of a few months for a nearby public school, and the demand for homespun articles from the school could not keep up with the supply. In 1936 Lady Snell, whose family had been significant landowners in the Chiltern area since the seventeenth century,<sup>98</sup> donated a new, foot-powered loom to enable the school to continue the expansion of its weaving activities.

There was a danger though, that the quantity of production and potential commercial success of the school's products would detract from the educational value of weaving. James was careful to ensure that weaving remained an educational exercise above all else:

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>98</sup> Marian Miller, David Green and Mike Farley, *Brill: Buckinghamshire Historic Towns Assessment Report* (Buckinghamshire County Council and English Heritage, 2012), 38-41.



Experiment, in trying out new processes and in widening the scope of the work, is the real aim, and it is fully understood that too extensive production of any one kind of material may obscure the educational value of the craft.<sup>99</sup>

Indeed, this was a broader problem within the interwar crafts revival, and was also felt by the WI, who worked to emphasise the educational rather than commercial value of their crafts.<sup>100</sup> HMI noted that, as with Staunton School, the practice of weaving at Ashley Green School was educational since it supported the curriculum through developing the pupils' personal qualities. The pupils were expected to help each other, rather than relying on a teacher, developing their sense of independence,<sup>101</sup> and they gained a new-found respect for knowledge and eagerness to learn.<sup>102</sup> The inspector judged them to be more trustworthy, and better able to 'talk and write sensibly'. Weaving appeared to have a civilizing effect, in that the pupils were more interested in music and art as a result, and were willing to 'play the game' rather than playing truant, as they had done five years previously.<sup>103</sup>

Interestingly, in 1940, the Ministry of Information selected Ashley Green School to feature in a propaganda film, *Ashley Green Goes to School*.<sup>104</sup> The film was intended to promote the 'British' value of freedom and to celebrate the work of teachers in the war effort, as well as to reassure the parents of children evacuated to the countryside.<sup>105</sup> The children were shown playing, and conversing informally but respectfully with James, whose charitable role had extended with the need to accommodate evacuees. The school and its pupils were depicted as 'thoroughly integrated in the daily economy of the

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<sup>99</sup> 'Pedagogue- or Server of Tables?', 5, ED 77/226, TNA.

<sup>100</sup> This is discussed in chapter 6.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Ministry of Information, Film: 'Ashley Green Goes to School', (1940; uploaded to YouTube 4 July 2011).

<sup>105</sup> Peter Cunningham, 'Moving Images: Propaganda Film and British Education 1940-45', *Paedagogica Historica* 36, no. 1 (2000), 389-406.

village',<sup>106</sup> with a local farmer delivering fresh milk to the school and pupils shown growing their own vegetables and carrying out weaving and spinning. The film suggests that James continued with her 'experiment' in weaving and sustained her active role in village life with the support of parents and local residents.

The report of the weaving experiment in Ashley Green School shared many similarities with that of Staunton school. Weaving was held to represent a revival of an innate practice which suited the particular qualities of country children, resonating with them in a way which more formal aspects of the curriculum could not. It naturally cohered with the traditions of their locality and the cultural life of the community, and facilitated an expansion in the role of the school as a 'social institution', through gaining the support of parents and local residents. It was a commercial activity to an extent, allowing the schools to make money, expand their facilities and engage the community, without overshadowing their fundamentally educative role.

### **Conclusion**

Anxiety over the decline of rural England ignited debates over the purpose of elementary education in the countryside and encouraged the use of rural bias as a way to preserve the countryside while regenerating it. Fundamental questions over the nature of rural bias, and how far it should be related to agriculture or the rural community more generally, remained unresolved and fluctuated with different economic circumstances, and between different groups. In general, however, there was less emphasis on 'the rural problem' and the decline of agriculture, and more on the 'rural community' and its development by the mid-1930s.

Teachers had scope to experiment with new approaches, dependent upon the influence of actors at a local level including parents, employers and local authorities. In the reports on rural education by HMI cited here, the concept of rural community shaped experiments in rural bias. The description of the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

schools as communities of craftsmen, operating harmoniously with the home life of their pupils and the social life of their locality followed the Board's aspiration to develop the rural school as a 'social institution' serving the 'distinctive life' of the community. How far the experiments benefited the pupils is difficult to determine. Such heartening reports of craft-based school communities which, with limited resources, had brightened the lives of pupils and engaged local residents, conceivably allowed the Board to step back from rural education, leaving rural teachers to continue grappling with the 'rural problem' on their own initiative. Furthermore, the place of agriculture in the education system was still unclear. Since the Board stated that 'rural education' in terms of vocational instruction in agriculture was in the remit of the Ministry, not the elementary school, the nature and organisation of continuation education became particularly important to the Ministry and farming organisations, and is discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Continuation and adult education: ‘collaborative networks’ in agriculture and education

The education of young people in the countryside was integral to the Board’s plans for continuation education, the Ministry’s strategy to support agriculture, and the rural community movement’s aspirations for a ‘new rural civilization’. For the Ministry and county councils, agricultural education was to be a modernising force, encouraging scientifically informed, efficient approaches to farming; for the Board, it would keep technical instruction out of the elementary school and expand it to those who would otherwise learn through on-the-job training; and for the rural community movement, it was part of a broader drive to improve rural life. These diverse aims were accommodated within the voluntary and self-governing YFC and WI movements, which provided technical training alongside opportunities for recreation. As a result, agricultural education was increasingly organised as part of a collaborative effort between the state and voluntary sector.

Whereas other departments concerned with technical education, such as the Ministry of Labour and the Board of Trade, did not make recommendations on the day-to-day processes of industry or commerce, the Ministry did provide advice on how farming could be most effectively carried out, giving it a significant stake in the development of agricultural education.<sup>1</sup> Agricultural education therefore has to be considered in relation to agricultural as well as educational policy. Reaching a consensus on agricultural policy became increasingly difficult after the ‘great betrayal’ of 1921,<sup>2</sup> when the Agriculture Act, which had guaranteed minimum prices for wheat and had established wages boards for agricultural labourers, was repealed.<sup>3</sup> While paternalistic approaches prioritised the protection and preservation of rural areas, seeing

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<sup>1</sup> Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, 416-418.

<sup>2</sup> Sheail, ‘The White Paper, *Agricultural Policy*, of 1926: Its Context and Significance’, *Agricultural History Review* 58, no. 2, (2010): 236-54.

<sup>3</sup> Edith H. Whetham, ‘The Agriculture Act, 1920 and its Repeal- the ‘Great Betrayal’, *Agricultural History Review* 20 (1974): 36-49.

farmers as ‘custodians of the natural heritage of the countryside’,<sup>4</sup> agricultural scientists such as A. D. Hall (1864-1942), the chief scientific adviser to the Ministry, wanted to modernise agriculture and improve its efficiency through expanding education and research.<sup>5</sup> Science was to provide the principles from which policy was made, but there was a need to balance the requirements of science with the practice of farming and the needs of society. That is, to take into consideration theoretical knowledge of physical conditions; soil, weather, topography, and the physiology of plants and animals, alongside the business procedures of farming and people’s needs in terms of nutrition.<sup>6</sup>

Within competing perspectives on agricultural policy, education became fundamentally important, as it provided a means for the Ministry to support the industry without directly intervening. There was, however, no ‘settled’ policy on agricultural education in the interwar years,<sup>7</sup> making it a challenging area of educational history to research. It developed across a range of different sites and was not coordinated nationally, leading to a high degree of regional variation in terms of the type and quality of provision. Developments in agricultural education are discussed in this chapter in two main parts. The first part focuses on the aims of the Board and Ministry, and the development of agricultural education on a local level through the county authorities, and the second outlines the pursuit of agricultural education within the rural community movement. For the RCCs, agricultural education was valuable as a way to bring people together in the same vein as informal educational activities such as music and village dramas. By integrating education and

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<sup>4</sup> Simon Miller, ‘Land Use and Leisure: Leslie Scott and the Contested Countryside’ in Burchardt and Conford, *Contested Countryside*, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Brassley, ‘Agricultural Education, Training and Advice’, in Vivier, *The State and Rural Societies*, 259-278.

<sup>6</sup> Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, *A Scientific Policy for British Agriculture: Particularly in Relation to Nutrition* (London: Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, 1944), 1.

<sup>7</sup> H. E. Luxmoore, *Report of the Committee on Post-War Agricultural Education in England and Wales*. Cmd; 6433. (London : HMSO, 1943), 44. Hereafter cited as *Luxmoore Report*.

leisure, the YFC and WI movements offered a way to reconcile these diverse aims. They provided a link between the county agricultural education staff and the rural community, aiding the coordination and expansion of agricultural education while also developing opportunities for recreation.

### **Continuation education in agriculture: policy and practice**

The day continuation schools proposed by the 1918 Education Act represented a compromise between instruction and education, in that they were meant to relate to technical work without providing a narrow training.<sup>8</sup> When drawing up the Act, Fisher articulated various ambitions for continuation schools in the countryside, from improving technical instruction in agriculture to catering for the intellectual needs of the rural community. He explained that they needed to provide some form of technical training, since young people working in agriculture were:

Not looked upon as apprentices to whom the employer is under an obligation to teach the processes of the industry... Day Continuation Schools will number among their students many future foremen, bailiffs, and small farmers to whom agricultural instruction will be of unquestionable value, and who will have little opportunity of acquiring it except in these schools.<sup>9</sup>

While the sons and daughters of wealthier farmers could receive instruction at agricultural colleges, those of 'foremen, bailiffs, and small farmers' continued to learn by on-the-job training without the opportunity to acquire further education. Fisher supposed that employers in agriculture had not acquired the same obligations towards their employees as those in other industries. In fact, a range of informal apprenticeships for young people inducted them into agricultural work. Horsemen, for example, served long training periods before achieving the 'immeasurably high standard' required.<sup>10</sup> Robert Youngman, who began work on a farm in East Anglia in the late-nineteenth century at thirteen years old, did not plough until he was

<sup>8</sup> Woodin et al, *Secondary Education*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Board of Education, *Memorandum on the Provision and Conduct of Day Continuation Schools*, ED 24/1432, TNA.

<sup>10</sup> George Ewart Evans, *The Horse in the Furrow* (London: Faber, 1960), 30.

eighteen. He began by following the horseman's furrow, and was in turn followed by more experienced men who could adjust any mistakes he made.<sup>11</sup> However, such practices were organised on an individual, private basis and were not recognised or coordinated in an official capacity.

Fisher did not, however, want continuation classes to become a recruitment pool for farmers, and argued that it was necessary to cater for the majority of country children, who would go on to work in the town. He estimated that seventy-five per cent of children educated in rural day continuation schools would go elsewhere for work, pointing out that it would therefore be unfair to provide a curriculum heavily weighted towards agriculture.<sup>12</sup> He maintained that the 'specialised crafts of rural life' such as thatching or dairywork,

Ought to be taught out of school and the farmer should see that they are taught, but they are too special to deserve to be included in the curriculum of a school designed to serve the needs of the whole rural population.<sup>13</sup>

Having previously acknowledged the need to provide 'agricultural instruction', Fisher backtracked, shunting the responsibility back on to the farmer. The term 'crafts' has connotations of skill, which require dedication, hard work and practice as much as technical education, but designating them as 'specialised' highlighted their marginal status, and conceptualising continuation education in relation to 'rural life' associated it with timelessness and tradition.

Building on the rural bias of elementary education, Fisher recommended that the curriculum of day continuation schools should relate to the environment and history of the countryside. English subjects, for example, were to have utilitarian and cultural aims covering literature, composition and rural

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from H. A. L. Fisher to Mr. Davies, Vice Chairman of the Gloucestershire Education Committee, including notes of an address to members of the House of Commons, 4 Jan 1918, ED 24/1432, TNA.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

economy, with essays on 'rural matters' and lessons on the writing of business letters. History would be social and industrial as well as political, covering the development of systems of land-tenure, the progress of agriculture, co-operative enterprises and the conditions of land workers. Vocational subjects were to account for less than one-ninth of the whole years' course.<sup>14</sup>

Though Fisher claimed that continuation education was for the 'whole rural population' rather than just those who worked in agriculture, he expected:

The house of our agricultural labourers to be better kept and their dinners to be better cooked... And that village life will be made more interesting by reason of the new current of intellectual interest which will be set flowing by the establishment of these classes.<sup>15</sup>

Influenced by stereotypes of village life as monotonous, and country people as ignorant, with unkempt houses and poorly cooked meals, Fisher further obscured the purpose of day continuation schools in rural areas by identifying an additional aim; to unleash a 'new current of intellectual interest'. This would presumably wash away problems resulting from poverty in the countryside, not by improving opportunities for employment in agriculture or other industries, but by enlightening the agricultural labourer and making village life more interesting. The memorandum also suggested that day continuation schools could be used in the evenings under the management of local committees 'for recreative purposes for people of all ages',<sup>16</sup> linking rural education with regeneration more broadly.

The fundamental purpose of continuation schools, and the place of practical instruction related to agriculture, remained unclear in the final Act. Young people could be exempted from continuation education if they were under 'suitable and efficient full-time instruction' in another form recognised by the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



Board,<sup>17</sup> but it was not clear what qualified. A lack of clarity about key terminology used in the Act was compounded by the fact that it accepted varied provision. It suggested that LEAs should take into account existing schemes as well as the views of ‘parents or other... bodies of persons interested’,<sup>18</sup> allowing for the influence of other groups and individuals.

One such group was the Agricultural Education Association (AEA), an association of teachers from institutions responsible for agricultural education, such as farm institutes, agricultural colleges and universities. They aimed to encourage ‘the development of agricultural education and research by mutual assistance and advice’.<sup>19</sup> From a ‘close-knit’ group of seven members in 1894, their membership reached 400 by 1926,<sup>20</sup> and through their connections with prominent farmers, landowners, the Royal Agricultural Society of England, and the editorial staff of popular farming journals, such as the *Farmer and Stockbreeder*, they attempted to secure national recognition of agricultural education, and coordinate the research agendas of their institutions while engaging the ‘practical man’ in the field.<sup>21</sup>

The Association wanted to strengthen the representation of agriculture at different stages of the education system. They recommended that some form of vocational training in agriculture should be introduced during the later stages of elementary education, which would then link up to technical training at continuation classes, followed by more advanced instruction at farm institutes and agricultural departments at universities.<sup>22</sup> In 1916 they stated that they hoped the Education Bill would ‘give the scholars in the rural

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Andrews, *The Education Act, 1918* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 38.

<sup>18</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 207.

<sup>19</sup> AEA, *Memorandum on the Reconstruction of Agricultural Education in England and Wales* (Agricultural Education Association, 1921), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas H. Middleton, Sir, ‘The Early Days of the Agricultural Education Association’, *Agricultural Progress*, 3 (1926), 52.

<sup>21</sup> AEA, ‘Constitution and Objects’ reprinted from *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, August 1914, MS 940/1/4, Museum of English Rural Life, Reading. Hereafter cited as MERL.

<sup>22</sup> AEA, *Memorandum on Agricultural Education*, 48.

schools the fullest opportunity of obtaining a vocational education in rural pursuits'.<sup>23</sup> Ahead of a meeting between an AEA deputation and Fisher to discuss the Bill in April 1918, they tactically amended this resolution, omitting the word 'vocational' in an attempt to evade its controversy. However, the degree to which continuation education should be vocational remained a sticking point. As the AEA pushed for greater vocational provision, Fisher resisted, concluding the meeting by aptly declaring that 'the whole question depends on the definition you give to the word vocational!'<sup>24</sup>

For the AEA, greater vocational provision meant integrating continuation education in the countryside with existing provision made by county authorities, in line with the requirements of the agricultural industry. One member pointed out, for example, that voluntary classes in 'skilled agriculture' attended by sixteen to eighteen year olds in Wiltshire, were under threat from the prescribed 320 hours in continuation schools,<sup>25</sup> and wanted Fisher to clarify whether such classes could be incorporated into the emerging system of education for those above the age of fourteen. The AEA made several suggestions about the form continuation education could take, recommending, for instance, that local farms could be used as sites of instruction for continuation classes with the 'co-operation of the farmer, and of his wife, sons and daughters'. Fisher rejected this on the grounds that it would cause 'jealousy' among farmers, and disagreed with proposals linked too closely to agricultural work, which would undermine the 'intellectual interest' he hoped continuation education would arouse in the countryside.

Certainly, the AEA's policy on education was informed by a perception of the rural community which was stratified in terms of gender and class. They expected 'village lads' to take continuation classes, 'farmers' sons' to study at farm institutes, and 'farmers' daughters' to take specialised courses in subjects such as book-keeping. Assumptions about the agricultural working-

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<sup>23</sup> Agricultural Education Association, Resolution on the Education Bill, March 22 1916, ED 24/1432, TNA.

<sup>24</sup> Board of Education, Minutes of proceedings of AEA deputation, ED 24/1432, TNA.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

classes intersected with regional stereotypes. Discussing agricultural labour at an AEA conference, J. C. Newsham claimed that

the average type of farm labourer in the North, whether due to climatic or other influences, is capable of performing a better day's work and is better educated than his confrere in the South.<sup>26</sup>

This was a longstanding view, dating back at least seventy years.<sup>27</sup> Though education was acknowledged as a factor relating to agricultural work in this statement, it was not linked to broader social or cultural structures, such as the quality of rural schools or the availability of technical instruction. The climate, or 'other influences' could, according to Newsham, be equally important causes.

The AEA accepted agriculture as a largely 'hereditary occupation',<sup>28</sup> undertaken by those who had inherited the required land and capital. Many prominent farming families were able to trace connections to the land back for several generations, and often played a paternalistic role in rural life. The AEA chairman, Thomas Middleton (1863-1943), for example, came from 'a long line of farmers on his father's side, and his mother's people had close connections with the land'.<sup>29</sup> His obituary, written by agricultural scientist Sir Edward John Russell, noted that this was typical within farming. The Middleton family was highly respected for farming profitably, as well as being leaders in their community. Middleton's father was a member of the parish council and the local school board, and his mother, who kept the farm accounts, held a 'Sunday School' in her kitchen for all the farmworkers children.<sup>30</sup> The AEA as an organisation, however, was focused on the needs

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<sup>26</sup> J. C. Newsham, 'Agricultural Labour', paper presented to British Association for the Advancement of Science, Agricultural Section, September 1915, MS 1014/1/12, MERL.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Freeman, 'The Agricultural Labourer and the Hodge Stereotype c.1850-1914', *Agricultural History Review* 49 (2001): 172-86.

<sup>28</sup> E. J. Russell, 'Thomas Hudson Middleton. 1863-1943', *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society* 4, no. 13 (1944): 555.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

of farmers in terms of scientific knowledge and technical skills, and their ambitions for continuation and adult education were limited to serving the needs of agriculture within existing social hierarchies, in tension with Fisher's broader, if ill-defined notion of continuation education.

Alternative visions of agricultural education sought to harness its capacity to promote social change in the countryside. In his 'new agricultural policy',<sup>31</sup> F. E. Green highlighted the inequalities of agriculture under private enterprise, and put forward a case for educational change alongside land reform. Rather than inherited capital managed by 'inefficient' farmers, his vision was of large farms of 2000 to 10,000 acres run collectively by Guilds, making farm workers 'partners in their own industry'. Embracing science and new technologies, farming would be more efficient with a view to benefitting all in the industry rather than just for increasing landowners' profits. He anticipated that since this would offer those without the capital the opportunity to farm, it would increase the population of the countryside, which would in turn introduce new industries into the villages.<sup>32</sup>

A communally run agricultural industry would rely on an 'improved and democratised' education system.<sup>33</sup> Like Jesse Collings before him, Green saw land reform and education as interrelated.<sup>34</sup> He recommended abolishing supplementary teachers, and establishing rural central schools and agricultural technical schools to strengthen rural elementary education. Those aged fifteen and above who showed an aptitude for and interest in the land would receive further general as well as practical instruction at farm schools. Education in crafts such as hedging, thatching and the construction and repair of agricultural machinery, would be provided at 'Winter schools', and every county would have demonstration and experimental plots. Most

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<sup>31</sup> F. E. Green, *A New Agricultural Policy* (London, L. Parsons, 1921).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Jesse Collings, *Land Reform: Occupying Ownership, Peasant Proprietary, and Rural Education* (London: Longmans Green, 1908); Paul Readman, 'Jesse Collings and Land Reform, 1886-1914', *Historical Research* 81, no. 212 (2008): 292-314.

importantly, Green asserted that this scheme should be nationally funded, rather than left to the county councils.<sup>35</sup>

Certainly, agricultural education was as much a part of agricultural as educational policy, since it fed into the Ministry's strategy of supporting agriculture without too much direct intervention. The Ministry had more scope to expand agricultural education from 1925, when the interdepartmental committee resolved that the Ministry should aid the development of technical instruction in agricultural subjects for those aged fourteen and above.<sup>36</sup> Previously, responsibility had been divided solely in terms of age group, with the Ministry aiding expenditure on those above the age of sixteen and the Board for those below.<sup>37</sup> These new regulations connected continuation education in agriculture to scientific research. In 1924, in the first edition of the AEA's journal, *Agricultural Progress*, Middleton asserted that:

few people have any idea of the mass of experimental work in the field and in the laboratory which is being carried out by the County Agricultural Education Committees...with the assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture.<sup>38</sup>

The involvement of the Ministry in continuation education linked agricultural education with this 'mass of experimental work', separating agricultural instruction from other forms of technical education. The Ministry promoted their efforts to improve the 'scope and efficiency' of agricultural education in a 1929 circular to county authorities, pointing out that aid was available on a 'generous' scale towards the salaries of new staff.<sup>39</sup> This division of responsibility for agricultural education could lead to confusion among local

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<sup>35</sup> Green, *New Agricultural Policy*, 151-2.

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, *New regulation superseding Article II of Regulations for Grants in aid of Agricultural Education and Research* 1919, c.1925, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Board of Education Interdepartmental Committee, *Circular letter to County Agricultural Education Authorities: Revised Arrangements*, 25 November 1925, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Middleton, 'Editorial', *Agricultural Progress* 1 (1924), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ministry, Circular letter to County Authorities for Agricultural Education, 7 November 1929, ED 11/187, TNA.

and county authorities, however. A review conducted by the Ministry in 1938, for example, found that while in Cheshire the organisation of agricultural education worked efficiently, in Cumberland and Westmorland the director of education and agricultural organiser clashed over who was in charge.<sup>40</sup>

Within the expansion of agricultural education supported by the Ministry, there were attempts to engage a broader range of people. Partly to compensate for the repeal of the Agriculture Act in 1921, the Ministry pledged to establish scholarships and maintenance grants for the sons and daughters of agricultural workmen, bailiffs and smallholders.<sup>41</sup> There were three classes of scholars; those who had qualified for admission to a university through attendance at good secondary schools; those who had educated themselves by private study up to the standard required for entrance to an agricultural college; and those who had shown promise while at elementary school and subsequently as land workers, and who gave some indication that they would benefit from a short course at a farm institute. Popularly known as the 'sons' and daughters' scholarships' they were unique in being designed to benefit one industry, and represented an acknowledgment of the ongoing problems associated with the rigid social structure of many rural areas.

Individual farm institutes and agricultural colleges also developed their own scholarship systems. In 1924-5 local authorities spent £12,617 on 1,214 students, a small figure compared to the number of students engaged in the agricultural industry.<sup>42</sup> The degree and quality of provision varied regionally. In Devon and Cornwall for example, the Ministry found that there was an 'excellent system of scholarship awards' in place for the children of farm workers and small farmers through both the sons and daughters scheme and local scholarships, while in other areas such provision was practically non-

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<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Review of Agricultural Education*, 1938, MAF 33/397, TNA.

<sup>41</sup> Piggot, 'Agricultural Scholarships for Rural Youth'.

<sup>42</sup> *Denman Report*, 20.

existent.<sup>43</sup> This patchy provision of scholarships fell far short of Green's proposal for an entirely state funded agricultural education system, supporting a communally run agricultural industry. However, it did increase the reach of agricultural education to those who would otherwise have had little opportunity to receive it. By the mid-1930s twenty rural English counties were providing some form of vocational instruction in agriculture for fourteen to sixteen year olds, with some 21,000 students attending the classes.<sup>44</sup>

### **'Techniques on teaching': agricultural education in practice**

Various agricultural organisers discussed how to develop agricultural education and engage local farmers at a conference on 'techniques on teaching' in 1923, and the range of suggestions presented in their papers, which were published in *Agricultural Progress*, give a snapshot of how agricultural education worked in practice, in relation to existing traditions associated with learning in agriculture, and new ideas in education.

The agricultural organiser for Buckinghamshire, J. Porter, for example, recommended that classes should be conducted in conjunction with an existing society, such as an agricultural improvement, fruit growers' or hops growers' society.<sup>45</sup> Agricultural discussion societies provided a space for farmers and others working in agriculture to share knowledge and discuss matters of interest, such as the development of new technologies, and they attracted a wide range of attendees, including people up to seventy years old as well as those of school leaving age. However, though they catered to a common interest, membership fees excluded some from joining.

The involvement of county agricultural education staff had the potential to alter the dynamics of agricultural discussion societies, refashioning traditional forms of learning in agriculture. For example, the agricultural organiser for the North Riding of Yorkshire, D. B. Johnston-Wallace would deliver a single

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<sup>43</sup> Ministry, *Review of Agricultural Education*, 1938, MAF 33/397, TNA.

<sup>44</sup> *Luxmoore Report*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> J. Porter, 'Manual Processes', (paper presented at the technique of teaching conference, Aberystwyth, July 10-11, 1923), abstracts of addresses in *Agricultural Progress* 1, (1924), 92-93.

lecture on a topic of general interest before encouraging the audience to form their own agricultural discussion society. Those interested would then elect a president, vice-president, secretary and committee,<sup>46</sup> giving the new society a democratic character. There were also attempts to broaden access to agricultural labourers by providing scholarships or waiving membership fees. Johnston-Wallace noted that many labourers attended, and participated in debates, which could become heated.<sup>47</sup> The societies developed their own programmes, with 'practical farmers' delivering lectures on a wide range of topics alongside scientific staff at the University of Leeds, local veterinary surgeons, and county agricultural education staff. Johnston-Wallace acted as a facilitator, providing guidance on organisational matters when required rather than directing proceedings.<sup>48</sup>

This gave farmers a status as professionals, alongside scientists and county agricultural education staff, corresponding with their more public and political role in rural society and the nation following the First World War.<sup>49</sup> Farmers were expected to lobby the government and represent the interests of the industry, and by speaking publicly in discussion societies they had the opportunity to prepare for this alongside developing their technical knowledge. Johnston-Wallace noted that debates in agricultural discussion societies provided 'excellent training for young men as public speakers- a very useful thing in these days of an active Farmers' Union'.<sup>50</sup> The growth of the NFU had given farmers greater public representation, and it became an important function of agricultural education to prepare young people for this role as much as for the technical demands of agriculture. At the same time, building links with the farming community bolstered the professional position

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<sup>46</sup> D. B. Johnston-Wallace, 'Agricultural Discussion Societies', (paper presented at the technique of teaching conference, Aberystwyth, July 10-11, 1923), abstracts of addresses in *Agricultural Progress*, 1 (1924), 86.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Such as seeds mixtures, farm management, farm accounts, and the principles of breeding.

<sup>49</sup> Griffiths, 'Farming in the Public Interest'.

<sup>50</sup> Johnston-Wallace, 'Agricultural Discussion Societies', 85-87.



of agricultural organisers, cementing their identity as experts with an important role to play in the future of agriculture.

The degree to which agricultural organisers were successful in reaching farmers varied regionally. A survey conducted for the Ministry in 1944 found that agricultural advisory services were often understaffed and only reached a small proportion of farmers.<sup>51</sup> In targeting farmers, the organisers also excluded other members of the rural community. The agricultural organiser for Kent, G. H. Garrad for instance, complained that he was asked to give lectures by 'the parson, the clerk to the parish council, an enthusiastic educationist, or, in a very few cases, by the local secretary of the National Farmers' Union'.<sup>52</sup> Garrad disappointedly found that farmers were 'conspicuous by their small numbers or their total absence', and lectures were instead attended by 'men, women and children of all trades and professions' the majority 'not interested in the subject'. Consequently, he arranged to address meetings of branches of the NFU and maintained discussions at the pub.<sup>53</sup> The number of attendees at a lecture was clearly not as important as getting the right type of participant, and Garrad rearranged his lectures to exclude the participation of people other than farmers, especially women, whose presence in pubs was still contested in the 1920s.<sup>54</sup>

Many agricultural organisers assumed that women played a limited role in agriculture, largely confined to the cottage garden, and that they therefore required little agricultural education. Gendered assumptions about agricultural work and rural life continued into the 1930s, with a Ministry inspector complaining in 1938 that at Newton Rigg farm institute 'most of the visitors are of the Women's Institute type' or were amateur gardeners and

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<sup>51</sup> cited in Holmes, 'Science and the Farmer', 82-3.

<sup>52</sup> G. H. Garrad, 'Single Lectures for Adult Farmers', (paper presented at the technique of teaching conference, Aberystwyth, July 10-11, 1923), abstracts of addresses in *Agricultural Progress*, 1 (1924), 90.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-92.

<sup>54</sup> Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 278-9.

allotments holders, 'to such people, lectures on cottage gardening, poultry-keeping or bee-keeping are far more suitable'.<sup>55</sup> Women's continued participation in schemes of agricultural education, which were ostensibly of no interest to them, undermined these assumptions. The presence of such apparently unsuitable people as women, and those who worked in trades and professions unrelated to agriculture, is in itself interesting. Undoubtedly, some people chose to attend lectures, discussion societies and demonstrations as much for their social dimension as a means to learn about new approaches to agriculture. Informal education is often closely related to work and leisure, and adult education organisations such as the Workers' Educational Association found that their courses competed for attendees with other forms of leisure.<sup>56</sup> The demand for agricultural education was closely related to calls for increased leisure and wider social participation in rural areas, especially for women, young people and agricultural labourers, for whom public provision had been underdeveloped in the countryside.

### **Agricultural education, leisure and the rural community movement**

Rural Community Councils (RCCs) viewed agricultural education as part of a broader programme of regeneration which aimed to develop amenities for the 'general welfare of village people'. They coordinated state and voluntary provision of education, helping the 'providing bodies', such as the LEAs, universities and agricultural colleges, to get in touch with the villages. For example, the Yorkshire Rural Community Council helped to establish day continuation classes in agriculture by convening a meeting between 'voluntary organisations, farmers and other residents' to discuss ways in which young people could be encouraged to make the most of educational facilities available.<sup>57</sup> Professor N. N. Comber of the University of Leeds Department of Agriculture was the main speaker, and the RCC circularised over 900 people with reference to educational courses. For this educational

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<sup>55</sup> Ministry, *Review of Agricultural Education*, 1938, MAF 33/397, TNA.

<sup>56</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living, 1790-1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1961), 312-328.

<sup>57</sup> National Council of Social Service, *Memorandum on Rural Community Councils*, ED 46/103, TNA. The memorandum referred to a report of the Yorkshire RCC for 1932/3.

work, fifteen RCCs received grants from their county council education committees by the mid 1930s; the aggregate income of twelve RCCs from this source for the year 1933/34 was £2,380.<sup>58</sup>

For W. G. S. Adams and Grace Hadow, the founders of the first RCC in Oxford in 1921, a modern, scientifically informed agricultural industry was to be the bedrock of a reinvigorated countryside. They asserted that:

The coming of the petrol engine and the advance in scientific knowledge were revolutionising methods of farming, and that very different intellectual equipment would be required of farmers and workers alike if full advantage was to be taken of the new intensive methods. Agricultural co-operation, the advantages of which farmers were slowly coming to acknowledge, would also demand of countrymen generally a better understanding and experience of corporate action.<sup>59</sup>

This vision of agricultural education embraced the use of technology and science for the benefit of the farm worker as well as the farmer. The founders idealistically conceived of technological change as the beginning of a new epoch which required different 'intellectual equipment'. Rather than just learning about particular topics related to agriculture, farmers and workers needed the capacity to adapt to new ways of thinking and behaving. Developing 'corporate action' and co-operative habits was just as important as technical knowledge.

To encourage new modes of behavior, the RCCs became increasingly proactive in initiating informal educational activities, including village dramas, school choirs and the study of local history. Music and drama were treated as educational subjects because 'village people learn how to express themselves and how to break down the social prejudices which are a hindrance to co-operation and a sound village life'.<sup>60</sup> Alongside agricultural education through discussion societies or lectures, village dramas worked to

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. See page 60 of Chapter 1 of this thesis for information on Adams, Hadow, and the rural community movement.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

bring people together, making them equally valuable within the rural community movement.<sup>61</sup> Through participating in leisure activities ‘village people’ learnt how to ‘express themselves’, a necessary condition of citizenship, and by working together, co-operative habits would form, interrupting the ‘social prejudices’ which prevented the development of true community.

It was hoped that leadership, a quality deemed to be lacking in the countryside, would emerge naturally from co-operation. In 1925 the NCSS, the national body formed in 1919 to improve the coordination and efficiency of voluntary social action, convened a conference on the ‘reconstruction of country life’, at which RCC representatives agreed that leadership was required in order to develop ‘healthy recreation’ in the countryside.<sup>62</sup> This was seen as particularly important in relation to young people. As Grace Hadow explained, rural depopulation remained the countryside’s main problem, as the ‘brighter lads’ left, and those who stayed tended to deteriorate for lack of recreation.<sup>63</sup> Young women and girls were not specifically mentioned, but were most likely expected to enter domestic service before marriage, after which they would get involved in the ‘lighter’ branches of agricultural work. Hadow concluded that young people needed to develop the skills to enable them to both live and work in the countryside, and recommended a ‘three-fold programme’, which was educational, recreational and practical.<sup>64</sup>

Hadow saw the Young Farmers’ Club movement as the most effective means to realise this, since it provided agricultural instruction related to local farming alongside opportunities for supervised ‘healthy recreation’. The first club was formed by P. B. Tustin, the technical advisor of United Dairies

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<sup>61</sup> Burchardt, “A new rural civilization”, in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 31.

<sup>62</sup> National Council of Social Service, *The Reconstruction of Country Life: Being Notes on a Conference of Rural Community Councils held at Oxford in 1925* (London: NCSS, 1925), 29-31.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Limited at Hemyock, in Devon in 1921, to educate the young dairy farmer and ensure that milk production would be both 'efficient and economical' in the future.<sup>65</sup> The influential British newspaper pioneer Lord Northcliffe, who had seen the growth of 4-H clubs, a similar rural youth organisation in America, organised a publicity campaign through the *Daily Mail* highlighting the national importance of the movement in terms of boosting food production and regenerating rural life. The campaign claimed that the movement would 'bring the agricultural college to the door of the youngster... dignifying the farmers' vocation' and lessening the isolation of the 'mute inglorious Miltons' of the countryside.<sup>66</sup> YFCs were to provide 'a new and much needed type of rural education' rather than a narrowly vocational training in agriculture.

The potential of the YFCs to benefit the agricultural industry also caught the attention of the Ministry, who soon viewed it as 'integral' to the provision of agricultural education' as well as the 'broader purpose of creating a full and varied rural life'.<sup>67</sup> The Ministry supported its development from 1925 by providing technical advice, in line with its policy of assisting agriculture, but Ministry officials judged that supporting the social side of the movement was beyond the remit of a government department.<sup>68</sup> The Treasury limited the amount of direct help which could be given, and the total expenditure on the movement between 1925 and 1928 was £3,300. To aid the movement's growth, the Ministry asked the NCSS and Carnegie Trust to help develop it as a voluntary and self-governing movement, organised along similar lines to the WI.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> P. B. Tustin, 'Young Farmers' Clubs', *TYF*, March 1929, 8.

<sup>66</sup> Daily Mail Bulletin, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, c.1922, bound in *Agricultural Education Miscellaneous Pamphlets 1/3330/AGR*, MERL.

<sup>67</sup> Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 1-2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> The Rural Development Sub-Committee of the Carnegie Trust agreed to give £1000 a year for a period of 5 years.

In 1932, the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs (NFYFC) was formed, governed by an executive committee of representatives from the Ministry, Carnegie Trustees and affiliated clubs. There were around 100 Clubs, with a total membership of around 1,500 by 1932, rising to 412 Clubs and 15,000 members in 1939.<sup>70</sup> The Ministry and Carnegie Trustees supplied grants directly to the NFYFC, and although the NCSS relinquished its responsibilities for the movement, the first NFYFC chairman was W. G. S. Adams, who was also chair of the NCSS,<sup>71</sup> ensuring that the broader social aims of the movement in nurturing co-operation, leadership and community remained to the fore.

The movement accommodated the aims of the rural community movement as well as the Ministry by emphasising the need to develop traits such as 'co-operation' as much as technical skills. In July 1929 the annual conference of RCCs discussed the purpose and function of the YFCs in terms of their capacity to awaken new interests in young people, and form 'habits of co-operation' by 'reading and discussing all kinds of subjects'.<sup>72</sup> Adams reminded the NFYFC of 'the wider social significance of our Movement' in 1936, which was:

trying to build up the rural community, to train young people to come forward as leaders...to train them not only in business methods but in team work and co-operation.<sup>73</sup>

Education was conceived broadly within the movement as training in technical agricultural skills and business procedure, as well as qualities associated with good citizenship, in terms of co-operation, team work and leadership.

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<sup>70</sup> Shields, *50 Not Out!*, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Thirty-four members; three appointed by the MAF, three appointed by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees, eighteen appointed by the affiliated YFCs and ten co-opted by all of the above.

<sup>72</sup> 'Young Farmers' Clubs', *TYF*, August 1929, 147.

<sup>73</sup> quoted in Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 9.

The movement's emphasis on healthy recreation for the benefit of the community was also compatible with the Board's plans to extend the education system, particularly in line with the notion of 'social and physical training' in the 1921 Education Act. The Board believed that voluntary organisations could buttress schooling by providing a space between school and work in which young people could develop character and citizenship. In a 1924 circular to LEAs on the 'Promotion of Social and Physical Training', the Board stated that it was:

greatly impressed by the value of the contribution which voluntary agencies.... can make to the public System of education by supplementing and reinforcing the instruction and training given in Schools.<sup>74</sup>

Though the Board did not specifically mention the YFC movement, they approved in principle of collaboration between voluntary agencies and the 'public system of education'. In particular, they were prepared to give grant aid for initiatives such as local 'Juvenile Organisations Committees', which assisted those who were out of work by 'protecting young persons from the risk of deterioration of character'. Grace Hadow explained that Juvenile Organisations Committees were not greatly needed in the countryside, with its low levels of unemployment, but saw the YFC as a comparable organisation, since it gave technical instruction as well as character training.<sup>75</sup>

Collaboration between schools and voluntary organisations became more important in the context of proposals to raise the school leaving age, which would:

very materially change the relation of 'Elementary' to 'Adult' education. There will be a large number of big boys and girls of 15 who will need, especially in the country, 'vocational' instruction...probably we shall have to make considerable use of village institutes and farmers' clubs etc.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Board of Education, Circular 1338 issued to LEAs, 2 Sept 1924, ED 100/30, TNA.

<sup>75</sup> NCSS, *The Reconstruction of Country Life*.

<sup>76</sup> Tracing of letter sent to Major E. Garnsey, 6 September 1929, ED 11/187, TNA.

The nature and purpose of education in between the elementary and adult stages was still unclear in 1929, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, accommodating technical agricultural instruction in rural schools was increasingly seen as unacceptable. County and local authorities had limited time to devote to the complexities of continuation education, and curricula matters competed with ongoing plans for reorganisation and building.<sup>77</sup>

Various 'village institutes and farmers' clubs' offered the flexibility, facilities and personnel needed to execute any extension to the education system.

Certainly, the movement was increasingly envisaged by its organisers as central to the agricultural and continuation education provided by county councils and LEAs, particularly since this would place the movement on a more secure footing financially. A meeting convened by the Carnegie UK Trust in 1936, involving representatives from the Ministry and Board as well as the county councils and other interested bodies, aimed to encourage the county councils to give annual grants to the NFYFC as part of their expenditure on agricultural education. The meeting was chaired by Sir Percy Jackson, a leading figure in national education and chair of the West Riding Education Committee from 1918 until 1937,<sup>78</sup> who explained that:

what is necessary in the urban districts, from the point of view of technical education, is no less necessary in our leading industry- agriculture- and in our rural districts. But you cannot put a technical school system into our rural districts. In the rural areas of

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<sup>77</sup> Letter from Pelham (Board) to H.E Dale (MAF) explaining why LEAs had 'little time to consider problems of curriculum' in rural areas, 21 November 1929 ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Gosden, 'Jackson, Sir Percy Richard (1869–1941)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004: online edn, Oct 2009)

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63811>, accessed 19 Oct 2015. Jackson became president of the Association of Education Committees in 1924, was chairman of the education committee of the County Councils Association, and was a member of the Board's consultative committee from 1922 to 1938. He was appointed vice-chairman of the Carnegie Trust in 1934, and was a member of the executive of the Land Settlement Association, formed to provide estates where unemployed men from depressed areas could learn how to run their own smallholdings.



the West Riding of Yorkshire we were never successful with our evening school work until we tackled it from the standpoint of the Young Farmers Clubs. It is not that the Young Farmers' Club is the be-all and end-all of continued education... it is the foundation of it. We have now in the West Riding a considerable number of classes running in the normal way under the West Riding Education Committee, but the same young people attend those classes as go to the Young Farmers' Clubs. They have, largely, been enticed into the normal educational work that we expect young people to do because they have been trained into it... through the Young Farmers' Club Movement.<sup>79</sup>

Since agricultural education had been separated from other forms of technical instruction, it required a different mode of organisation. Rather than an urban imposition modeled on the requirements of technical education for other industries, the YFC represented a specifically rural type of continuation education, with strong links to the agricultural industry, which Jackson saw as the 'foundation' of continuation education in the countryside.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, for the county agricultural education staff, the YFCs were 'feeders', providing recruits for farm institutes, agricultural colleges and agricultural departments of universities.<sup>81</sup> W. S. Chalmers, agricultural organiser for Northumberland saw the movement as a means of creating a number of centres throughout a county where agricultural education could be systematically built up, with the young members forming, as they grew older, the 'nucleus of classes for more advanced technical instruction'.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, he thought that YFC club work could be used to carry out experiments and so add to the 'machinery for improving agricultural practice'.<sup>83</sup> The movement therefore had an important role in the contemporary and future agricultural industry, in facilitating new, scientifically informed approaches to farming.

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<sup>79</sup> NFYFC, *Report of Conference on Young Farmers' Clubs*, October 1936, 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> 'Farmers in the Making: A New Movement', *The Manchester Guardian* (20 October, 1937), 11; J. A. S. Watson, 'Young Farmers Clubs', *Scottish Journal of Agriculture* 16, 2 (April 1933), 6.

<sup>82</sup> 'Young Farmers' Clubs and Agricultural Education', *TYF*, August 1929, 148.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

The movement was also integrated into rural elementary education through School YFCs. School clubs were set up by elementary teachers, and involved work outside of school hours, during the evenings or weekends. They usually kept bees, rabbits or poultry, which could be accommodated easily in a school garden or small patch of land owned or rented by the school.<sup>84</sup> The YFC encouraged the formation of school clubs as a way to capture interest early, and produced a series of booklets aimed at teachers, with suggestions for school club work.<sup>85</sup> In some cases LEAs provided bee hives, for instance, or the material to build them, with the school paying for further equipment out of profits, or children could buy shares, usually to the value of one shilling or six-pence, to raise capital.<sup>86</sup> A. W. Blackman, head of Rye Senior School found out about the YFC movement at a teachers' course on school gardening held at the county institute of agriculture, and persuaded the county education committee to buy a one-acre paddock to enable him to start a 'school farm'.<sup>87</sup>

Club work offered the opportunity for practical instruction in the later stages of elementary education, introducing a rural bias to the curriculum and providing an effective link to continuation education. At an annual prize-giving at Chichester High School, which had a YFC, H. Ramsbotham, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education stated that:

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<sup>84</sup> For example, Gladys M. Peters, 'Bee Club Work', *TYF*, March 1929, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Annesley Voysey, *The Farm*, Young Farmers' Club Booklet Series, No. 1 (London: Longmans & Co., 1939); Reginald Gamble, *Bee-Keeping*, Young Farmers' Club Booklet Series, No. 2 (London: Longmans & Co., 1939), 41-42.

<sup>86</sup> Gamble, *Bee-Keeping*, 42.

<sup>87</sup> National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs, *Growing Pains: The Story of the First Year of the School Young Farmers' Club* (National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs, 1940); See also an amateur documentary film about the Rye Modern School YFC made in 1949, which depicted schoolchildren taking part in a variety of tasks over the course of the year, 'The School Farm', Film produced and directed by Lesley Holmes (1949) ES 960000 / 1 (Screen Archive South East, University of Brighton).

To-day in rural areas no education can be truly liberal that does not impart a knowledge of the countryside and some fitness to live the life of a farmer.<sup>88</sup>

This reasserted the Hadow report's recommendation that the rural school should dignify the vocation of the farmer and engage children with their environment. J. A. S. Watson, Professor of Rural Economy at Oxford, argued that by 1933 the YFC was 'recognised as filling what was formerly a serious gap in the educational scheme'.<sup>89</sup> Their educational programme differed from classroom study and possessed a 'special attraction for many young people'.<sup>90</sup> He concluded that:

The technical training is limited in scope, but need not on that account be the less sound. More important, however, is the introduction which the members obtain to elementary notions of finance and accounts; to the conduct of public business, to public speaking, and to the organisation of their own affairs; most important of all is the development of a real co-operative spirit, which is a marked feature of the older and better clubs.<sup>91</sup>

The movement's diverse aims cohered with those of the rural community movement, as well as the Board, Ministry and county agricultural education staff.

By the late 1930s, mounting anxiety over the possibility of another war reinforced support for the movement. It was seen as a crucial agency in developing both the technical skill and social organisation required to increase food production. The Board assisted the Ministry with promoting the movement, instructing HMI to bring it to the attention of local education authorities and the National Union of Teachers.<sup>92</sup> To this end, the NFYFC provided HMI with eighty-five pamphlets, thirty-six record-keeping books, eighty-five copies of *The Farming Year* by J. A. S. Watson as well as editions

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<sup>88</sup> 'Club News', *TYF*, March 1934, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Watson, 'Young Farmers Clubs', 1.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Board of Education, Memorandum on Young Farmers' Clubs, 1938, ED 22/204, TNA.

of *The Young Farmer*.<sup>93</sup> The Board began to provide grants to the NFYFC in 1939, followed by over forty county councils.<sup>94</sup>

The YFC provided a way to address the challenges surrounding continuation education in agriculture through collaboration between the state and voluntary sector. Initiated in Devon, it became a national, voluntary and self-governing organisation by 1932 with the inauguration of the NFYFC, but also formed a part of the public education system with the support of the Ministry, the Board and county councils. For the Ministry it was part of the machinery of agricultural education. It provided education directly, and clubs acted as hubs from which young people could be recruited into further instruction at farm institutes, agricultural colleges or non-institutional settings. Further, YFCs offered a channel by which county agricultural education staff could reach farmers. For the Board, the movement was an extension of their conception of rural bias and a useful way to negotiate the boundaries between elementary and adult education, and for the NCSS and RCC it was a means to develop co-operation, leadership and community in the countryside.

### **The education of women and girls for rural life**

Though YFCs were open to boys and girls, much of the discussion around continuation education in the countryside concerned boys and their future occupations in agriculture. The Board had specified that domestic subjects in country elementary schools should have a rural bias, but there was little clarity about how this should be developed within continuation education, and the lack of provision of agricultural education for women meant that the Board and Ministry had few precedents to draw on. To plan for the education of women and girls, the Board and Ministry investigated and reported on their lives and work, and their particular requirements compared to urban women.

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<sup>93</sup> Letter from W. H Wood (Board Inspectors' section) to Mr Wilkins (Ministry) requesting NFYFC pamphlets, 13 May 1938; Letter from V. C. Lowe (Ministry) to W. H. Wood, 31 May 1938, agreeing to follow up on the request; Letter from M. Hiles (Secretary of the NFYFC) to W. H. Wood giving details of materials to be sent, ED 22/204, TNA.

<sup>94</sup> Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 10.

With an active involvement in the 'lighter' branches of agriculture as well as a central role within the family and village, rural women required broad educational provision which linked the domestic, agricultural and social aspects of their lives.

By the early 1920s the WI movement was already providing education in agriculture, handicrafts and a host of other subjects to rural women, offering training in technical skills as well as opportunities for leisure. Club meetings tended to follow the same broad pattern: over two hours the 'business', including minutes and notices, was followed by an educational lecture, demonstration or film. Afterwards, there would be a social half hour, including dancing, singing or games, and then tea.<sup>95</sup> Described as a 'rural woman's university' at a Conference of Educational Associations at University College London in January 1920,<sup>96</sup> the WI provided a starting point for investigations into the educational requirements of 'village women'. While most of their educational work was aimed at married women, there were junior groups in some areas which extended to those above the age of fourteen. The Board reported on 'the educational work of women's rural institutes' in 1925, covering courses recognised by their regulations on technical education, classes arranged by individual institutes, and lectures and demonstrations aided by the Ministry.<sup>97</sup>

The Board noted the diversity of instruction, shaped by the movement's funders as well as the demands of members. Many WIs had initiated co-operative craft industries during the war alongside their work in aiding food production, and, impressed by the role of the WI in reviving rural craft work, the Development Fund increased their grant to the NFWI 'for the encouragement of handicrafts' from £700 to £1,850 between 1922 and

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<sup>95</sup> Andrews, *Acceptable Face of Feminism*, xiv.

<sup>96</sup> L. Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts, H&C (February 1920), 5.

<sup>97</sup> Board of Education, *Report on the Educational Work of Women's Rural Institutes* (London: HMSO, 1925), 7.

1926.<sup>98</sup> In some areas county federations also received grants from the local education authority to supply teachers trained through the Guild of Learners, which was established in 1921 to organise the teaching and exhibiting of handicrafts,<sup>99</sup> and is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The WI promoted adult education more generally through a sub-committee of the NFWI, which encouraged the study of 'subjects of liberal education' as well as the use of libraries through the Carnegie library scheme.<sup>100</sup> Each institute was provided with a list of lectures drawn up by the county federations, sometimes with the help of the RCC. Oxfordshire County Federation, for instance, composed a list of 105 subjects, of which seventy-four were of general interest and thirty-one were practical. Institutes then selected subjects and lecturers according to the funds at their disposal, and though in some villages only a single lecture was asked for a 'considerable number' held courses ranging from six to twenty lectures.<sup>101</sup> The report noted that provision for recreation under the WI stimulated curiosity about academic and liberal subjects. Pageants and drama, for instance, inspired interest in literature and history.<sup>102</sup> Practical steps were taken to assist individual members. For example, one institute paid the fees of a member attending an agricultural college, and some county federations provided funds for members to attend Guild of Learners classes.<sup>103</sup>

The WI's provision of informal education was seen as particularly suitable for countrywomen. The Board depicted customs relating to life and work in the countryside as incompatible with educational development on an urban model. Work within the rural home, inclement weather and seasonal events such as hay-making and fruit gathering meant that 'not all countrywomen are

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<sup>98</sup> The grant towards general expenses had decreased from £4,125 in 1922-3 to £950 in 1926-6.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 6.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 21.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

ready to receive the more formal type of instruction usually given in towns'.<sup>104</sup> The Board concluded that since there was a strong, organic connection between rural life and work, women's education in the countryside had to be less formal than that in the towns. Short intensive courses, single lectures and demonstrations were thought to be more appropriate for countrywomen, since they were less likely to interrupt rural life.<sup>105</sup> Certainly, itinerant and flexible instruction did benefit rural women, as it would any busy, working adult, especially those living in remote areas with poor transport links. However, there was a danger that relying on this type of provision would undermine more systematic educational developments.

Indeed, the Board conceptualised the differences between rural and urban women, as between rural and urban children, in intellectual as well as practical terms. Countrywomen were held to possess a different type of intelligence to their urban counterparts. The report claimed that although they had been 'deprived' of interests due to the remoteness of village life, the WI gave an outlet their 'latent natural ability':<sup>106</sup>

Countrywomen do not naturally think quickly, they need time for reflection and for the application of knowledge gained, but they know what they want and what is worth having.<sup>107</sup>

Although apparently isolated and slow, countrywomen had an instinct for 'useful knowledge'. Teachers were criticised in the report for holding patronising attitudes and lacking 'sympathetic understanding'. The education offered by the WI was seen as authentic, capturing the knowledge that the countrywoman deemed 'worth having' and providing a model of rural education for women and girls.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 8.

The interdepartmental committee of the Board and Ministry also set out to report on the 'practical education of women and girls for rural life', and formed a sub-committee for this purpose in 1928 chaired by Lady Denman, president of the WI. Denman pointed out that the countrywoman was relatively unknown in an 'official' capacity, leaving her educational requirements undetermined, and set out to uncover and document details of the 'every-day life of the country woman', which other reports had only looked at in an ad hoc way.<sup>108</sup> Based on their detailed research into rural women's lives, the authors urged policymakers to take into account the experience and knowledge possessed by 'women of the agricultural community',<sup>109</sup> whose role in the industry had been overlooked.<sup>110</sup> They contended that while many of the problems of the agricultural industry were economic in origin, improved education for both men and women was a prerequisite for change. In addition to assessing the contribution women made to agricultural production, the report highlighted the hardship of daily life for rural women as part of a broader initiative, led by the WI, to improve the conditions of rural life.

The report focused on adult women, since it was necessary to frame a system of 'practical education' to address her needs before formulating the requirements of education for the adolescent.<sup>111</sup> The authors quantified women's involvement in agriculture in terms of those who were 'independently' engaged in the industry as paid workers or as farmers, such as Isabel Fry, and those who were 'co-operatively' involved through their position in the 'rural home'. They used figures gathered by the Ministry detailing the number of agricultural workers in England and Wales on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1926, and found that of a total of 794,000 workers, 104,556 were women and girls. These figures included daughters working on holdings but did not include women occupiers, wives of occupiers or domestic servants, who often also undertook agricultural work. To remedy this, the committee

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<sup>108</sup> *Denman Report*, 9.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



added on the 19,440 women farmers counted by the 1921 census, and arrived at a total of approximately 124,000 women who were 'independently occupied' in the industry.<sup>112</sup>

There were significantly more women co-operatively involved in agriculture. Since such a category was not officially recognised, the authors had to decipher the number of women involved using data from the 1921 census. Of over 1,171,000 men engaged in agricultural occupations in England and Wales, the committee disregarded the 135,000 aged under eighteen, who were unlikely to be married. This left more than a million men engaged in agriculture who each had a 'corresponding woman', whether a wife, mother or sister. These women were 'the centre of a rural home' and in many cases made a direct contribution to agricultural production, leading to the conclusion that there were around a million women working in agriculture as part of a family.

The 'rural home' extended beyond the 'home' as conventionally defined to include the garden, farm and village, and involved both domestic and agricultural work. The report highlighted the mutual dependence of men and women as a distinctive and underlying feature of rural life:

The women in the country homes are partners in a very special sense. The intimate association of these women with their menfolk in the industry, especially noticeable in the case of the farmer and smallholder, but also obtaining with the agricultural worker...is not normally found in industries other than agriculture, of which it is an essential and characteristic feature.<sup>113</sup>

This passage connected women's work within the home, farm, smallholding or garden with that of men within the industry. Although it was conservative in situating women in the home and discussing their contribution in terms of their relationship to men, it highlighted the contribution they made as 'partners' to agricultural production. The authors expected that trends in the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 8-10

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 10.

industry would further the need for improved agricultural education among women, noting that the growth of stock-rearing and poultry-keeping, both the 'lighter' branches of agriculture traditionally managed by women, would lead to an increase in the number of women and girls employed in agriculture. Furthermore, the authors argued that agricultural education would improve everyday life for rural women by allowing them to carry out their work in the rural home more efficiently, making them more likely to encourage their families to stay in the countryside.

The report's findings built on their notion of women as 'partners' in agriculture. It recommended that more women should be represented on the committees organising agricultural education in order to aid the development of suitable courses, that instruction in domestic science should be correlated with technical agricultural subjects,<sup>114</sup> and that rural domestic economy instructresses should be appointed to work in twelve counties, fully grant-aided by the Ministry.<sup>115</sup> The report was well received, and the following year the interdepartmental committee sent a circular to county agricultural education authorities recommending, among other proposals, the extension of agricultural education along the lines of the Denman report.<sup>116</sup> By 1939 sixteen counties employed full-time instructresses, several of whom were provided with an assistant, and twenty-four counties employed part-time instructresses.<sup>117</sup>

The Denman report also supported the extension of agricultural education within the voluntary sector. The WI had started to meet the demand for education among countrywomen which the state had traditionally failed to acknowledge, providing classes in handicrafts, cooking, dressmaking and 'health matters' as well as agricultural subjects. The report noted that the

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Ministry, Circular letter to County Authorities for Agricultural Education, 7 November 1929, ED 11/187, TNA.

<sup>117</sup> Appointment of Rural Domestic Economy Instructresses by Local Agricultural Education Committees: Minute by Miss Summers to Miss Goodfellow, January 1942, ED 46/221, TNA.

'combination of voluntary and official effort has produced a useful system, the extension and development of which is desirable'.<sup>118</sup> For girls above the school leaving age, they recommended that continuation education should be co-ordinated with the work of the YFC, and proposed that qualified instructresses employed by county authorities could assist the development of the girls' side of club work. The authors pointed out, however, that the WI and YFC were not intended to 'relieve' local authorities of their responsibilities towards rural women and girls.<sup>119</sup> While the report supported collaborations between county authorities and WI branches, it cautioned that voluntary initiatives were to supplement rather than replace 'official provision.'

Voluntarism was, however, fundamental to the report's 'fresh conception of agricultural education',<sup>120</sup> since it allowed for a flexible system of education suited specifically to the lives of countrywomen, mirroring the uniquely close association between men's and women's work in agriculture, and the active contribution of women to the home, farm and village. The accounts of rural women within the Denman report and the Board's report on WIs highlighted their contribution to the agricultural industry, home and village as integrated areas of their life. This gave countrywomen a new status and value, as 'partners' in agriculture with specialist knowledge, and upheld notions of rural/urban difference. The Board and Ministry therefore acknowledged the need to extend adult and continuation education in the countryside, but in a different capacity to that in urban areas, and as a result, they relied heavily on the WI to develop education suited to the specific needs of rural women.

Women's agricultural education became more important to policymakers towards the end of the 1930s, when there was a need to increase food production. The Minister of Agriculture assured the Devon County Federation of WIs that the government was working to ensure that an increase in production could be effected quickly, if necessary, and reiterated that

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<sup>118</sup> *Denman Report*, 17.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

countrywomen could play an important part in this, since their first 'natural' concern was the health of the family. 'Fresh wholesome food and the peaceful atmosphere of the countryside' best nurtured a healthy mind and body:

Milk, meat, eggs, fruit and fresh vegetables are at the foundation of sound health, and all of these commodities are the better for the active interest and help of womankind. It is notorious that a good farmer is usually a bad gardener, and that where his womenfolk do not provide a timely jolt the farmhouse is often less well supplied with vegetables, and the flowers that do so much to brighten the home.<sup>121</sup>

This acknowledgment of women's contribution to agricultural production emphasised their importance to food production within the home, but placed them in a supportive and ultimately subordinate role as helpers rather than partners.

### **Policy developments in agricultural education**

By the end of the 1930s, provision of agricultural education for young people and adults was still patchy and uncoordinated. Reporting in 1938, the Ministry admitted that in many cases 'knowledge is absorbed by the simple process of looking over a neighbour's hedge',<sup>122</sup> and concluded that:

Too much is expected of agricultural education and consequently, too much is attempted... Agricultural education cannot work miracles and it cannot afford to ignore, as with poultry for instance, accepted principles and proved practice.<sup>123</sup>

A lack of coordination and funding were identified as fundamental problems in the development of agricultural education in the Luxmoore report (1943), which investigated the condition of agricultural education in England and Wales with a view to improving and developing it after the Second World War. It adopted a broad definition of agricultural education, describing it as 'the

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<sup>121</sup> Minister of Agriculture's message to Devon County Federation of Women's Institutes Produce Exhibition, 7 October 1938, ED 17/416, TNA.

<sup>122</sup> Ministry, Review of Agricultural Education, 1938, MAF 33/397, TNA.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

various processes connected with the art and craft of farming' involving training in 'the sciences and their application to agriculture.'<sup>124</sup> It distinguished between institutional education, through farm institutes, agricultural colleges and universities, and non-institutional education derived from centres offering advice to farmers, instructional classes, correspondence courses and discussion groups and associations.<sup>125</sup> The committee investigated education required by farmers, as well as landowners, bailiffs, farm workers, land agents, agricultural engineers, teachers and technical advisers. It recommended that a 'National Council for Agricultural Education' should be established, funded by the Treasury, to coordinate teaching, research and advice into one national service. It also advocated the development of the YFC movement as the most effective agency through which to deliver agricultural education for young people.

The Luxmoore Report had implications for the Education Act 1944, which, among other measures, raised the school leaving age to fifteen and reorganised secondary education into a tripartite system of grammar schools, secondary technical schools and secondary modern schools.<sup>126</sup> The Act was written by R. A. Butler (1902-1982), who became president of the Board of Education in 1941, in consultation with other Members of Parliament, senior civil servants, teachers' organisations, local educational administrators and Church leaders.<sup>127</sup> Butler was reminded by his advisors that 'technical and commercial education are firmly embedded with the educational system, while agricultural education is not'.<sup>128</sup> Among the notes and memoranda

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<sup>124</sup> *Luxmoore Report*, 6.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>126</sup> Hailed as radical at the time, the Act has since been seen as a conservative measure by historians of education. See Brian Simon, 'The 1944 Education Act: A Conservative Measure?', *History of Education* 15, no. 1 (1986): 31-43. For a discussion of debates surrounding the Act and its broader social significance see Gary McCulloch, *Educational Reconstruction: the 1944 Education Act and the Twenty-first Century* (London: Woburn Press, 1994).

<sup>127</sup> Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*, 264-317.

<sup>128</sup> Note prepared for R. A. Butler about the future of farm institutes, 27 May 1943, ED 136/554, TNA.

prepared for Butler regarding the construction and implementation of the 1944 Act was a press cutting from *The Economist*, reporting on the future organisation of agricultural education. It noted that the main challenge was that of:

bridging the gap between the student straight from the agricultural college, well primed with theory, and the farmer, wise in experience, but conservative in method. It is not sufficient to provide an army of trained agriculturalists if no preparations are made for their reception at the farm.<sup>129</sup>

The gap between theory and practice, between the agricultural college and the farm, remained a fundamental issue in the organisation and content of agricultural education. Fisher and the AEA had clashed over how to deliver practical instruction, agricultural organisers had tried to coordinate the dissemination of scientific research with the concerns of practical farmers, and the RCCs had worked to resolve this by trying to alter the outlook, attitudes and behaviour of farmers and agricultural workers, connecting agricultural education to the working and recreational lives of the rural community. With the need to link the agricultural college to the farm and home, spaces of informal education, such as the YFC and WI, became increasingly important.

## **Conclusion**

In proposals for day continuation schools, Fisher had acknowledged the need to cater both for technical agricultural instruction and the 'intellectual interest' of villagers in order to improve rural life, complicating the aims of continuation education. The AEA and county agricultural education staff embraced science and technology, but their perception of the rural community was stratified in terms of class and gender. To reconcile the need to teach technical skills in agriculture with the need to provide for the cultural and social needs of the community, the Board and Ministry encouraged collaboration between county authorities and voluntary organisations, leading to overlaps between education for adults and young people, and between

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<sup>129</sup> Press cutting, 'Agricultural Education', *The Economist*, June 24 1944, ED 136/554, TNA.

initiatives in education and leisure. Overall, the scope of agricultural education broadened throughout the 1920s and 1930s through the Ministry's and county scholarship systems, increased funding for developing non-institutional education, and the growth of the YFC and WI movements, though the extent and quality of provision varied regionally.

With close links to the agricultural industry, county agricultural education staff and the rural community movement, instruction through the YFC and WI sustained a separation between agricultural and other forms of technical education. Both the YFC and WI provided rural, rather than purely agricultural education, in that education of a technical or scientific nature often went hand-in-hand with informal educational activities to 'improve' rural life. While the Ministry and county agricultural education staff valued the YFC's potential to introduce the upcoming generation of farmers to scientific, efficient methods of farming, the NCSS and RCCs saw it as a way to develop citizenship, leadership and community in the countryside.

Collaboration with the voluntary sector relieved pressure on policymakers in the Board and Ministry, and the success of the YFC and WI conceivably contributed to the slow development of agricultural education in formal settings supported by the state. Furthermore, the YFC movement prioritised the farmer over others who worked in agriculture or rural trades, and the Denman report's conception of education for rural life largely catered for those who were married to, or were the daughters of farmers, sidelining women agricultural workers themselves, and areas of rural life outside of agriculture. Having outlined the broad aims of the movements and the rationale for their support from the Board, Ministry, RCCs and NCSS, the following two chapters look at their educational and social significance in more detail. Chapter five considers the aims of the YFC movement and how they played out in practice in relation to gender and class, and chapter six looks at handicrafts through the WI's Guild of Learners.

## Chapter 5

### The Young Farmers' Club: education, recreation and leadership

The YFC offered a form of continuation education, from the school to the farm institute, giving instruction in the technical skills and business procedure associated with farming. At the same time, it offered 'healthy recreation' and sought to develop the personal qualities of its young members as citizens. Co-operation and leadership, nurtured through committee work and participation in competitions at agricultural shows, were emphasised as necessary traits of the modern farmer. Reconceptualising the role of the farmer in terms of public service, the movement fed into the social mobilisation of farmers as an organised group during the 1930s, following the retreat of the gentry and aristocracy from rural life. These social and educational aims interrelated, in that an active involvement in village life and success in farming, based on knowledge of science and business efficiency as well as rural traditions, legitimised the young farmers' future leadership of the countryside.

The formation of the first YFC in Devon in 1921, provided a means for the scientific and commercial staff of United Dairies to reach the farming community. P. B. Tustin, the founder, claimed that local families were enthusiastic about the venture, and that several members of the club induced their parents to 'reconstruct their cow sheds on modern lines'.<sup>1</sup> The young members were seen as more receptive to change than their parents, and though it was a movement for young people, adults dominated club life. Boys and girls aged between ten and twenty-one paid affiliation fees of 1s for those over fifteen years and 6d for those under, fifty per cent of which was sent to the NFYFC with the rest retained to spend locally. Learner members under ten years of age and senior members over the age of twenty-one were also permitted, provided that they could not hold office, vote or take part in competitions. Club members elected from their own number a chairman,

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<sup>1</sup> Tustin, 'Young Farmers' Clubs', 8.



secretary and treasurer, and were guided during monthly meetings by an adult club leader.<sup>2</sup>

An advisory committee helped the club leader to develop the club programme. Committees usually included representatives of the local NFU branch, county agricultural education staff, parents and local farmers, and could also involve RCC members, staff of commercial organisations and other interested residents.<sup>3</sup> Club programmes varied, but stock-keeping was the most important activity across clubs. All members had to look after 'something which lives and grows'. Whether it was 'animal, bird or plant' depended on regional farming patterns and the size and fortunes of the club. Most of the early clubs kept cows or pigs, but rabbits, poultry and bees all constituted relatively cheap stock options. The advisory committee and club leader organised the initial purchase of the stock, usually by acting as guarantor for a loan, before it was allocated to club members.<sup>4</sup> Members kept detailed records of the progress of their stock in record books, which they shared and discussed at monthly meetings held either in the local schoolhouse, parish room, village hall or local farm, before engaging in related educational activities, such as listening to lectures from experts, going on farm visits or watching films. Members also formed committees to organise social events such as whist drives and dances, as well as public speaking competitions and village dramas.

The YFC's 'three-pronged' educational, practical and recreational approach was described in a detailed statement of its objectives accompanying an article on the movement in *The Times* in 1928:

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<sup>2</sup> NFYFC, *Young Farmers' Clubs: Their Work and Management* (NFYFC, n. d.), 3-8, HC 502/98/69, SRO.

<sup>3</sup> The Horsham Club Advisory Committee for instance consisted of representatives from West Sussex Agricultural Education Committee, the Horsham Branch of the NFU, the Ploughing Match Society, and the Fat Stock Show Committee. The Club Leader was Mr J. C. W. Simms, the West Sussex Assistant Agricultural Organiser, see Dora Dowding, 'My Experiences at the Dairy Show, 1928', *TYF*, March 1929, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Tustin, 'Young Farmers' Clubs', 8-9.

1. To instruct boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 20 in the general principals of thrift, application, perseverance and self-confidence.
2. To teach them through the conduct of their own meetings something about public speaking, debating, and the proper management of local public affairs, and to take an intelligent interest in the communal life of the district in which they live.
3. To impart sound instruction in modern dairy farming and beef production, in the breeding and management of pigs, sheep, goats, poultry, rabbits and bees, and in horticulture; to carry out simple experiments and field trials on seeds and roots with artificial manures; to demonstrate the labour-saving and other advantages of modern and efficient methods; to study simple farm cost-accounting and book-keeping; to encourage the development of practical rural domestic science in its application to every-day life.<sup>5</sup>

These aims present interesting tensions between self-help and public service. The first and third objectives sought to foster the personal development of the individual member as well as improving technical skills for an 'efficient', 'modern' agricultural industry. Boys and girls were expected to participate in the same activities, with girls also taking an interest in 'rural domestic economy'. The second aim linked these two objectives; with self-confidence and a sound knowledge of agriculture, the young farmers were expected to develop the ability and legitimacy to manage 'local public affairs' within the communal life of their area.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the movement had a broad base of support, from the state, county authorities and RCCs. Drawing on the YFC magazine, *The Young Farmer*, records associated with the NFYFC and the archives of individual clubs, this chapter unpacks the movement's diverse objectives, and examines how the movement sought to encourage modern, scientific approaches to farming and an active involvement in the rural community.

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<sup>5</sup> Reproduced in Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 2.

### **A modern agriculture: science, efficiency, and service**

*The Young Farmer* insisted on the movement's national importance. Mrs Nugent Harris, Editor of the WI's magazine *Home and Country* sent a word of welcome to the publication, which it hoped would 'prove an inspiration to the young farmers on whom the hopes of old England rely'.<sup>6</sup> This emphasised the importance of an agricultural youth movement in preserving the countryside as the foundation of Englishness. Indeed, the first issue insisted that club work benefitted 'the land, the livestock and the Nation' and was worthy of the support of 'all classes of the people',<sup>7</sup> portraying farming as an occupation in the service of the public, with relevance to people across social groups living in rural and urban areas. The movement spanned the U.K with clubs in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but within the journal Britain was generally synonymous with England.

An Anglo-centric focus was broadened to an extent by articles about farming, and country life in Europe and America.<sup>8</sup> However, reports on agriculture in Africa were couched in discourses of 'Whiteness', resting on racial stereotypes of African backwardness.<sup>9</sup> A story about a young farmers' movement 'in darkest Africa', for example, mocked the club leader, 'Big Chief Nincompoop' and imagined the wild animals such a club might keep as stock, including lion clubs, baby elephants, gazelles and snakes.<sup>10</sup> The story served to highlight the modern nature of the English movement by pointing out its incompatibility with the supposedly unscientific farming methods and undemocratic village life of Africa.

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<sup>6</sup> Nugent Harris, 'A Word of Welcome', *TYF*, March 1929, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Tustin, 'Young Farmers' Clubs', 9.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Grace Hadow, 'The Back of Beyond', *TYF*, March 1929, 17. This article is about rural Italy; Wm. C. Noxon, 'Boys and Girls in Rural Ontario', *TYF*, March 1929, 22; W. S. Benson, 'Canadian Farming', *TYF*, June 1929, 113; Dorothy Kahn, 'The Four-H Clubs of America', *TYF*, July 1929, 122; 'Young Farmers' Clubs in the Dominions', *TYF*, December 1932, 165.

<sup>9</sup> For example J. A. S. Watson, 'On The Reasons Of Things', *TYF*, May 1929, 70. This article tells of the 'natives' of Africa who thought agricultural science was 'magic'.

<sup>10</sup> 'The Young Farmers' Club Movement in Darkest Africa', *TYF*, December 1933, 154-55.

Modernity was understood in terms of science and efficiency, and there were silences around alternative or organic approaches to farming that were emerging at the time. After the Second World War, in 1947, *The Essex Young Farmer* addressed 'controversial' ecological approaches to agriculture, which emphasised sustainability and nutrition, in an article entitled 'muck and mysticism',<sup>11</sup> but there was a lack of engagement with such ideas in the main journal during the interwar period. Agriculture was described as a changing industry, with tractors, binders and chemical manures. *The Young Farmer* speculated over the impact of technological advancements for the future of farming,<sup>12</sup> and sought to challenge the stereotype held by 'townspeople' of the farmer as a conservative 'jolly, red-faced chap who never had to use his head' and who farmed along the same lines as his grandfather had.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, although stock-keeping and stock-judging were usually conducted with reference to farm animals or produce, the NFYFC Executive Council decided in 1935 that a club which dealt with machinery such as tractors would also be acceptable as it was 'living' in the sense of being actively used,<sup>14</sup> testifying to their willingness to embrace a modern agriculture.

The journal drew attention to the scientific and 'efficient' methods advocated by the twenty 'Research or Experimental Stations' around the country.<sup>15</sup> The county agricultural organiser and their staff of instructors were described as 'officers' who 'bear the brunt of the forward line of attack of agricultural knowledge and progress',<sup>16</sup> and were the first point of call for help and advice over various farming related matters. For example, the journal advised a club leader in Kent who wanted to know how to help one of his members to become a judge at agricultural shows to go in the first instance to the county

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<sup>11</sup> Alec Barbour, 'Muck and Mysticism', *The Essex Young Farmer*, 1947, 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> 'New Ideas in Farming', *TYF*, March 1934, 9.

<sup>13</sup> J. A. S. Watson, 'Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow', *TYF*, December 1934, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> John A. Caseby 'Agricultural Research and The Young Farmer', *TYF*, September 1929, 192.

<sup>16</sup> 'Agricultural Organisers and Technical Advice', *TYF*, February 1930, 51.

agricultural organiser.<sup>17</sup> Young Farmers were encouraged to ‘set an example of professional thoroughness by getting acquainted, through the help of their Club Leader, with the best opinions on the different farming problems’,<sup>18</sup> reiterating the importance of the county agricultural education staff to solving the problems of modern farming. Science was equated with progress, and farmers were expected to form professional, collaborative networks with the county agricultural education staff.

The ideal club leader embodied this transition from older, individualist methods of farming towards new, collaborative approaches which embraced science and technology. Their qualities were summed up in a poem, ‘Our Leader’:

He went to an agricultural college  
And came home simply stuffed with knowledge;  
He’s always got an answer pat  
To the ‘why’ of this or the ‘wherefore’ of that

He talks when he feels in a learned mood,  
Of ‘artificial’ and ‘mineral food’,  
Or with sparkling eye and flashing glance  
Expounds ‘sex-linked inheritance’

But although this hard stuff must be done  
He mixes it up with lots of fun-  
And thus in wise and witty fashion  
He feeds us, too, on a ‘balanced ration’.<sup>19</sup>

The club leader was expected to bring the ‘agricultural college’ back ‘home’, sharing their knowledge of the ‘hard stuff’ of modern, scientific agriculture, while ensuring that club life was fun. The NFYFC described the club leader as ‘in the position of elder brother or sister’ to the members.<sup>20</sup> This paternalistic metaphor represented a particular view of young people as governable and in need of supervision. It conformed with the archetypal youth leader as friendly but responsible and had particular resonance in a youth movement serving the ‘hereditary occupation’ of farming. In common

<sup>17</sup> ‘Correspondence’, *TYF*, April 1929, 48.

<sup>18</sup> Caseby ‘Agricultural Research and The Young Farmer’.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Our Leader’, *TYF*, April 1929, 49.

<sup>20</sup> NFYFC, *Young Farmers’ Clubs: Their Work and Management* (NFYFC, n. d.), 12, HC 502/98/69, SRO.

with the leaders of other youth groups such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, the club leader was required to have an interest in 'educational progress', in addition to a 'sympathy with country pursuits', knowledge of agriculture as a science and experience of 'business procedure'.

Agricultural scientists had a prominent voice within the journal.<sup>21</sup> J. A. S. Watson had a regular column, in which he highlighted the importance of scientific discovery and modern methods. An article on 'the fight with disease', for example, detailed old explanations for the cause of disease in crops and the discovery of modern methods of dealing with it, such as land drainage.<sup>22</sup> His first contribution, an article entitled 'On Knowing and Doing' recalled his own experiences of working on his father's farm and the difficulty of 'understanding' the land. He pointed out that membership of the YFC gave young farmers a chance to 'experiment' with applying science to practical problems, an experience which would be useful to them throughout their lives,<sup>23</sup> and would help to ensure the future prosperity of agriculture.<sup>24</sup> His columns insisted that young farmers would benefit from their club membership through the knowledge gained by practical and scientific instruction, as well as the relationships forged with each other and the county agricultural education staff.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Sir J. Arthur Thomson, 'A Biological Walk in Winter', *TYF*, January 1931, 3-4. Thomson was Emeritus Professor of Natural History at the University of Aberdeen. Further examples include, J. A. S. Watson, 'The Soil and its Cultivation', *TYF*, February 1931, 31-32. This was the first article in an eleven part series, finishing in January 1932. A. H. Blissett 'Producing healthy Pigs', *TYF*, June 1933, 51. Blissett worked at the Rowett Research Institute. There was also a series of articles on 'New Ideas in Farming' beginning in June 1933 and ending in June 1934, detailing the use of new fertilizers, feed mixtures for animals.

<sup>22</sup> J. A. S. Watson, 'The Fight with Disease', *TYF*, June 1929, 97.

<sup>23</sup> ---, 'On Knowing and Doing', *TYF*, March 1929, 7. The author is stated as G. S. Watson, Professor of Rural Economy at Oxford University and member of the NAYFC. This is an error, as J. A. S. Watson in fact held these positions.

<sup>24</sup> For example, there was an advertisement by International Correspondence Schools for agricultural courses under the heading 'Knowledge and Prosperity for Young Farmers', *TYF*, September 1929, 227.

Agriculture was conceptualised as a business, which needed to be managed profitably, as much as a science. Business procedure was introduced through stock-keeping, which provided a 'profitable hobby' for members. Blending ideas around business efficiency with small-scale, self-help activity, it served as a microcosm of good farming, through which members developed technical knowledge as well as the ability to manage accounts. Before being allocated stock or land, the young farmers and their parents were required to sign an undertaking stating that any money advanced for its maintenance would be repaid, and that the stock would not be sold except with the permission of the advisory committee. The committee also inspected their premises for suitability,<sup>25</sup> which would conceivably have deterred some from joining the movement.

This habit of inspection was maintained during meetings when the club leader checked record books. A NFYFC 'textbook' on the aims of the movement underlined the importance of a 'carefully-kept Record Book' as the first and most important step towards a 'successful career as a farmer in the future'.<sup>26</sup> The description of farming as a 'career' gave it a professional status and highlighted its attendant need for training and accountability. Members were assessed on their proficiency in stock-keeping at county agricultural show competitions, where they were expected to enter their record books and specimens of stock or produce for a valuation and sale. The club would take a share of the profit to cover the purchase cost of the stock and foodstuffs, and the remainder would go to the member, giving them a taste for profit.

In order to evaluate the success, and therefore likely revenue of their stock, members were taught stock-judging.<sup>27</sup> Working out how to teach it, especially to groups spanning a range of ages, presented a challenge for club leaders.

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<sup>25</sup> NFYFC, *Work and Management*, Appendix A: General Rules' HC 502/98/69, SRO.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Watson, 'Young Farmers' Clubs', 3.

In the first issue of *The Young Farmer*, Dora Dowding of Horsham YFC explained how she was taught. First, she listened to lectures illustrated by lantern slides about the main points by which to distinguish a dairy from a beef cow, which involved learning technical vocabulary such as the meaning of 'milk veins', 'top line', and 'spring of rib'. Secondly, the members were taken on visits to local farms where they were given demonstrations and encouraged to put their ideas into practice. Thirdly, they had to draw point-by-point comparisons between two animals, and finally between a class of animals, ordinarily of four, placing them in order of merit and giving verbal reasons for their decision.<sup>28</sup>

This method was criticised for being too difficult for children below the age of fourteen.<sup>29</sup> Dora admitted that 'it was not easy... especially when we had to 'give reasons' for our placings',<sup>30</sup> and though she won a silver medal for the highest individual score in a stock judging competition at the 1929 Dairy Show, other members struggled. This can be seen in the example of a sparsely completed stock-judging card below, in figure 5:

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<sup>28</sup> Dowding, 'My Experiences', 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Watson, 'Young Farmers' Clubs', 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



Name.....

EAST ANGLIAN INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE.

STOCK JUDGING CARD. -

No. of Animal.	A	B	X	Y
Placing.	1	<del>3</del>	4	2
General Appearance etc.	lovel top line		top line not so good	
Head & Neck.				
Forequarters.	good chest			
Body.		well made animal.		
Hindquarters.				side back bones.
	well developed veins well up behind	uneven teats	uneven teats light colour	rather pedicled

Figure 5: Stock-judging card. HC/502/98/66 (Sussex Record Office, Bury St. Edmunds Branch).

Although nothing is known of the age or circumstances of the participant, there is little detail in terms of the comparison between the animals and the comments are vague suggesting a lack of engagement with, or poor understanding of, the task.

An emphasis on stock-judging and accurate record keeping cohered with a realignment towards business methods in agricultural education more generally. At a conference on the 'Technique of Teaching' in 1923, A. D. Hall, chief scientific adviser to the Ministry, argued that 'Whilst 30 years ago agriculture was regarded as an assembly of applied sciences...[it] has its own fundamental science, that of accountancy'.<sup>31</sup> Though not from a farming background himself, Hall became interested in agricultural education after becoming an Oxford University extension lecturer, and gained credibility within the farming community by talking to farmers about the uses of scientific research, visiting their farms and giving extramural lectures on agricultural science.<sup>32</sup> Hall went on to recommend that students should be taught broad questions of economics and financial results, taking note not only of the details of agricultural processes but also of the conditions under which processes were carried out, such as the number of horses and men, and the number of days required to cultivate a particular acreage. Conceptualising agriculture as a business put the management of accounts on an equal footing with the scientific and technical elements of agricultural education.

YFC members needed an understanding of how farming operated as a business not only to help them calculate their profits and losses, but also to enable them to comprehend its function within the economy. With the growth of the NFU, farmers were expected to publicly represent the agricultural industry and take part in corporate action. An article in *The Young Farmer* in

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<sup>31</sup> A.D. Hall, 'The Function of the College Course' (paper presented at the technique of teaching conference, Aberystwyth, July 10-11, 1923), abstracts of addresses in *Agricultural Progress*, 1 (1924), 79-81.

<sup>32</sup> Hall was appointed as the first principal of South Eastern Agricultural College at Wye in Kent in 1894, and became the director of the Rothamsted Experimental Station at Harpenden in Hertfordshire in 1902. He began working with the Development Commission in 1910 and was appointed secretary to the Board of Agriculture in 1917, where he remained until 1927, acting as chief scientific adviser from 1920. Paul Brassley, 'Hall, Sir (Alfred) Daniel (1864-1942)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2014) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33647>, accessed 16 Nov 2015.

1929 entitled 'Pull Together' emphasised the importance of working together to represent the interests of farming. It detailed the success of farmers who had 'banded together' to achieve a higher price for their milk the previous autumn, showing the power of 'joint effort'. The article urged the young farmers to maintain the close ties fostered by their club membership in the future, and told them to seek advice in order to discover 'better ways of managing land, feeding stock and selling your produce'.<sup>33</sup> Working co-operatively offered new ways of organising the production and sale of goods, and presented a strong public image. By 'pulling together' farmers would improve their capacity to respond to economic pressures.

It was assumed that the farmers' success and prosperity would filter down to the rural community. A prize-winning essay on the value of competitions to the movement claimed that they:

make the world at large understand that the Young Farmers of today, who hope to be the experienced and successful farmers of tomorrow, are bending all their energies to the task of discovering how to revive a dying industry, [and] to use scientific knowledge where it is financially practical...Competitions encourage efficiency, efficiency leads to prosperity, and a prosperous agriculture leads to a prosperous community.<sup>34</sup>

The essay linked the financial success of farmers to the greater good of the countryside, with the assumption that the successful and prosperous 'farmers of tomorrow' would naturally lead to the future prosperity of the countryside as a whole.

Some rural reformers challenged this focus on 'prosperity'. For instance, J. W. Robertson Scott,<sup>35</sup> editor of *The Countryman*, argued that the movement

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<sup>33</sup> Jean Gilkinson, 'Pull Together', *TYF*, June 1929, 112.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Frank, 'The Value of Competitions to the Young Farmer', reprint from The Shrewsbury Young Farmers' Club Journal, in *TYF*, September 1932, 129.

<sup>35</sup> Scott was a journalist and author, who had written extensively about rural matters before founding *The Countryman* in 1923, a journal aimed at both rural and urban audiences, which sought to inform readers about the reality of country life. He was an enthusiastic supporter of

should encourage the realisation of the 'high possibilities' of living in the countryside besides make a living and insisted that the movement's chief aim was the development of a 'higher rural civilization'.<sup>36</sup> This echoed the rural community movement's aim of forging a 'new rural civilization' based on democracy and citizenship, and implied that the movement should nurture the cultural life of the community. Indeed, in 1928 the West Sussex RCC suggested that YFCs should be called 'Rural Life Clubs' to underline their wider role and relevance to the whole rural community rather than just the sons and daughters of farmers.<sup>37</sup>

The broader social aspirations of the movement were not necessarily incompatible with its aim of improving efficiency in agriculture, since both required co-operation. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the movement was producing

men and women with ideas of co-operation and of taking part in local affairs in the service of the whole community, two factors which have been sadly lacking in agriculture and rural affairs.<sup>38</sup>

Co-operation in agriculture was intended to have a broader social significance in 'rural affairs'. Unlike the individualistic, self-serving older generation of farmers, young farmers were learning to take part in their locality in the 'service' of the community as a whole. A lack of popular participation in 'local affairs' was perceived as a problem in the countryside more widely. Reporting on the development of adult education in rural areas in 1922, the Board of Education Adult Education Committee pointed to the

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the WI and published *The Story of the Women's Institute Movement* in 1925, as well as his best-selling book *England's Green and Pleasant Land*, which described the life of a contemporary village. He had been educated partly at Quaker schools, and was a committed Liberal party supporter. John Cripps, 'Scott, John William Robertson (1866–1962)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2010) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35787>, accessed 29 Feb 2016.

<sup>36</sup> J. W. Robertson Scott, 'The Best Side of Club Work', *TYF*, April 1929, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> 'Farmers in the Making', *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 Oct 1937, 11.

persistence of an undemocratic rural 'feudal tradition' linked to the agricultural industry, in which village activity had depended on two or three individuals, usually landowners. The report supported the growth of the WI and 'other schemes' run on a democratic, co-operative basis as a way to 'recreate rural culture'.<sup>39</sup> The YFC movement was an example of such a scheme, working towards the redevelopment of 'rural culture' for a more democratic rural society.

Alongside co-operation, leadership was deemed to be wanting in rural areas. An article in *The Young Farmer* by Vaughan Nash, who had been vice-chairman of the Development Commission from 1919 until 1929,<sup>40</sup> explained that Englishmen were 'deferentially minded', a good quality as long as they had the 'right kind of leaders', who were 'capable, clear-minded, public-spirited men and women'. Nash believed that committee work within the YFC would cultivate a 'seed bed of leaders', who would go on to serve the rural community and address the lack of leadership in the English countryside.<sup>41</sup> As P. G. Dallinger, a representative of the Ministry, pointed out, club life provided a training ground for the future members of the rural community movement and the various voluntary organisations it involved.<sup>42</sup> Training in

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<sup>39</sup> Adult Education Committee, *The Development of Adult Education in Rural Areas*, Paper No. 3 (London: HMSO, 1922), 5.

<sup>40</sup> Vaughan Nash (1861–1932) was a left-leaning journalist and public servant with an interested in labour issues. In 1915-16 he had been a member of the government committee that had prepared the scheme to settle demobilised soldiers on the land. Although for much of his working life he lived in Hampstead, he owned a farm at Froxfield, near Petersfield in Hampshire, and a house in Loughton, Essex. On his retirement in 1929, he became influential in rural affairs by advising the Development Commission. See J. M. Lee, 'Nash, Vaughan Robinson (1861–1932)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, Oct 2007; online edn, Jan 2008) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40819>, accessed 29 Feb 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Vaughn Nash, 'Concerning Leaders', *TYF*, March 1930, 65-66.

<sup>42</sup> P.G. Dallinger, NCSS, *Report on a Conference*, 31. Dallinger had also been on the Lamb Committee.

leadership was more actively pursued in some areas such as in Essex, where the RCC considered running a course in leadership for club leaders.<sup>43</sup>

This focus on co-operation and leadership within the community cohered with progressive visions of social and economic reconstruction on the political left. From the mid-1920s the countryside was identified as a key electoral battleground.<sup>44</sup> The Labour Party began to conceptualise agriculture in terms of 'public service', relating farming to the whole of society, both urban and rural.<sup>45</sup> They emphasised the need for farmers to focus on poultry farming, stock breeding, meat production and pig rearing, rather than large-scale arable farming.<sup>46</sup> While the YFC did not directly engage with leftist ideas about the future of agriculture, they facilitated new ways of thinking about the position of the farmer as being in the service of the community and nation.

With the onset of the depression in the 1930s, the NFYFC sought to promote the movement's role in public service. In December 1932, *The Young Farmer* opened with 'A Call to Young Farmers' by W. G. S. Adams, which urged members to 'help others' and 'be missionaries of your movement' in order to initiate the formation of 'tens of thousands' of clubs around the country to provide 'good training' for the 'thousands of fellows and girls who are out of work'.<sup>47</sup> The NFYFC became involved in a scheme to give 'training and occupation on the land to unemployed boys under twenty-one', and in 1934 a Stockton Young Farmers' Unemployed Club was set up to train boys aged between sixteen and twenty-one in poultry farming. It was partly funded by the NCSS and was supplemented by funds raised locally. Drawing on long-running associations between masculinity and land work, and between the countryside and healthiness, *The Young Farmer* reported that there was an improvement in the 'health and physique of boys participating in the scheme',

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<sup>43</sup> Minutes County Federation Committee meeting held at East Anglian Institute of Agriculture in Chelmsford, 23 September 1937, HC/502/98/56, SRO.

<sup>44</sup> Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*.

<sup>45</sup> Griffiths, 'Farming in the Public Interest', 166.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 172

<sup>47</sup> W. G. S. Adams, 'A Call to Young Farmers', *TYF*, December 1932, 153.

in addition to the skills they had acquired in poultry keeping.<sup>48</sup> This underlined the national significance of the movement in leading and supporting ways of life which could be adopted more widely through becoming, in the words of the Denman report, 'healthy hobbies'.

### **Heritage and the stewardship of the countryside.**

As the future leaders of the countryside as well as the agricultural industry, YFC members were encouraged to drive the modernisation of farming while respecting rural heritage. As these two objectives were potentially in conflict, the journal urged members to learn about the history of farming and the countryside and use their judgement to negotiate the boundaries between science and tradition. For example, *The Young Farmer* ran articles on 'ancient farming communities', which highlighted the continuities and changes in farming practices over time.<sup>49</sup> Members were encouraged to find out about the traditions of the countryside, and write into *The Young Farmer* with their discoveries. The second issue, for instance, included a short article on an old 'one-man power plough', and urged members to send in photos or drawings of other such 'ancient tools' to record them before they 'are broken up or lost'.<sup>50</sup> The journal covered rural crafts as well as agricultural customs. The June 1929 edition included a report on old techniques of rush-work based on a pamphlet produced by the Rural Industries Bureau,<sup>51</sup> which sought to both preserve and modernise rural crafts to ensure that they were economically sustainable.<sup>52</sup>

New innovations were to be tempered by a respect for older methods. The young farmer was expected to bring 'new life to farming' by 'his enthusiasm, his reverence for tradition, his aptitude for new knowledge, his judgement

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<sup>48</sup> 'The Stockton Young Farmers' Unemployed Club', *TYF*, March 1934, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ewart Walsh, 'Very Ancient Farmers Indeed', *TYF*, September 1929, 179.

<sup>50</sup> 'A One-man Power Plough', *TYF*, April 1929, 39.

<sup>51</sup> 'Rush-work', *TYF*, June 1929, 98-99.

<sup>52</sup> Bailey, 'Rural Industries and the Image of the Countryside' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 132-149.

when the new clashes with the old, and his intuition of the truth'.<sup>53</sup> Scientific innovation and business efficiency within agriculture were to be moderated by a respect for heritage and tradition. Miss E. H. Pratt, a representative from the Ministry, explained in *The Young Farmer*, for instance, that though the formation of the first club in Hemyock was geared towards the modernisation of dairying, it was also in-keeping with existing practices. It had been a local custom in Devon for farmers to give their children a calf, lamb or poultry to form the foundation of a herd or flock, so an 'old English practice was revived, in up-to-date guise'.<sup>54</sup> Written into a broader history of the countryside, the movement was portrayed as consistent with rural traditions, yet cautiously modernising.

A booklet on bee-keeping is instructive for understanding the way in which the YFC navigated the tensions between modernisation and the 'traditions' of the countryside. It described bee-keeping as a science and a craft, and gave practical advice on materials and care alongside information about the use of honey in 'olden times'.<sup>55</sup> It pointed out, for example, that old-fashioned 'skeps', a basket placed open-end-down with an entrance for the bees, had the benefit of allowing the bee colony to recover, unlike the more intensive environment of modern hives. Similarly a 1932 article in *The Young Farmer* stressed the continuity of traditional methods of bee-keeping, pointing out that old straw skeps were still used in some areas alongside modern hives and methods.<sup>56</sup> Rather than blindly relying on science and the advice of experts, members were encouraged to make informed decisions, bearing in mind not only profits but also the heritage of the countryside.

The notion of farmers as guardians of rural heritage was more explicitly articulated towards the end of the 1930s, when the prospect of another war seemed increasingly likely. At the 1937 annual general meeting of the NFYFC, W. S. Morrison, Minister of Agriculture, declared that a 'great sense

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<sup>53</sup> 'Clean Boots, by "Farmer's Wife"', *TYF*, June 1929, 108.

<sup>54</sup> 'A message from Miss E. H. Pratt', *TYF*, March 1929, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Gamble, *Bee-Keeping*, 38-41.

<sup>56</sup> A. H. Bowen, 'The Old Straw Skep', *TYF*, January 1932, 16-17.



of reality' drawn from the 'old ideas of the country' gave form to 'the nation's make-up'.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in an address to the Durham county federation of YFCs in February 1939, Professor J. W. Paterson, Principal of the West of Scotland Agricultural College, stated his firm conviction that 'a prosperous rural community is absolutely essential for the stability and well being of any nation'.<sup>58</sup> He asserted that:

The land is a great heritage. You are the trustees of this heritage, and now is the time to be training to fit yourselves for the stewardship which in due course you will undertake.<sup>59</sup>

While landowners and the gentry had been trustees by birthright, young farmers were in 'training' to take on a more active stewardship of the land, which was part of the nation's heritage. This contrasted with the 'traditional' leadership of the countryside by the aristocracy and gentry, 'stewards' who responsibly conserved the land for future generations of their family to inherit. The YFC harnessed this concept of stewardship within their idea of leadership, writing the young farmers into a tradition of paternalism within the countryside, but broadening it out to accommodate the ideals of service for the common good.

In 1939, the new Minister of Agriculture, Sir Reginald Dorman Smith, sent a circular to clubs giving his 'whole-hearted support' to a movement 'designed to preserve the heritage of our countryside'.<sup>60</sup> This prioritised the preservation of the countryside over the modernisation of agriculture, indicating a shift in emphasis. Whereas at the beginning of the period the aims of the movement were bound up with the hope of modernising the countryside, by 1939 they were weighed down with the anxiety over the destructive potential of another war. Preservation had a newfound

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<sup>57</sup> W. S. Morrison, 'Address: Annual General Meeting of the NFYFC', *TYF*, December 1937, 196.

<sup>58</sup> 'Some things a Young Farmer should be- and know: extracts of an address by Professor J. W. Paterson', *TYF*, March 1939, 31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Circular sent to County Federations, HC 502/98/73-4, SRO.

importance, and the Ministry reinforced the idea that farmers were stewards who were duty bound, as they had been during the First World War, to stay on the land in order to increase home food production and safeguard the nation.

The public duty of YFC members became more important during the Second World War, when service to the nation was encouraged within a range of youth organisations.<sup>61</sup> Young people engaged in agriculture had a particular contribution to make in relation to food production, and membership of an active YFC was officially recognised as an approved form of national service.<sup>62</sup> The title page of a book on rabbit keeping from 1939, 'The Ministry of Food urges you to keep rabbits. This book tells you how to do it', emphasised the national importance of YFC club work.<sup>63</sup> A bee keeping booklet had a similar tone; 'To save sugar, eat honey. To get honey cheaply, keep bees'.<sup>64</sup> These read like directives, which anticipated the propaganda slogans later used to encourage rationing. They appealed to a patriotic, common-sense notion of duty, and placed the young farmer, through their club work, as important contributors to the war effort. This was harnessed after the war in relation to reconstruction. D. J. Ewing, the president of the Essex County Federation of YFCs stated in the first issue of *The Essex Young Farmer* in 1947 that:

The movement has an important role to play in the rehabilitation of the nation.... The Young Farmer stands in the same relation to his club, his country and his National Federation as does the citizen to his Local and National governments. A good young farmer will undoubtedly also be a good citizen... this new venture [the establishment of *The Essex Young Farmer*] should enhance the opportunity which membership of

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<sup>61</sup> Berry Mayall and Virginia Morrow, *You Can Help Your Country: English Children's Work During the Second World War* (London: Institute of Education, 2011), 205-235.

<sup>62</sup> NFYFC Memorandum sent to the County Federation Secretaries, 4 March 1942, HC 502/98/79, SRO.

<sup>63</sup> Annesley Voysey, *Rabbit-Keeping*, Young Farmers' Club Booklet Series, No. 3 (London: Longmans & Co., 1939).

<sup>64</sup> Gamble, *Bee-Keeping*.

a YFC offers for learning how to function as a member of a corporate organisation whose activities extended through club, county and nation to the world outside.<sup>65</sup>

This description of the movement as a microcosm of the nation cemented links between farming and public service which had developed during the interwar years through the idea of duty to the community and the nation. Describing the movement as a 'corporate organisation' stressed the importance of collective responsibility. The organisational structure of the clubs, with a local branch linked to a county and national federation, mirrored the relationship between the individual and 'his' local and national government, and committee work provided a way to practice democracy and nurture leadership.

### **Young Farmers' Clubs at a local level**

The YFC movement positioned farmers as future leaders of the agricultural industry, the rural community and the countryside as a whole. There was a new breed of stewardship, aligned to citizenship, community and a modern agriculture. This new role required training in the technical skills and scientific knowledge associated with farming, as well as in co-operation and leadership. But how did this work in practice in such a localised movement? The programme and activities of individual clubs varied depending on regional farming patterns, the personalities and motivations of those involved, and the quality and resources of county agricultural education services. *The Young Farmer* and records of the NFYFC raise questions around the dynamics of the movement on the ground in terms of the relationship between farmers and agricultural organisers, the links between the YFC and their locality, and the significance of club membership for individual members. The remainder of the chapter examines these issues with reference to the archives of individual clubs.

The archive of the Bures & District YFC, established in Suffolk in 1937, depicts how club leader Ernest J. Batten managed the club.<sup>66</sup> Batten was a

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<sup>65</sup> D. J. Ewing, 'Foreword', *The Essex Young Farmer*, 1947, 1.

Quaker and had been a conscientious objector during the First World War. After being imprisoned in Dartmoor for several months, he was employed under the Home Office Scheme on a number of farms in Essex, before moving to Nayland, a village on the Suffolk side of the border between Suffolk and Essex. He worked there as a farm bailiff to the East Anglian Sanatorium Company between 1918 and 1931, before taking up farming with his family in the same area.<sup>67</sup> The relatively small folder containing the Bures club archives, consisting of typed meeting agendas, notes scribbled on envelopes, and jottings of rough sums on scraps of paper, gives an impression of Batten as a busy farmer who fitted club work around managing his farm. The records are catalogued with his farm papers, giving some indication of the extent to which the YFC at a local level was as much a private undertaking, often initiated by a farmer with his family in tow, as it was a public movement, which was part of an emerging national system of continuation education.

Certainly, Batten's family played a leading role in everyday club life. His children, Francis J. Batten and Margaret Batten acted as the club chairman and secretary,<sup>68</sup> and Ernest's wife Ellen Jane Batten, helped with the organisation of social events and the buying and selling of stock.<sup>69</sup> As was the norm in the YFC movement, the activities of the Bures Club revolved around stock-keeping. Sixteen members kept pigs,<sup>70</sup> and Batten monitored their progress, noting details of their weight and condition, and keeping track of positions they were awarded in competitions.<sup>71</sup> The purchase of stock was the club's most significant expense at £64.1s, with additional associated

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<sup>66</sup> Ernest J. Batten managed his father's farm in Gloucestershire during the First World War and joined The Society of Friends at the end of 1916.

<sup>67</sup> His family's farm was Goody's Farm, then they farmed at Wissington Grove, Wissington (c.1945-1982). Members of the family were taken into partnership in 1939 and the firm of E.J. Batten & Co. continued in the Nayland area until March 1982.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Margaret Batten to Littlewood, 12 April 1939, HC/502/98/41, SRO.

<sup>69</sup> Receipt, HC/502/98/44, SRO.

<sup>70</sup> List of Pig Keeping Members, HC 502/98/42, SRO.

<sup>71</sup> Stock-keeping notes, HC/502/98/26-27, SRO.

costs including cartage and food purchases. The total expenditure of £154.19s. 4d was balanced by the club's income, which came mainly from the sale of pigs at £129.1s.10d, with some additional profit from the whist drive and dance and a contribution of £3 from the Suffolk Agricultural Committee.<sup>72</sup> The club also had six gardening members, conceivably because a garden was cheaper and less demanding in terms of time and space than an animal, thereby opening membership to less well-off families. This is suggested by the fact that many members who engaged in the same activities were siblings: there were two McLeods who both kept pigs, and two Fishers who kept gardens. The club was open to boys and girls, though there appeared to be only four girl members.

While the nature of club activities depended on regional differences, snippets of club news sent in to the *Young Farmer* suggest that the experience of the Bures Club was fairly typical in terms of the frequency of meetings and the types of activity on offer. During meetings at their local school, which were roughly every month, members discussed how their stock was progressing before listening to talks by county agricultural staff on topics such as 'poultry keeping for the beginner', 'farming 50 million acres' and 'the kitchen-garden of today',<sup>73</sup> watching film screenings and organising social events such as whist drives, dances or 'hat nights'.<sup>74</sup>

To develop the club's stock-keeping activities and educational programme Batten collaborated with neighbouring farmers and the county agricultural education staff. The Bures club advisory committee consisted of the assistant agricultural organiser, J. Littlewood, the parents of members, and other local residents, including the distinguished country writer and farmer Adrian Bell.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Club Accounts, HC/502/98/13, SRO.

<sup>73</sup> List of films, HC 502/98/12, SRO.

<sup>74</sup> Club programme, HC 502/98/11, SRO. A hat night was a public speaking event. Members wrote topics on scraps of paper and put them into a hat, before taking turns to select a topic and talk about it. See Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 53-54.

<sup>75</sup> AGM Minutes, HC 502/98/10, SRO.

The first committee meeting was held at Batten's farm, and outside of meetings Batten corresponded regularly with Littlewood to organise club work such as arranging farm visits,<sup>76</sup> reinforcing informal networks between farmers and organisers.<sup>77</sup>

The importance of technical education and scientific research to the overall aims of the movement gave the county agricultural education staff a central position. Although Batten was the driving force of Club activities, he was heavily reliant on Littlewood for advice on educational activities. For example, in one letter Batten informed Littlewood that he had taken a few members along to some 'interesting and helpful' cattle and pig inspections, but felt that the younger members needed 'more training in elementary things' first. He had also 'been persuaded' to enter five of the older members to judge at the Essex Show, but felt it went 'over their heads'.<sup>78</sup> Batten was clearly hopeful that Littlewood would give some direction to these educational activities.

As well as being frequently called upon for advice and assistance on educational matters, Littlewood was expected to attend YFC social events. In a letter asking for advice on the composition of meal for three pigs which were 'doing badly', Batten also detailed social events, such as their 'very interesting Hat Night', which he felt enabled the young members to relax and

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Adrian Bell (1901–1980) left London in 1920 to be a farm apprentice at Hundon, Suffolk. He then bought a small farm, in nearby Stradishall, and sold up in 1929 to fulfil his ambition to write. His sympathies lay with older styles of farming, and he had a great respect for earlier rural artefacts. A persistent theme in his 'land literature' was an effort to link past, present, and future in village life. K. D. M. Snell, 'Bell, Adrian Hanbury (1901–1980)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004)

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56898>, accessed 2 March 2015.

<sup>76</sup> Club programme, HC 502/98/11, SRO.

<sup>77</sup> For example, letter sent from J.C. Fletcher, District Agricultural Organiser for Chelmsford who was involved with the Yeldham and Shalford YFC to Batten inviting members of the Bures club to go stock judging at a farm near Braintree with the Yeldham YFC, 4 May 1938, HC/502/98/33, SRO.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Batten to Littlewood, 7 June 1938, HC/502/98/35, SRO.

socialise: 'the youngsters really did talk and I think enjoyed themselves'.<sup>79</sup> In another letter primarily concerning advice over how to get cockerels for some of the club members who wanted to try raising them, he also expressed his expectation that Littlewood would support their latest social event. In a draft letter, he penned 'we hope to see you at the Whist drive and dance', but he reinforced this more strongly in the final letter: 'we are looking forward to seeing you (and a large party) at the Whist drive and dance'. This is a small difference, but it gives an impression of the level of expectation on Littlewood to provide technical advice, as well as support for less formal activities, outside of 'office hours'.

The tone of Littlewood's reply was more formal than Batten's requests. He thanked him for his letter, matter-of-factly informed him that he would get in touch with the county poultry instructor about the cockerels, briefly apologised for not attending the Whist drive Batten had so clearly hoped he would join, and did not respond to comments about the Hat Night.<sup>80</sup> Too much could be read into these subtle distinctions, but they suggest if not a degree of tension, then certainly the extent to which club work had different implications for the 'time-spaces' available to farmers and organisers.<sup>81</sup> Littlewood perhaps felt an obligation to be more formal in his correspondence as he was undertaking a role in the movement in his capacity as a paid county employee, whereas Batten, in managing his own farm, was not accountable to an employer, and his club leadership was more closely tied to the private life of his family.

The collaborative networks between farmers and county staff engendered by the adults who organised the movement were imitated through the activities of the Bures Club members. The habit of asking advice and working co-

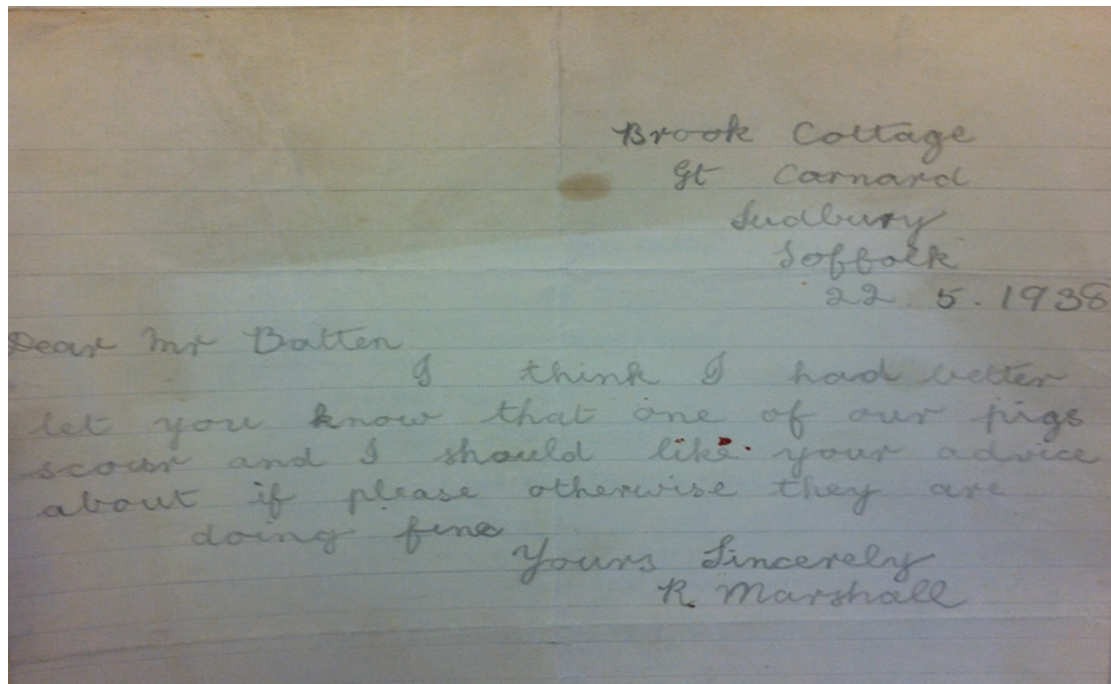
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<sup>79</sup> Letter from Batten to Littlewood, 24 October 1938, HC/502/98/36, SRO.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Littlewood to Batten, 1 November 1938, HC/502/98/40, SRO.

<sup>81</sup> Sarah Mills, 'Geographies of Youth Work, Volunteering and Employment: The Jewish Lads' Brigade and Club in Post-war Manchester', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 40, no. 4 (2015): 524. In this article Mills discusses the tensions between volunteering and employment.

operatively for example, were modelled through the activities around stock-keeping. A young member wrote a letter to Batten in 1938, shown in figure 6 and transcribed below:



**Figure 6: Letter from R. Marshall to Ernest Batten, 22 May 1938. HC 502/98/10 (Sussex Record Office, Bury St. Edmunds Branch).**

Dear Mr Batten

I think I had better let you know that one of our pigs scour and I should like your advice about if please otherwise they are doing fine

Yours Sincerely

R Marshall

The very careful handwriting, attentively formal layout and polite tone along with grammatical errors gives the sense of adult, probably parental, supervision and suggests that Marshall fell towards the lower end of the ten to twenty-one age range. The use of the word 'advice' is noteworthy. It signifies a particular type of information: relevant, useful and applicable, exactly the qualities that the advisory services and agricultural organisers were trying to demonstrate. After receiving the letter, Batten wrote to Littlewood,<sup>82</sup> so whilst for Marshall the letter performed the practise of

<sup>82</sup> Letter from member, HC 502/98/34, SRO.



seeking advice, it also had the effect of prompting contact between farmer and organiser. As much as technical advice about pig feed, how to go about seeking advice and from whom was part of the pedagogy of the letter.

The stock-keeping activities of individual clubs also provided small-scale case studies into the viability of potential products and markets. The West Suffolk Agricultural Committee, for example, wrote about YFC activities in their monthly bulletin *Agricultural Education*, which aimed to share news about education and research to benefit farming. In 1938, they reported on the accounts and records detailing the rearing and sale of Bacon pigs kept by members of the West Row Young Farmers' Club, which demonstrated the small profit margin open to those producing bacon pigs at the time.<sup>83</sup> Reports of YFC activities also functioned as a way of sharing pedagogic practice. For instance, the bulletin reported on the results of table cockerels kept by the Bradfield YFC as a very encouraging 'experiment' for introducing stock management to children under the age of fourteen.<sup>84</sup>

The close association between club membership and local farming was reinforced through the participation of young farmers in local agricultural shows. As well as being important in terms of sharing knowledge, with exhibitions and demonstrations of new machinery and stock, agricultural shows were a social occasion for farmers, agricultural labourers, rural crafts and tradesmen, and those who were not engaged in agriculture.<sup>85</sup> Situated near the border of Suffolk and Essex, the Bures club took part in stock-judging competitions at various shows including the West Suffolk Show, the Essex Show, the London Dairy Show and the Royal Show at Windsor.<sup>86</sup> Highlighting the value of training in stock judging, J. A. S. Watson drew

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<sup>83</sup> West Suffolk Agricultural Committee, *Monthly Bulletin on Agricultural Education* 4, no. 4 (July, 1938) HC/502/98/68, SRO.

<sup>84</sup> West Suffolk Agricultural Committee, *Monthly Bulletin on Agricultural Education* 4, no. 2 (May, 1938) HC/502/98/67, SRO.

<sup>85</sup> Nicholas Goddard 'Royal Shows and Agricultural Progress, 1839-1989', *History Today* 39, no. 7 (1989): 44-51.

<sup>86</sup> Meeting agenda, 18 April 1938, HC/502/98/60, SRO.

attention to the 'performance of competitors... particularly their powers of expressing themselves in terse and lucid speech'.<sup>87</sup> As well demonstrating YFC members' knowledge of animal husbandry, stock judging competitions showcased their assertiveness and capacity for public speaking.

The notion of 'performance' is helpful for examining how these competitions functioned and the ways in which the organisers and members had to make up, or 'improvise' activities.<sup>88</sup> Whereas activities around stock-keeping represented the weaker sense of 'performance' in that they were part of the day-to-day activities of club life, the part YFC members played in agricultural shows constituted the stronger sense of the term. Stock-judging competitions were heavily choreographed, following an established set of practices, involving the associated paraphernalia of banners, rosettes, cups and medals.

At the Essex agricultural show at Braintree, members of YFCs were asked to take part in a judging demonstration in the grand ring immediately after the 'Grand Parade of Stock'.<sup>89</sup> Information issued to clubs beforehand set out how the competitors were expected to conduct themselves. They had to march in single file in to the ring, preceded by four Dairy Shorthorn Cows:

On entering the Grand Ring the procession will turn in the direction of the Grand Stand and the cows will be led past the front of the Grandstand, and make a complete circuit of the Ring. The competitors all of whom must be wearing white coats or smocks, will be grouped according to the club or team they represent. The first of each group will carry a banner indicating the name of the club or team. The competitors will follow the cows until they arrive at a point at which a marker will be standing, here they will turn and march in the direction of another marker, standing in front of the Grandstand. Here the procession will halt and line up evenly spaced between the two markers in front of the Grand Stand. At this stage the banner bearers should drop their banners to the ground.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Watson, 'Young Farmers' Clubs', 5.

<sup>88</sup> Burke, 'Performing History', 35-52.

<sup>89</sup> Instructions for stock-judging demonstration, HC 502/98/65, SRO.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

The directive language creates a vivid image of how the young farmers were placed and displayed. It reads like a script, a set of instructions detailing how they should act, and the display was well placed to be seen by spectators, since it occurred immediately after the main parade of stock. They all had to wear white coats, and at an earlier point in the competition they were required to wear their YFC badge, or brooch for female members, making them distinguishable as YFC members.<sup>91</sup> Competitions were reported in the agricultural press alongside the results of other stock-judging events, ensuring a wider audience than those present.<sup>92</sup>

Participation within agricultural shows publicly displayed the young farmers as central to the future of farming, and worked alongside other social events to integrate them into the recreational life of the countryside. Whilst stock judging was regarded as a 'serious' competition, other more light-hearted events, such as a best scarecrow competition, functioned to make the members more visible to the rural community. YFCs frequently organised social events within their locality, and *The Young Farmer* claimed that 'many YFC dances are 2 a.m. affairs- an hour once thought impossibly late in the country, except for the Hunt Ball- or in lambing time'.<sup>93</sup> While the YFC's agricultural education programme was largely aimed at future farmers, their social events appealed to a broader audience. Leisure traditions in the countryside had been divisive, with events such as hunt balls being the privilege of the few who were wealthy enough to enjoy blood sports,<sup>94</sup> to the exclusion of the many small farmers and labourers who toiled until the early hours. At the same time, many who worked in agriculture and rural trades

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<sup>91</sup> Information about stock-judging, HC 502/98/64, SRO. Badges and brooches were 6d each, see NFYFC, *Work and Management*, Appendix C, HC 502/98/69, SRO.

<sup>92</sup> The results of competitions that the Bures club were involved in at the Essex show for example, were written about in the West Suffolk Agricultural Committee's *Agricultural Education Bulletin*, HC 502/98/68, SRO.

<sup>93</sup> 'Extracts from the Chief Organizer's Report: Social Events', *TYF*, December 1934, 188.

<sup>94</sup> Blood sports had remodelled the landscape as a recreational ground for landowners, see Eric L. Jones, 'The Land that Richard Jeffries Inherited', *Rural History* 16, no. 1 (2005): 83-93.

engaged in recreational activities which their employers knew little or nothing about. YFC dances, arranged by committees of young people and open to the whole community, were an attempt to introduce a new dimension to rural recreation which reconciled these conflicting leisure customs.

The archive of the Bures YFC, then, gives an impression of practices within individual clubs, and the degree to which the ideals of the organisers were met in actuality. To an extent, stock-keeping succeeded in bringing farmers into close contact with the county agricultural education staff, and facilitated the dissemination of advice based on science. Within the agricultural industry, regional economies and local markets continued to be significant, and the YFC played a small but active role in them. There was not necessarily an active discourse of citizenship and democracy, but there was an emphasis on public service and the greater good, in an attempt to balance out a focus on farming for profit. The records of the Somerset County Federation offer an insight into the workings of the movement at county level. They show the scope of the county agricultural education staff to wield influence, but that individual clubs could be remote and operate quite separately from the movement as a whole.

W. D. Hay, the principal of the Cannington farm institute was a leading force in the Somerset county federation of YFCs. Other members of the county federation committee were dependent on him for facilitating and coordinating stock-judging, and he was active in setting both the educational and social agenda of clubs within the county. For example, he proposed a county federation rally, involving running races, sack races and tug-of-war events, and made suggestions for speakers and invitees.<sup>95</sup> The movement gave Hay a platform to assert his authority over other more established agricultural societies. He refused a request by the Mid-Somerset Agricultural Society for a £5 grant towards an 'Inter County YFC Stock-Judging Competition' which was to be held at their annual show, for example. Pointing out that practically all show societies in Somerset accommodated YFC competitions, Hay

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<sup>95</sup> Minutes of the Somerset County Federation, 18 Jan 1935, A/APW, SHC.

asserted that the county federation did not have enough money to start giving grants, a point which was supported by the other members.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the *Young Farmer* noted in 1932 that it had become the norm for agricultural societies to allow time, space and facilities for YFC competitions.<sup>97</sup> At another meeting, plans were made to allow young farmer judges to act in conjunction with older and more experienced judges at county agricultural shows. Hay suggested that candidates should first be nominated by members of the YFCs, and then 'vetted' by the agricultural organiser, his assistant and the county federation secretary, before being circulated to the various show societies.<sup>98</sup> This underlined the authority of the county agricultural education staff, since it was they who gave the young farmers legitimacy.

The centrality of the county agricultural education staff to the movement became more apparent with the onset of the Second World War. The Somerset county federation found it difficult to continue with YFC work during wartime, since the county agricultural education staffs who had 'fathered the movement' had been seconded to the County War Agricultural Executive Committees (CWAEC).<sup>99</sup> The remaining members confirmed that they would follow peace time activities, and encourage the 'agricultural youth' to make contact with 'the type of people who were interested in their problems and would help them throughout their lives'.<sup>100</sup> This suggests that the movement had an almost pastoral role to play in the lives of the members, and is indicative of the personal as well as professional relationships which had formed between farmers and advisory staff by the end of the interwar years.

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<sup>96</sup> Minutes, 22 July 1935. A/APW, SHC. The competition was between Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. Executive Committee, Somerset County Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs.

<sup>97</sup> 'Young Farmers and the Show Season', *TYF*, September 1932, 127.

<sup>98</sup> Minutes, 18 November 1937, A/APW, SHC.

<sup>99</sup> Minutes, 4 April 1941, A/APW, SHC.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Individual clubs could, however, remain remote from their county federations. Hay complained that the federation secretary had experienced 'great difficulty' in obtaining information from the affiliated clubs about their work, leaving him unable to report to the county education committee on their progress. He was obliged to do so since the county council gave the federation a grant and provided for secretarial work to be carried out at the farm institute without charge.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, Sidney White, who formed the calf-rearing Yeovil YFC in 1935, made no mention of the relationship between the club and the county federation in an oral history interview recorded in 1987.<sup>102</sup> White had remained active in the Yeovil Club, and was asked to cut their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary cake in 1985 when he was ninety-five years old. While White looked at photographs of club life, including social events, calf sales and competitions, he described how he started the club following a conversation with another farmer:

Sat there in Yeovil, and er talking to one another, and a young fellow who'd been to my place, very interested in the Young Farmers, he come from Derbyshire, and I started talking about a Young Farmers Club in Yeovil, Yeovil and District, and they said, well, let's see what we can do, so on that day we started.<sup>103</sup>

Despite the ideals of the Ministry and NFYFC, who sought to cultivate the movement as a seedbed of rural leaders rooted in a scientifically informed agricultural industry, many YFCs spread by word of mouth, and could remain separate from the movement's organisational structure.

White's involvement with the YFC ran alongside other public responsibilities within his local area and in national agricultural organisations. He was a member of the Council of the British Dairy Farmers Association, chairman of the Public Health Committee of Yeovil District Council, and acted as a judge of cheese at the National Dairy Show. Along with his wife, who White felt was a better cheese-maker than him, he won prizes for his cheese at various

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<sup>101</sup> Minutes, 18 November 1937, A/APW, SHC.

<sup>102</sup> Sidney White, interview by Ann Heeley, 1987, transcript, A\CMQ/2/136, SHC.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

agricultural shows. He had left school in 1904, just before his fourteenth birthday, to work on his father's farm, and was apprenticed to a local prize-winning Cheddar cheese maker, who was a friend of his father and lived two miles away from his home. Throughout his working life, White continued to teach young people in the way he had been taught, taking apprentices who would stay with him to learn cheese-making. The Yeovil Club was a continuation and extension of this work, and did not necessarily connect to the county or national federation.

The overall development of a club's educational and social programme required coordination and negotiation between farmers and agricultural organisers. The records of the Bures YFC and Somerset County Federation show that the divisions of responsibility and hierarchies within the work of the advisory and county federation committees were not necessarily clear. The expertise of the county agricultural education staff was fundamental to the technical training provided by the clubs, giving them significant influence in shaping the movement. The degree to which they exploited this, however, depended on particular individuals. Many agricultural organisers, like Littlewood, were already overburdened and had no ambition to further their involvement with the movement, whereas other county staff such as Hay saw the movement as a way to strengthen their authority among better established agricultural interest groups. Furthermore, some clubs began and grew in a similar way to agricultural discussion societies and interest groups in the past, remaining distant from the movement's structure and aims.

The intentions and actions of the movement's organisers are easier to discern than those of members, since they largely created the records which are left behind, but the movement's significance for young people can be gauged to some extent from these sources, as well as from *The Young Farmer*. By forging a channel through which the county agricultural education staff could engage young people, the YFC provided some members with the experience necessary to pursue further agricultural education. Hay reported in September 1938, for example, that seventy-five per cent of applicants for scholarships in agricultural instruction were members of YFCs and were 'of a

most excellent type'.<sup>104</sup> Similarly in Devon, 'almost every student' entering Seale Hayne on one of the numerous agricultural scholarships in 1937 had been a YFC member, and there were similar reports from other districts.<sup>105</sup> County agricultural organisers who attended YFC club meetings to recruit students for classes in subjects such as ploughing, hedging or walling got their members 'in as many minutes as it used to take hours'.<sup>106</sup>

Individual success stories were sometimes celebrated in *The Young Farmer*. For example, in 1929, John Jones, the first elected chairman of the Bletchley YFC, was congratulated for gaining a Bledisloe scholarship worth £75 to attend 'Avoncroft Agricultural College for Rural Workers'.<sup>107</sup> Jones had previously worked on his father's farm and had completed a correspondence course in agriculture under the Buckinghamshire Agricultural Instruction Subcommittee, and his YFC membership was part of this educational portfolio. Around twenty young men per term, from the end of September to mid-June, attended Avoncroft College. Aged eighteen and over, they studied the science of animal and plant life through lectures and practical instruction, as well as Farm Book-keeping, English Literature, Economics and History. The curriculum was broadened by organised visits to farms and related manufacturing plants such as sugar beet factories, as well as debates, dramatic readings, football, cricket and evening social events. Avoncroft was advertised as being suitable for those who 'hope to be leaders in agriculture and village life', and its aim was 'to help its students to become progressive farmers and good and useful citizens'.<sup>108</sup> This was held to be particularly compatible with the YFC's broad educational agenda, and in March 1932, Avoncroft offered a scholarship of £50 to a senior or past YFC member.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Minutes, 16 September 1938, A/APW, SHC.

<sup>105</sup> 'Farmers in the Making', *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 Oct 1937, 11.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> 'Success of a Young Farmer', *TYF*, October 1929, 208.

<sup>108</sup> 'Avoncroft College: A Young Farmer's Opportunity', *TYF*, March 1932, 59.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.; Avoncroft College for Rural Workers also advertised their Bledisloe Scholarship (full cost of residence and tuition for a rural worker, aged eighteen to thirty) see 'Advertisement: Avoncroft College for Agricultural Workers', *TYF*, May 1929, 61.



Some YFCs also had the help of other educational organisations such as local libraries, forming a hub around agricultural education. For example, the Heston School YFC obtained catalogues of relevant books by Hounslow library, and the East Sussex County Federation of YFCs were provided with a list of books about agriculture by their county library, which they then circulated to all clubs.<sup>110</sup>

Although membership of the movement had a real and lasting impact on the lives of some members, it remained remote from much of the rural population. A survey of representative clubs in twenty-seven counties carried out by the National Federation in 1944 found that forty-nine per cent of members were the sons and daughter of farmers, thirty-one per cent were the sons and daughters of those not directly engaged in agriculture and twenty per cent were the children of farm workers.<sup>111</sup> *The Young Farmer* frequently advertised the Ministry 'sons and daughters scholarship' in the early 1930s, suggesting that they expected to reach the children of agricultural workers, perhaps through those who employed them.<sup>112</sup> However, writing in 1942 about 'labour on the land' during the interwar years, Pedley pointed out that aspects of club life, such stock rearing, which working-class members may not have been able to afford, worked to exclude the sons and daughters of farm workers. Furthermore, the NFU were so heavily involved in some areas, the clubs were in danger of becoming a youth branch of the NFU.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the NFU actively sought to work in close co-operation with the YFC, and passed a resolution in November 1930 stating that 'where Young Farmers' Clubs affiliated to the National Association of Young Farmers' Clubs exist, members of the Union should be

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<sup>110</sup> Minutes, 6 October 1931, YFC/1/1/1, ESRO.

<sup>111</sup> Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 106.

<sup>112</sup> For example, 'Agricultural Scholarships', *TYF*, April 1929, 34; 'Free Agricultural Scholarships', *TYF*, March 1932, 70; 'Advertisement: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Free Agricultural Scholarships', *TYF*, March 1933, 23.

<sup>113</sup> Pedley, *Labour on the Land*, 153-154.

encouraged to take an interest in their development'.<sup>114</sup> In East Sussex, local branches of the NFU invited the YFCs to send two representatives to their meetings, giving members a direct experience of NFU work and cementing the less formal relationship between the NFU and YFC that had built up during the interwar years.<sup>115</sup>

Concerns about the sectional nature of the movement were voiced at a local level, but were not necessarily heeded. During the Second World War, a member of the Somerset county federation pointed out that since the YFCs did not make provision for the working-class, they risked losing potential recruits to the Board of Education's Service of Youth movement. This was rebuffed by other members of the committee, who asserted that young people were invited to attend social activities 'which are of interest to agriculturalists and non-agriculturalists alike'.<sup>116</sup> Thus, while the movement's core educational activities were aimed at the sons and daughters of farmers, YFC social events had a broader remit.

The movement attempted to broaden its membership during and after the Second World War. In an address broadcast to all YFC clubs in 1945, for example, the Minister of Agriculture declared that

We want young and fresh blood in agriculture... the YFCs have an important part to play in training the farmers and farm workers of the future to be better farmers and better farm workers. I stress the workers deliberately. There has been a tendency in the past to think the Young Farmers' Club movement is for the sons and daughters of farmers only. I hope that there is nobody who still thinks this...Every boy or girl, whether he is the son of a farmer, a farm worker, a barrister, a butcher, a bus driver or any other worker in the country, should be welcomed with open arms by your movement...If you fail to bring in the workers' children and the townsmen's children you will have failed in one of your essential aims.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> 'National Farmers' Union', *TYF*, December 1930, 316.

<sup>115</sup> Minutes, 14 October 1944, YFC 1/1/3, ESRO.

<sup>116</sup> Minutes, 4 April 1941, A/APW, SHC.

<sup>117</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, 26 April 1945, Minister of Agriculture's Address to the NFYFC, Press notice, MAF 115/49, TNA.

This drive towards widening membership to those of other occupational backgrounds was motivated by the need for more funding, but it was not backed up with any substantial effort to effect change. A 1952 report on the movement found that the children of farmers still heavily dominated the movement, constituting more than fifty per cent of the club membership in 232 of the 324 clubs surveyed. Unsurprisingly, of the office bearers within clubs, the majority were the sons and daughters of farmers, and in 112 clubs there were no sons and daughters of farm workers at all.<sup>118</sup>

The report, compiled by G. P. Hirsch of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute at Oxford, was based on a survey conducted in order to review the historical development of the movement and make recommendations for its future development. The committee found it especially difficult to garner details on the social background of members, and complained that club leaders, county organisers and club officers did not realise the importance of the matter.<sup>119</sup> The report proposed changing the name of the movement in order to encourage a more socially diverse membership, but this was not taken up.<sup>120</sup>

The movement was also unevenly spaced throughout the countryside. A census carried out by the Ministry in 1937 found that there were forty-five clubs in Devon, by far the most numerous, just one in Norfolk and none in Oxfordshire.<sup>121</sup> Of the 453 clubs who supplied information to the Hirsch Committee, eighty-one were in pastoral areas, 338 were in intermediate or mixed farming areas, and just thirty-four clubs were in arable areas. The authors noted that judging from early reports of the movement, this was the situation as far back as 1930.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, in 1929, W. S. Chalmers, county

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<sup>118</sup> Hirsh, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 107.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>121</sup> Number of Young Farmers' Clubs in England and Wales and proposed County contributions to the NFYFC in 1938/9, ED 22/204, TNA.

<sup>122</sup> Hirsh, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 45.

agricultural organiser for Northumberland, reported that clubs were not likely to be successful in north of the county because farms were much bigger, reaching up to and over 1000 acres.<sup>123</sup>

The clubs were most successful in areas where stock-raising was important, and had less scope for development in arable districts.<sup>124</sup> In areas where large arable farms predominated there tended to be a significant social gap between the families of farmers, who often educated their children away from the district, and those of other workers, making it difficult for them all to mix in the same club. The geographical distribution and location of clubs also affected the ability of young people to attend club meetings. Of 303 clubs surveyed in 1952, as many as forty-two per cent of club members lived within a two-mile radius of their club meeting place. Almost seventy-five per cent of the membership lived less than four miles away, and only thirteen per cent travelled six miles or more. Issues around the lack of public transport to enable members to attend meetings would have been even more pertinent in the 1930s.

As well as indicating an occupational background, the term 'farmer' was gendered, and usually equated with men. Girls occupied an ambiguous, 'dual' position within the movement.<sup>125</sup> Though they were often in a minority within clubs,<sup>126</sup> they took part in the same activities as boys and were expected to be interested in agriculture alongside more domestic responsibilities. Articles in *The Young Farmer* aimed specifically at girls were limited to advice on cooking and cleaning in a 'Homecraft' column,<sup>127</sup> as well as fashion and dressmaking from 1930.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, the journal adopted a mocking attitude towards women and girls. A 1937 article entitled

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<sup>123</sup> W. S. Chalmers, 'Young Farmers' Clubs in Northumberland', *TYF*, April 1929, 45.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Edwards, 'The Farmer's Wife and the Duality of Rural Femininity'.

<sup>126</sup> Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 94.

<sup>127</sup> For example, 'Homecraft Month by Month: Marmalade Making', *TYF*, March 1929, 18; 'Homecraft Month by Month: Spring Cleaning', *TYF*, June 1929, 78 .

<sup>128</sup> For example, Janet Stuart, 'Spring Fashions', *TYF*, March 1939, 27.

'Should Girls Work?' ostensibly written by 'Another of the Office Staff', a 'town girl' of the London editorial office, addressed girl members of the movement, and joked that 'Industry with a big 'I' has come to your rescue'. It told the story of a farmer's daughter who, 'having donned a very becoming white smock and cap' to begin milking, found that the cows were milked mechanically by an electrical machine, leaving her with nothing to do but to 'borrow father's car and take a run down to the coast'.<sup>129</sup> This was perhaps satirising urban stereotypes of the role of women and girls in farming, particularly the daughters of well-off farmers, and it was also specifically a comment on the role of technology in replacing traditional practices. However, whether it was parodying assumptions about technological change, or ridiculing women's marginalisation in the increasingly mechanised dairy industry is unclear.

Certainly, there was relatively little content in the journal to counter this condescension. Drawing on long-standing stereotypes of women as nervous and weak, one article on 'clean boots', written by 'famer's wife', advised women to encourage their husbands or fathers to leave their muddy boots at the door to avoid having a 'nervous breakdown' caused by constant dirt in the house. Rather than being motivated by concern for the girl members themselves, they were urged to keep their spirits up for the sake of the 'worker in the field'.<sup>130</sup> This ignored women's contribution to agricultural production, and trivialised the concerns and ambitions of rural women. For instance, the journal criticised the Land Settlement scheme, which most likely referred to the attempts to resettle ex-servicemen on the land and train them in agricultural skills following the Land Settlement Act (1919), for failing to take into account 'the importance of the opposite sex', boasting that in contrast the NFYFC 'trains the future farmer and it trains the girl who will be the future farmer's wife'.<sup>131</sup> This placed the girl member firmly in terms of her relationship to her future husband.

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<sup>129</sup> 'Another of the Office Staff, "Should Girls Work?"', *TYF*, September 1937, 145.

<sup>130</sup> 'Farmer's Wife, "Clean Boots"', 107-8.

<sup>131</sup> Editorial, 'Wake up England', *TYF*, March 1933, 4.

The role of farmer's wife was played out publicly at agricultural shows during competitions in cake-making, salad-making and table decoration.<sup>132</sup> For instance, at a later period, it was reported in the *Essex Young Farmer* that a salad-making competition, including all the preparation was carried out in front of spectators, since 'the future young farmers' wives of Essex are not self-conscious'.<sup>133</sup> Such activities carried the expectation that girl members would, upon marriage, fulfil the role of 'farmer's wife' with its attendant domestic duties as well as continuing with the 'lighter branches of agriculture', such as poultry-keeping, bee-keeping, dairy work and fruit growing, which women had traditionally undertaken.<sup>134</sup> To an extent, this cohered with the Denman report's conception of farming as a family partnership. Girls were encouraged to know about and take part in the same activities as boys, with a view to them growing up to become 'co-operatively' involved in farming. However, there was little acknowledgement of those who wanted to be engaged in agriculture 'independently', and on their own terms.

### Conclusions

Having formed in 1921 with a view to improving agricultural production, the aims of the YFC expanded in line with those of the rural community movement to deepen a sense of community in the countryside, and it was as much a part of the rural community movement as an emerging system of continuation education. There were silences around the agricultural labourer within *The Young Farmer*, but clubs such as the Bures YFC included pig-keeping and gardening members, and YFC social events were meant to be village-wide activities, drawing in a broader mix of people. To what extent did the movement facilitate interaction between social groups and between members of opposite sexes? Did the movement encourage the introduction of new, scientific ideas into farming as it aimed to? Did it help to legitimise the idea of farmers as stewards? Was the focus on domesticity for girl young

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<sup>132</sup> Margaret Fraser, 'County Rally', *The Essex Young Farmer*, 1948, 15.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 104.

farmers a constraining factor in their activities and future lives? There is scope for much more research at a local level, allowing for a deeper understanding of the movement's social significance in terms of gender and class.

The journal sought to present farming as an attractive career with national importance, feeding into broader processes of professionalisation in English agriculture. Although the movement was conservative in emphasising prosperity as the primary aim of efficient farming, and in venerating the farmer above others living in the countryside, its vision of agriculture was also modern and progressive, in that it was linked to ideas of service to the community and nation. A capacity for leadership would enable farmers to serve both their local community and their nation, as the new stewards of the countryside. *The Young Farmer* emphasised the need to temper a focus on science and profit with respect for the heritage of the countryside, and attracted a broad following of people, including left-leaning progressives and non-conformists. In forging a space in which a range of agencies, including government departments, local authorities, voluntary bodies and farming organisations worked together to forge an educational and recreational programme for young people, the movement conceivably contributed to broader debates about the social function of agriculture and farmers, and the type of education they required.

## Chapter 6

### The Guild of Learners: education, community, and craftsmanship

The WI's Guild of Learners stimulated an idealised restoration of handicrafts in line with 'English' traditions of workmanship. Alongside an emphasis on preservation and heritage, the Guild engaged with modern ideas around social change and citizenship. Through national handicraft exhibitions, the WI asserted the contemporary value of the skills held by countrywomen and fed into a broader public education in 'good taste' in the context of mass production and standardisation. The Guild saw handicraft work as a fundamentally educational activity, practised during leisure time. However, the educative function of making ran alongside, and often in tension with, the potential commercialism of the finished craft object. Co-operative craft industries had developed in some areas during the First World War, yet ultimately the focus in the WI handicraft programme on education and leisure channelled the direction of craft work away from industry, potentially inhibiting the viability and growth of localised craft industries.

#### Handicrafts: trade, locality and home

The main tension in the early years of WI craft work centred on the commercialism of crafts and whether they should be made for sale or for personal use. In the first issue of *Home and Country* in 1919, for example, Catherine Margesson, a suffragette who had been involved in organising women to work on the land and in rural industries during the First World War, offered a 'word of caution' in the 'transition from War to Peace' to those who believed that they had proven the viability of 'industries undertaken by part time workers'.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the Caxton Hall Exhibition in 1918 had revealed the WI to be 'dynamo for generating initiative, discrimination and co-operative effort in country and village life', Margesson insisted that it was important to maintain a clear distinction between 'thrift industries', consisting of articles for home use which saved the housewife money, and 'trade industries', involving

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<sup>1</sup> C. Margesson, 'W. I. Industries', *H&C*, March 1919, 4.



marketable articles for sale.<sup>2</sup> The term ‘industry’, then, was applied both to the home and the market place, and was understood in the sense of *saving* money, through the manufacture of ‘thrift’ items for home use, and *making* money through the sale of items.

Most institutes had a WI stall selling members’ surplus produce at the end of meetings, enabling them to benefit from the sharing of skills and knowledge as well as providing a means of making money.<sup>3</sup> WI branches often acted as a training ground and then sales point for individual or pairs of craftswomen, and members sold their work in local co-operatively organised industries which had formed during the war.<sup>4</sup> In 1918 the Carnegie UK Trust awarded the WI a grant of £1000 to enable them to continue with ‘initiating and assisting cottage industries’.<sup>5</sup> It was significant that the Trust specified ‘cottage’ industries, referring to organised work associated with the home, rather than with the factory. It was supporting not new trading ventures, but those which were historically and locally rooted.

Traditionally within cottage industries, products were made in the home with raw materials supplied by a dealer or organiser, who would then collect the finished products and deliver them to the buyer.<sup>6</sup> Products tended to be associated with certain geographical locations, ‘Bucks point lace’ from the East Midlands for example. ‘Occupational communities’ formed around industries such as the lace trade, with skills passed from mothers to daughters and perpetuated through informal apprenticeship systems, and women spent at least part of their day together working in groups.<sup>7</sup> There

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<sup>2</sup> Margesson, ‘W. I. Industries’.

<sup>3</sup> The Women’s Institute Stall: Talk Given at Caxton Hall Exhibition by Miss Christie’, *H&C*, June 1919, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, ‘Jam Making, Cuthburt Rabbits and Cakes’, 212.

<sup>5</sup> Stamper, ‘Teaching and Preserving Crafts’, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Horn, ‘Women’s Cottage Industries’ in *The Victorian Countryside: Volume 1*, ed. Gordon Mingay (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 341.

<sup>7</sup> Pamela Sharpe, ‘Lace and Place: Women’s Business in Occupational Communities in England 1550–1950’, *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 2 (2010): 283-306.

were social customs attached to working practices, such as the lacemakers' feast days on St Catherine's Day on 25<sup>th</sup> November and St Andrew's Day on 30<sup>th</sup> November where special cakes were made and gifts were exchanged.<sup>8</sup> For younger unmarried women living at home, this type of work offered more freedom than the more restrictive life of domestic service.<sup>9</sup> However, while they gave women a 'place' in society and a means of making an income, cottage industries were often exploitative, with items made in relative poverty sold on as luxury goods.<sup>10</sup>

The WI's 'revival' of rural crafts forged new 'occupational communities' around cottage industry crafts, remaking traditions associated with them. Rather than being exploitative and dominated by external 'buyers', for example, they were run co-operatively by women themselves. WI craft products were marketed and sold as distinctly 'rural', evoking the cottage industry tradition. Yet, being organised co-operatively their sale was intended to benefit members and protect them from exploitation. Indeed, co-operative organisation encompassed a particular conception of the relationship between society and industry, which problematised dominant patterns of consumption and production and invested them with a broader social purpose. The NFWI handbook insisted that 'co-operation should be understood broadly as 'working together' rather than in the 'generally accepted narrower sense of a trading concern'.<sup>11</sup>

Toy making was the first craft to become established. Members bought materials, collected orders and controlled sales co-operatively through the Toy Society, which was supported by an Industries Subcommittee. The first article they produced on a large scale was a toy rabbit named Cuthbert.<sup>12</sup> Based on a satirical cartoon by Percy Fearon (Poy) in the *Evening Chronicle*,

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<sup>8</sup> Horn, 'Women's Cottage Industries', 352.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>10</sup> Sharpe, 'Lace and Place'; Horn, 'Women's Cottage Industries'.

<sup>11</sup> NFWI, *Handbook of Constitution and Rules* (1923), 29, 5FWII/G/1/3/2/03, LSE.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs Alfred Watt and Miss Nest Lloyd, *The First Women's Institute School* (Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes, c.1918) 5FWI/H/03, LSE.

Cuthbert was intended to poke fun at those who refused to join the war effort, especially by securing a government post or a place in the civil service.<sup>13</sup> A patriotic, conservative product, it was also distinctly rural. Rabbits were identifiable with the countryside. They became popular as household pets in the Victorian era,<sup>14</sup> and were ambivalently valued in the countryside as sport as well as for their meat and pelt.<sup>15</sup> Other crafts organised co-operatively through the Trading Society included osier basket making and fur craft, and WI members made a range of items, including mats, baskets, rush bottoms for chairs, hats, kneelers and table mats, doing the whole process of cutting, drying, plaiting and making the articles themselves. Craft products were rural in design and were associated either with the countryside in general, as in the case of Cuthbert, or particular places. For instance, Ticehurst smocks from East Sussex continued to be sold in Liberty's store in London up until the Second World War, and had orders for places in Scotland, Africa and New Zealand.<sup>16</sup>

The 'timelessness' of WI rural craft products belied the new, co-operative ways in which they were being made and sold. As a member of a Sussex WI, who was the first to produce Cuthbert, described:

we received an order from a large London firm for eleven dozen animals of five different kinds, and...with the help of the other villages, completed the order to the satisfaction of the firm...The animals are... sold at an average of 24s. per dozen. All the work, once learned, can be done by the workers in their spare time at home. The materials are bought wholesale, co-operatively, so that the toy-makers get the full

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<sup>13</sup> Percy Fearon (Poy), British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent.

<http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/artists/percyfearon/biography>, accessed 12 February 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Victoria Dickenson, *Rabbit* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 123-154.

<sup>15</sup> J. Martin, 'The Wild Rabbit: Plague, Polices and Pestilence in England and Wales, 1931-1955', *Agricultural History Review* 58, no. 2 (2010): 255-76. They were not seen as vermin until the mid-1930s.

<sup>16</sup> Sub-Editors Notes, 'W.I. Industries', *H&C*, May 1920, 5; Morgan, 'Jam Making, Cuthbert Rabbits and Cakes', 212.

benefit of the sellings. The middleman, the agent, is eliminated, and everybody benefits.<sup>17</sup>

She wanted her village to be 'the nucleus of a flourishing soft-toy industry', and had taught toy making to WI members in several surrounding villages. Different institutes specialised in a particular type of toy, whether puppies, ducks, oats or kittens. Whereas women had often had little room to manoeuvre in cottage industries, they had greater control along the processes of production and sale through WI co-operative craft industries.

Despite the rapid and enthusiastic response of Institutes to make and sell toys, the Toy Society was under-capitalised, suffered from competition from abroad, and was unable to ensure consistency between products coming in from so many different areas. It closed down in April 1919 leaving the NFWI to make a choice between encouraging crafts for trade or for personal use. There was a demand for WI products and their sale benefited members, their families and regional economies, fuelling 'rural reconstruction'. Yet, if their products were sub-standard, the value of instruction under the WI could be called into question. Placing products on the open market subjected them to the scrutiny of a commercial, public value system, with their worth defined in monetary terms. Department stores, for example, ordering large quantities, expected a consistent standard among the products made in various local branches. Values such as uniformity, which did not matter for items made for personal use in the home, became important in a commercial context.

Since the integrity of the craft object was compromised by inconsistent standards in quality brought about by the production of large quantities, the Industry Subcommittee decided to work towards 'a revival of handicraft for home use rather than the development of trade industries'. This signalled a change in direction of their handicraft work towards the 'self-supply of the maker and her fellow members' as opposed to 'the setting of trade industries

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<sup>17</sup> 'Sussex Soft Toys', *The Spectator*, 15 December 1917 (The Spectator Archive, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/15th-december-1917/9/sussex-soft-toys>, accessed 9 September 2014).

for the open market', pitting industry and trade against home and self-supply. It continued,

With this end in view it is proposed establishing a Guild of Learners which shall have as its object to improve the conditions of rural life by encouraging home and local industries.<sup>18</sup>

This resolution carried forward the distinction between 'home' and 'trade industries', but articulated an important exception. It conflated 'home and local' allowing a space for commercial activity so long as it was within the locality and related to the home, a middle way between 'self-supply' and the 'open market'.

Tellingly, the Industry Subcommittee was renamed the Handicrafts Subcommittee in May 1920, re-focussing attention on the craft object and its creation. Making the object the nucleus of future policy and repositioning their revival of handicrafts away from industry and into the home allowed the connections between handicrafts, home and locality to be redrawn. The NFWI resolved that one of the main aims of the revival of handicrafts should be

to supply the worker's own needs and those of her neighbours with a view to the economic use and right treatment of local materials and, through mutual interests, to foster a sense of comradeship and pride in home-making.<sup>19</sup>

The practise of handicrafts for home and local use was presented here as a moral alternative to industry; it involved the 'right treatment' of materials and 'mutual', co-operative organising. This was particularly significant in the years following the war, when the civilising qualities of crafts were invested with a

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<sup>18</sup> Origin of the Guild of Learners: Report of the Industries Sub-Committee to the Executive Committee, 9 December 1919, 5FWI/E/4/2/34, LSE.

<sup>19</sup> NFWI Resolutions dealing with handicrafts, resolution carried 16 October 1919, 5FWI/E/4/2/09, LSE. This was again endorsed in 1920, see Resolutions, NFWI Annual Report, 24 June 1920, p.35, 5FWI/A/2/2/02, LSE.

new sense of purpose.<sup>20</sup> The use of the word comradeship is interesting. Traditionally used to describe relationships between men, especially among soldiers, it has also been applied within the socialist and communist movements to indicate political association.<sup>21</sup> It implies strong organisational as well as personal bonds, and a sense of duty, and is a reminder of the discourse of 'active citizenship' which was drawn upon by the WI.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the description of women as 'workers' suggested that home-making and handicrafts were not leisurely or trivial pursuit, but organised occupations.

### **The Guild of Learners**

The new emphasis on handicrafts as a 'home and local' pursuit highlighted its educative, rather than commercial value. With the formation of the Guild of Learners, leisure and learning rather than profit were stressed as the ideal motivations behind craft work. Since the role of the NFWI was no longer to oversee the organisation of handicrafts for sale, it established its function in relation to education, coordinating the training and supervision of 'learners'. The Guild sought to train teachers, encourage co-operation, and develop a standard by which instruction in handicrafts could be measured.<sup>23</sup> The use of the term Guild recalled medieval associations of skilled and regulated craftsmen, bound together by a historical and professional integrity.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, the stated objectives of the Guild drew on notions of heritage. Its first aim was 'to regain the practice of home handicrafts with a view to restoring the best traditions of English workmanship'.<sup>25</sup> Through their use of words prefixed with 're' the WI made a statement about the Guild as an

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<sup>20</sup> Jill Seddon, 'Work, Professionalism and Gender: Women Designing in the Interwar and Post-war periods', in Tanya Harrod, ed., *Obscure Objects of Desire? Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century* (London: Crafts Council, 1997), 212-220.

<sup>21</sup> 'Comrade, n.'. *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2016) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37986>. accessed 02 November 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Beaumont, 'Citizens not Feminists'.

<sup>23</sup> L. Preece, 'Guild of Learning', *H&C*, March 1920, 14.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, April 1920, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Preece, 'Guild of Learning', *H&C*, March 1920, 14.

organisation which sought to bring back a tradition that was in danger of being lost, rather than pursuing a 'new' or threatening venture.

Their second aim was to 'assist in bringing the best instruction in handicrafts within the reach of the villages', widening the knowledge of craftsmanship. This again located handicraft activity within the 'village' rather than the wider world of commerce and emphasised that crafts were primarily educational. The Guild was officially launched at a conference of county handicraft committees in February 1920, and there were over 600 members by 1922, reaching 1000 by 1927.<sup>26</sup> Its organisation mirrored that of the WI movement more generally with a structure based on affiliation between the member, county federation and national federation maintained through committee work. Members paid a subscription of 1s annually to their county federation, who were responsible for recruiting new members, collecting subscriptions, organising meetings, craft clubs and exhibitions, and helping members to prepare for tests. In turn, the National Federation arranged tests, classes and national exhibitions, circulated books from the Guild of Learners' library and maintained a loan collection of craftwork. Items from the loan collection, sent out to Guild members in sturdy boxes, could be borrowed for up to two weeks at a rate of 6d per week. They were intended to offer guidance and examples of work either for study in the home or to aid with demonstrating or teaching as well as giving details about the historical and cultural context of handicrafts.

With funding from the Development Commission, teachers were trained during courses which ran over one to three days, and tests were held either in London or in the main town of a county throughout the country. Between 1921 and 1939, the NFWI received £14,192 for education in handicrafts from the Commission.<sup>27</sup> In 1927, for example, the NFWI received a block grant of £1665 to enable county federations to hold 5 day schools for training teachers in a craft not previously taught in the area. Learning how to teach

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<sup>26</sup> Notes on the origins of the Guild of Learners, 5FWI/E/4/2/09, LSE.

<sup>27</sup> Grants for Development Work From HM Treasury, 5FWI/B/1/2/46, LSE.

and demonstrate handicrafts provided a lasting opportunity for both paid and unpaid work for some members. Dorothy Drage, NFWI member and President of Criccieth WI in Wales, recalled that some women trained in 1923 at a NFWI Handicraft School were still working in 1949.<sup>28</sup> Teachers and demonstrators were trained for free by the Guild, and could then charge a fee for providing tuition to other institutes.<sup>29</sup> In many counties LEAs recognised and employed WI teachers, either directly or by making grants to classes held under their tuition. The relatively small demand for such instruction in scattered rural populations meant that it was not viable for LEAs to employ technical experts in specialised crafts permanently, so those trained under the WI were often the only available teachers.<sup>30</sup>

Much importance was placed on achieving and maintaining high standards, and to this end the NFWI employed Miss Preece as a 'Technical Organiser'. By January 1920, Preece was referred to as 'Advisory Director of Handicrafts', indicating, perhaps, her growing role in shaping the direction of policy on handicrafts.<sup>31</sup> Her 'Notes on Handicrafts' column in *Home and Country* was intended to give advice and act as a 'clearing house' for the exchange of information on 'experiments' in handicraft work.<sup>32</sup> Explaining the formation of the Guild in her column, Preece differentiated between the term 'standardisation' as it was used in relation to the 'new standardised housing' being built in post-war reconstruction efforts and the idea of 'standards' used by medieval craft guilds.<sup>33</sup> This notion of standards required knowledge, skill and training which could be measured by assessing the quality of the final product, as oppose to the standardisation associated with mass production

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<sup>28</sup> Reminiscences, 5FWI/H//05, LSE.

<sup>29</sup> Alice Armes, 'Handicraft Notes', *H&C*, February 1926, 50.

<sup>30</sup> Summary of Federations' replies to NFWI questionnaire on teaching provision, 5FWI/E/4/2/09, LSE. This survey conducted by the NFWI in 1948 found that 31 LEAs had agreed to pay the fees of travelling teachers with various stipulations.

<sup>31</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, January 1920, 3.

<sup>32</sup> ---, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, September 1919, 12.

<sup>33</sup> ---, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, May 1920, 6.



and new-build houses, which Preece disparagingly explained merely involved the use of generic features.

A series of proficiency tests were introduced to judge and maintain high standards of craftsmanship. The 'A' tests indicated ability, 'B' tests were for demonstrators, 'C' tests were for teachers and there was a judges test to establish proficiency in judging. Timetables for the tests were printed in *Home and Country*. Members had to submit examples of their work following specific criteria,<sup>34</sup> and candidates for 'B' tests were required to giving a thirty minute lecture-demonstration, explaining the necessity of lessons, how many were required to get a fair knowledge of the craft, and detailing its history and traditions.<sup>35</sup> This was an important aspect of a craft demonstration, and in 1922 Mary Somerville complained that too many would-be demonstrators seemed to imagine that they were 'inventing new occupations for themselves, whereas they are really inheriting a fine tradition'.<sup>36</sup>

Through her column Preece clarified the importance of maintaining the difference between industry and home, and valuing the tradition of craftsmanship. She explained in May 1920:

As distinct from industries, which were primarily connected with money-making, handicrafts had as their first essential enjoyment in the work for its own sake. In industry, capital, premises, and trade conditions had to be considered. In handicrafts we worked in our homes, supplied our own good material, instead of buying ready made, bad and expensive, and we revived the old crafts for which Englishwomen were once famous all over the world.<sup>37</sup>

In referring to the 'old crafts' the WI highlighted the historicity of handicrafts. Crafts were presented as part of a rural heritage, naturalising the distinction between industry and home. It was significant that the Guild emphasised the

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<sup>34</sup> Crochet Test Paper, 5FWI/E/4/2/32, LSE.

<sup>35</sup> Briefing notes from meetings between NFWI and Development Commission, 5FWI/E/4/2/36, LSE.

<sup>36</sup> M. Somerville, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, February 1922, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, May 1920, 6.

history of craft objects as well as the technical skill involved in making them. Traditions are invoked by groups as part of an attempt to understand or give meaning to the present, and the WI's historicising functioned to help them negotiate the boundaries between crafts for industry and home, in relation to women's role in the rural community and national life.

### **'Old crafts' in a 'new world': citizenship and the invention of tradition**

The WI was strongly invested in a sense of history through the Guild, and this was frequently reinforced through the 'notes on handicrafts' column:

the practice of handicrafts, whether the motive be one of profit or enjoyment, must be under right direction if it is to reach a standard worthy of English traditions. Much of the beautiful workmanship displayed in our public museums was the work of village people in by-gone days; and we can get similar work again from our villages if we want it...one of the lessons of war is that each individual is called to the sacred duty of helping to build up a new world upon the broken fragments of the old.<sup>38</sup>

This rooted handicraft work in the traditions of English village life and appealed to a comforting sense of tradition after the war. Yet, it also hinted at the modern and embraced change; a 'new' world needed to be built. In describing handicrafts as the revival of a historic practice rooted in 'English traditions', the WI asserted the particular contribution of rural women to national life. Preece explained that 'history is a record of achievement in which women have borne a far larger part than the history books tell',<sup>39</sup> and the story of rural women's handicrafts functioned as a way to 'tell' the story of their part in history and their role in 'helping to build up a new world'.

National exhibitions of WI handicrafts held annually showcased the skills held by rural women and asserted their value to a modern society. The exhibition hall provided a controlled space in which to 'show' objects, giving an insight into the story of handicrafts projected by the WI. The first exhibition, held at Caxton Hall, in Westminster, in 1918 was mainly to present objects for sale.

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<sup>38</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, July 1919, 4.

<sup>39</sup> ---, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, March 1921, 4.

Over £1000 was paid directly to members from the sale of their work, and the NFWI retained £330.<sup>40</sup> But, with the change in their handicraft policy from trade and towards home, the emphasis shifted away from the selling of objects and towards the aesthetics of display. At the Caxton Hall Exhibition in 1920, there were demonstrations of various forms of 'homecrafts', with 'simple looms and other devices for home construction' alongside a lecture with slides intended to show 'the part women played in earlier times in home making and the effect of handwork in the development of civilization', with a particular focus on spinning and weaving.<sup>41</sup> Learning about the history of crafts was presented as a way to learn about rural women's role within 'civilization'.

In documenting rural women's historical contribution to national life, the WI's handicrafts narrative was a form of women's history. As an academic discipline, women's history emerged as an outgrowth of social history in the 1970s, yet as Raphael Samuel argued, social history is not just an academic practice but a 'pedagogic enthusiasm', conducted by those who fill the search rooms of the Record Offices documenting their family 'roots', the volunteer guides at open-air museums, or the railway fanatics detailing the heritage of the locomotive industry.<sup>42</sup> Social histories of 'ordinary lives' such as Elieen Power's *Medieval People* and the *Piers Plowman* text-books were popular in the interwar years, and the story of handicrafts told by the WI similarly 'evoked the human face of the past and its material culture'.<sup>43</sup>

Their historical narrative situated rural women's citizenship within the home. Preece defined citizenship as 'the intelligent fulfilment of the part each

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<sup>40</sup> 'Exhibition News', *H&C*, March 1919, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, October 1919, 8. Preece also gave a lecture on 'Handicrafts as the basis of civilization' at a course on Embroidery and Decorative Stitchery at the V&A in September 1920, see 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, August 1920, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Raphael Samuel et al, 'What is Social History?', *History Today* 35, no. 3 (1985): 34.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* See also Laura Carter, 'The Quennells and the "History of Everyday Life" in England, c. 1918–69', *History Workshop Journal* 81, no. 1 (2016): 106-134.

individual has to play in communal life',<sup>44</sup> and saw women's 'part' in the practice of handicrafts. She discussed the shifting nature of women's work in relation to long-term patterns of change in production and consumption following industrialisation, and lamented that 'a great loss had come to the home through the habit of supplying needs with the ready-made'.<sup>45</sup> While the availability of food, clothes, medicines and objects for the home in shops had relieved women of some of their domestic work, it had also disconnected them from their cultural heritage. In taking over the production of these materials, commercialisation 'from the 6 1/2d bazaar to the big London Store' had compromised the realisation of citizenship for women, since it competed with their role in 'communal life'.<sup>46</sup> Preece concluded that reviving and reconnecting with the 'domestic arts' through craftsmanship could restore women's connection between the home and the state, and reasoned that 'it is impossible to take an intelligent interest in the affairs of home without becoming familiar with the affairs of State which control the home'.<sup>47</sup>

Preece recognised the seemingly incongruous placing of citizenship in a handicraft column. She asked her readers, 'how can women of to-day best realise what citizenship means? Why should the question find place in this column of 'Home and Country?''<sup>48</sup> For Preece, handicrafts gave form and meaning to citizenship. Though handicrafts represented a revival of old 'English traditions', they were also part of an active and modern attempt to serve the nation. Preece explained that 'progress is not made by mere dreaming of future advancement, nor by looking back with pride on the past as many are content to do...history springs from action'.<sup>49</sup> Progress was conceptualised as an 'action' rather than a vision of the future or wistful look at the past. She quoted from American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote of the farmer in his 1870 essay *Society and Solitude*:

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<sup>44</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, February 1920, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, March 1921, 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

He who digs a well, constructs a stone fountain, plants a grove of trees by the roadside... makes the land so far lovely and desirable, makes a fortune which he cannot carry away with him, but which is useful to his country long afterwards.<sup>50</sup>

Preece commented that 'this is citizenship'. Like Emerson's farmer, rural women had to enact their citizenship by 'doing', and their handicraft work was comparable to the outdoor work undertaken by the farmer in this respect. Both served the nation as well as the individual.

Handicraft work was frequently juxtaposed with citizenship in the monthly *Notes on Handicrafts* column. For example in 1921, Preece regretted that:

There are many people whose circumstances and occupations are such as to shut them out from the practice of handicrafts, but there is no person with any aspirations to good citizenship who can be indifferent to it. For after all is said, the whole well-being of the state is built up of hand work.<sup>51</sup>

This situated crafts as the building blocks of the state, suggesting that rural women, as citizens, had a role to play in maintaining national 'well-being'. As explained in their 1922 NFWI handbook, crafts were conceptualised as objects which connected the home with the nation: 'Women's Institutes develop a sense of citizenship; and they do this in the only sound and permanent way, by basing citizenship on home life'.<sup>52</sup>

At face value, anchoring women's citizenship in domestic craft work was conservative and limiting. But given that the home occupied a central place in national life following the dislocating experience of the war, a more subtle reading is required. In Maidstone in Kent, for example, representatives from 80 WIs in West Kent organised and took part in a craft procession on the lines of the medieval craft guild processions. They marched with music and flying banners representing crafts 'in order to testify their faith in home crafts

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, April 1921, 4.

<sup>52</sup> NFWI Handbook, 1922, 5FWI/G/1/3/2/08, LSE.

as a means of self-education and self-expression, and in the home-maker as the real builder of a reconstructed Empire'.<sup>53</sup> This situated home crafts as important not only on an individual and national level but also in the context of empire. This was a conservative and patriotic vision, but it looked ahead to the future and highlighted the centrality of women within the reconstruction of the nation and empire.

Ideas around the relationship between citizenship, education and creativity had wider currency in the interwar years. Preece reported on a conference in Cambridge on 'New ideals in Education' at which Henry Wilson, Chairman of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society spoke about the 'creative impulse' and its place in education. Wilson argued that the 'western world' was suffering from the 'divorce of education from productive activity' through the 'decline of the craft initiative'.<sup>54</sup> He hoped for a revival of the 'building arts' and the household crafts; weaving, furniture making, pottery as well as the 'hundred and one rural crafts upon which the success of agriculture depended'. Since citizenship depended upon a revival of these crafts, and education was the 'art of citizen-making', the 'culture of craftsmanship' was central to both.<sup>55</sup>

This resonated with the revival of interest in craftsmanship in the interwar years, which contested the social role of visual art. Individuals prominent in the design reform movement such as William Lethaby (1857–1931), an architect and educationist, claimed that art was 'all worthy handicraft...hand-weaving, basket-making, cookery, bakery... and laying the table nicely'.<sup>56</sup> He connected handicrafts to the nation, insisting that 'the country and country-life are and must be the basis of national life'.<sup>57</sup> The idea that artistic value could be found in the functional objects of everyday life had important implications for women's work, and lent weight to the WI's handicraft revival.

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Somerville, 'Guild of Learners of Home Crafts: Craft Guild Procession', *H&C*, November 1920, 5. Somerville was Honorary Secretary of the Guild of Learners.

<sup>54</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, October 1919, 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> William Lethaby, *Home and Country Arts* (London: 1923), 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Lethaby's broad definition of art, and insistence on the aesthetic and social value of good design within domestic objects was taken up seriously and enthusiastically by the WI, as shown in figure 7 below:



**Figure 7: WI exhibit of a Welsh tea table, Royal Welsh Show, 1950. 5FWI/B/2/2/1/020. Women's Library Collections, London School of Economics)**

This image of a 'Welsh tea table' exhibit is from a later period, taken at an agricultural show in 1952, but it strikingly shows the extent to which the WI defined art in terms of everyday life.

WI handicraft work won recognition within the movement for design reform. In 1920 Owen Young of the Art Workers Guild praised the appreciation of real beauty and form shown in WI exhibitions, 'an intrinsic beauty that would claim attention in any country and any century'.<sup>58</sup> Again, this 'timelessness' was not necessarily backwards looking. Members were encouraged to use 'modern design' and to produce original work. Despite her use of history to legitimise the WI's 'revival' of domestic craft work, Preece cautioned that the real lesson to be learnt was how to use 'our ability and industry to fit the conditions of our own day and our own requirements'.<sup>59</sup> It was necessary to

<sup>58</sup> 'Letters From London Exhibition Judges: Handicrafts, Owen Young', *H&C*, July 1920, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, November 1919, 6.

find a new 'starting-point' without being 'driven aside by the rush and whirl of machinery' or looking 'backwards wistfully'. The widespread interest in handicrafts following the war, she asserted, was not anti-modern or anti-technology, but was simply 'a reaction against the wrong application of machinery'.<sup>60</sup>

Educating the public in good taste and modern design was seen as a way of mitigating against the standardisation of mass-produced goods. The prospectus of the British Institute of Industrial Art (BIIA), incorporated under the Board of Trade and Board of Education in 1920 stated that:

To-day more than at any time past our national economic stability depends upon volume of production, and upon a success in foreign markets, as well as in the home market, which can be secured only by quality- quality of design, of workmanship, and of material. The intimate co-operation of the arts is essential to the production of work bearing the stamp of quality, and art, therefore, is an indispensable element in industry.<sup>61</sup>

Art was a way of securing a quality of workmanship which was threatened by large scale production, and was seen as crucial to the success of industry.<sup>62</sup> The WI reported on the establishment of the BIA, and a small collection of rush work from the WI Loan collection was accepted for their first exhibition. Their part in the exhibition was an attempt to 'demonstrate the feasibility of some return to the homely crafts' both as 'recreation and for home economy', and Preece reported that their inclusion in the exhibition testified to their high 'standard of craftsmanship'.<sup>63</sup>

WI exhibitions fed into the broader public education in 'good taste', which sought to strengthen the consumer's ability to discriminate in the face of growing commercialism. Critics such as F. R. Leavis, for example, felt that

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, July 1920, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Yasuko Suga, 'Purgatory of taste' or Projector of Industrial Britain? The British Institute of Industrial Art', *Journal of Design History* 16, 2 (2003): 167-185.

<sup>63</sup> Preece, 'Notes on Handicrafts', *H&C*, July 1920, 12.



people needed to be educated in how to think critically about advertising.<sup>64</sup> WI exhibits were meant to show as much craftsmanship as possible, and their annual national exhibition was held at the V&A Museum in 1921 and 1922, showing the aspirations of the organisers to align crafts with art.

This was a world away from the displays of craft work at the local institute stall. Whilst national, artistic WI craft exhibitions represented a distancing from the localised commercial activity initiated by the co-operative craft industries, the Guild was still engaged with commerce, in terms of questioning how art, design and crafts should relate to industry. This has to be read in the context of concerns over the relationship between industry and society in the interwar years. The protracted nature and scale of the First World War affected daily habits and influenced what people could consume, leading to concerns over consumption and commercialisation in the post-war years. Both out of necessity and a patriotic sense of duty, people became concerned about buying British products rather than those produced abroad, giving relevance to the idea of reviving 'traditional' ways of making grounded in local communities. Anxieties about 'ready-made' products and consumerism intensified in the latter half of the twentieth century following the Second World War. By this time, the WI's reputation for their expertise in handicrafts extended into critiquing the production of goods more widely:

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<sup>64</sup> Leavis, *Culture and Environment*,



**Figure 8: 'It's Time this Shoddiness Ended!', *Picture Post* 40, no. 4 (1948). Press Cuttings. 5FWI/H/09 (London School of Economics)**

The image in the *Picture Post* in figure 8 shows two WI members indignantly inspecting a pair of farm labourer's trousers. It accompanied an article about the poor quality of British goods, including details about a WI deputation which went to the Board of Trade for a 'quiet and reasonable' talk about evidence they had gathered concerning the declining standard of products, which resulted in an investigation by the consumer-goods department. Based on their knowledge on making products which enabled them to discriminate between quality and 'shoddiness', the WI had developed the capacity to influence policy makers.<sup>65</sup>

Narrating the story of handicraft work as part of a rural tradition rooted in the communal knowledge of rural 'Englishwomen' through their 'Notes on Handicrafts' column was a way of maintaining the separation between crafts for industry and for the home, by reinforcing the status of the craft object as essentially home based, educative and part of a longer tradition which they were reviving. But it was also a way of addressing broader issues relating to women and their place in society. The links between citizenship, home life,

<sup>65</sup> 'It's Time this Shoddiness Ended!', *Picture Post* 40, no. 4 (1948), Press Cuttings, 5FWI/H/09, LSE

crafts and education in Preece's 'Notes on Handicrafts' column were not fixed and lucid but were fluid, sometimes unclear, and inconsistent. As well as a forum for exchanging information about crafts, the column became a space for working out what they signified.

Citizenship was conceived primarily as an intelligent interest in, and action resulting from, home life, which made the hand-made objects of the rural home an integral part of their broader aim to educate women in 'public life'. Though this was conservative in aligning women with the home it asserted the national centrality and relevance of their skills, and gave WI members, as rural women who were engaged collectively in making, teaching, exhibiting and selling handicrafts, a voice to critique practices of production and consumption. The stress they placed on the cultural, educational and artistic value of crafts gave their work a value beyond the market place by investing it with a personal and social worth, but did not necessarily remove crafts from industry. Rather, it contributed to dialogue about the nature and purpose of handicraft work and mass production. However, there was a clear tension in the positioning of the craft object as both a sellable item and as an article of leisure and learning. How did the multiple, competing meanings attached to handicraft work develop from the mid-1920s to the 1930s?

### **Leisured and 'unleisured': contesting handicrafts as work.**

The reorientation of NFWI handicraft policy towards self-supply and away from trade began to change the way handicrafts were practised within the movement. Increasingly, the Guild of Learners focused their attention on the aesthetics of the craft object, further marginalising the commercialism of handicrafts. This was partly pragmatic: the WI were successful at securing funding for their educational activities and they sought to make links with LEAs, so it made sense to stress the educational value of their handicrafts work. It was also a middle-class attempt to regulate leisure time, through providing an approved, constructive activity. In addition, it reflected the broader political and social instability caused by the onset of the economic depression from 1929, which heightened tensions around the relationship between industry, the economy and society. Financial hardship made

women's work a thorny issue and compelled the WI to clarify their position in relation to trade.

Another handicraft organiser, Alice Armes, took over the 'Notes on Handicrafts' column from January 1926, and concentrated on policing the aesthetic standards of craft work even more than Preece had. Following a conference of county handicraft and exhibition secretaries in December 1925, Armes reminded her readers not to display 'useless finicky things, because of a desire to sell', and to concentrate instead on 'simplicity and specialisation'. The aesthetic side of craft work was deemed to be even more important than 'technical dexterity', which led to 'professionalism, to the narrowing of one's outlook and to the loss of spontaneity'.<sup>66</sup> In June 1928 Armes commented on the improvement in the standard of objects displayed at county exhibitions, in terms of the choice of design and materials used. Exhibitions were intended to be educational in that members could learn about the standards expected of their work, and Armes declared that all 'trivial' work, that which failed to obtain a certificate, should not be displayed.<sup>67</sup>

Armes reiterated that there was a need for 'fresh efforts in the matter of design' and wanted exhibits to be simple, but pristinely executed, evoking classic craft work and rising above whimsical fashions.<sup>68</sup> She asserted that the 'practical linen embroidery' akin to that produced by Englishwomen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should replace the 'dreaded' black satin cushion and 'the "cottage" tea cosy'.<sup>69</sup> Judges gave 'sympathetic consideration to the development of design on modern lines', and members were urged to remember that 'the judge's decision is final', and to accept criticism without attempting to question or challenge it in correspondence with them.<sup>70</sup> Armes also condemned overcrowding in the staging of exhibits

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<sup>66</sup> Alice Armes, 'Handicraft Notes', *H&C*, January 1926, 6.

<sup>67</sup> ---, 'Handicraft Notes', *H&C*, June 1928, 267.

<sup>68</sup> ---, 'Handicraft Notes', *H&C*, October 1928, 475.

<sup>69</sup> ---, 'Handicraft Notes', *H&C*, June 1928, 267.

<sup>70</sup> ---, 'Handicraft Notes', *H&C*, October 1928, 475.

for giving a 'jumble sale effect', robbing the whole Movement of 'dignity'.<sup>71</sup> This established hierarchies not only in terms of technical skill but also in terms of taste, and it was clear that commercialism clashed with the ideal craft aesthetic.

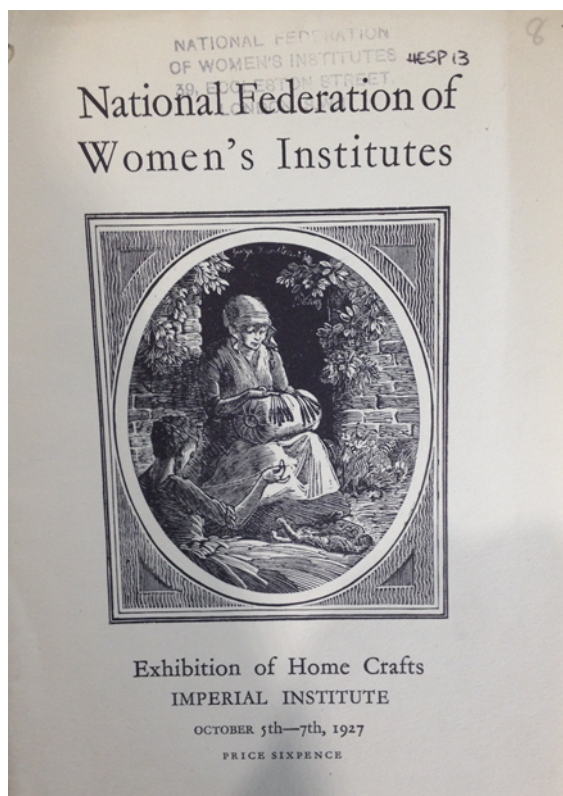
Whilst importance was increasingly laid on 'modern design' there was also an insistence on maintaining tradition. The role of handicrafts in regeneration continued to be stressed in terms of social or cultural development through respecting rural heritage, rather than economic regeneration rooted in local, co-operative craft industries. Traditional crafts relating to local industries were taught, such as rushwork in Somerset and Norfolk and smock making in Sussex. In Micheldever, in Hampshire, instruction in rush and sedge making, which was no longer being widely performed, initially came from a man in the village who could remember the craft.<sup>72</sup> This sense of tradition was alluded to in the cover image of the WI's 1927 exhibition handbook, designed by G. E. Marston,<sup>73</sup> Handicrafts Adviser to the Rural Industries Bureau:

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<sup>71</sup> ---, 'Handicraft Notes', *H&C*, June 1928, 267.

<sup>72</sup> Morgan, 'Jam Making, Cuthbert Rabbit and Cakes', 212.

<sup>73</sup> George Edward Marston (1882-1940) is best known for being the official artist on two Antarctic Expeditions ('Nimrod', 1907-1909 and 'Endurance' 1914-1916) led by Ernest Shackleton. He worked as a teacher in Arts and Crafts at Bedales school in Petersfield from 1918 to 1922, and in 1925 joined the Rural Industries Bureau as Handicrafts Adviser. He was promoted to Assistant Director in 1931, and Director in 1934. ([www.enduranceobituaries.co.uk/marston](http://www.enduranceobituaries.co.uk/marston))



**Figure 9: NFWI exhibition handbook, 1927 5FWI/G/1/3/3/5. Folder 1. (Women's Library Collection, London School of Economics)**

Showing two women engaged in embroidery in a rural setting, wearing eighteenth century style clothing, the image in figure 9 underlines the preservationist role of WI crafts.

The 1927 exhibition was held at the Imperial Institute in South Kensington in London, which was built out of the profits of the 'great exhibition' of 1851, along with the V&A, a detail which Preece felt was significant:

that long ago exhibition was indeed a landmark in the history of education in our country and one thinks that this other exhibition may be a landmark in the Women's Institute movement, not alone because the exhibition became, though only for three short days, an educational centre within a great educational centre,... but for what it was in itself. Everybody says it was a good exhibition. It was certainly stamped with femininity... good to see in days when women are accused of shirking their legitimate occupations.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Preece, 'The Exhibition: Some Reflections', *H&C*, November 1927, 472.

Similarly, Armes reported that representatives of the press had declared it 'the most *dignified* craft exhibition they had seen in London'.<sup>75</sup> Nearly 1000 exhibits were accepted, many of which were made in 'cottage homes', and Marston praised the 'admirable staging of exhibits, the high standard of the work and the evidence of a comprehensive educational scheme', as well as the concentration on the 'more purely feminine crafts',<sup>76</sup> particularly those which belonged to 'unbroken traditions', such as quilting and embroidery.

Achieving high aesthetic standards raised the status of WI crafts. Marston argued that the appreciation of colour and form gained by making handicrafts was akin to understanding the 'rhythm of poetry', and was fundamental to 'intellectual growth'. Given the lack of similar educational influence for men, he reflected that the WI's handicraft education programme 'may result in a curious inequality of intellectual development' in the countryside.<sup>77</sup> This focus on aesthetics heightened the standing of vocational and informal education for women by aligning it with good taste and intellect. In grouping women together, and contrasting their educational experiences with those of men, Marston also downplayed differences between women in terms of social class.

However, the processes by which crafts were selected and judged for NFWI exhibitions were contested among members. A letter from 'a working man's wife' printed in *Home and Country* explained that:

I know of many members who will not exhibit for the simple reason that their exhibits are judged on the same plane as those of the leisured classes and also on the same plane as those who have been taught at the Guild of Learners School...what chance have we after doing our own housework and cooking, scrubbing and washing for a working man's family, of competing with the leisured classes who can give their whole time to craft work?<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Armes, 'Handicraft Notes', *H&C*, November 1927, 467.

<sup>76</sup> Marston, 'The Exhibition: General Survey of the Exhibition', *H&C*, November 1927, 469.

<sup>77</sup> Marston, 'Co-operation', *H&C*, September 1926, 342.

<sup>78</sup> 'Judging at Women's Institute Exhibitions', Letter to Editor from 'A Working Man's Wife', *H&C*, September 1928, 446.

Individual members may have had a variety of motivations for wanting to learn a new craft, and were not necessarily in a position to devote the time or resources to produce objects of a standard set by the Guild. Furthermore, other leisure attractions competed with craft work.

The ongoing correspondence printed in *Home and Country* demonstrated different shades of opinion among the membership rooted in class differences. As one Vice-President put it,

The Women's Institute is to benefit all women in the villages and though equality of membership in the Institute is a real thing we cannot help belonging to two classes-leisured and unleisured. It seems to me obviously unfair that a hard-working woman who has to do her craftwork just how and when she can, with hands roughened by housework, should be judged exactly on the same lines as people who have servants, and can sit at their work as long as they like, besides having far greater advantages in the matter of being able to keep their work clean. My own idea would be to deduct at least 25% of marks for 'leisure'; and the label of the work would have to be endorsed 'leisured'.<sup>79</sup>

The notion of 'leisured' and 'unleisured' work expressed the tensions between working women, whose time competed with everyday domestic work, and those who had servants and therefore more time to devote to handicrafts.

Whereas some felt that there should be different criteria according to the time and resources women could devote to their work, others felt that creating a two tiered system would be unfair on working women. It would deny them the chance to compete on an equal footing, and would undermine the educative purpose of handicrafts by allowing for a lower standard.<sup>80</sup> One member

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<sup>79</sup> 'Judging at Women's Institute Exhibitions', Letter to Editor from 'Vice President', *H&C*, July 1928. This letter was endorsed by responses printed in the September edition, see September 1928, 446.

<sup>80</sup> 'Judging at Women's Institute Exhibitions', Letter to Editor from D. M. Maclaren, *H&C*, October 1928, 501; 'Judging at Women's Institute Exhibitions', Letter to Editor from Barbara Crothers, *H&C*, September 1928, 446-7.



pointed out, for example, that working women had won prizes in handicraft exhibitions, and that co-operative categories, such as exhibits of quilts provided opportunities for collective participation. It is significant, though, that these letters, printed in 1928, accepted that the main point of craft work was for 'self-supply', an article to be made as part of an essentially educational and recreational experience. The controversy was around how the 'standards' set by the Guild should be judged rather than about the fundamental purpose of handicrafts.

Competing notions of 'leisured' and 'unleisured' were evident in other WI activities, and as one of the letters endorsing the views of 'Vice President' pointed out, there were different competitive classes in flower and horticultural exhibitions.<sup>81</sup> Classes for different types of produce in a horticultural exhibition of the Surrey federation of WIs for instance, were subdivided along the following lines:

members employing not more than one man for one day a week and with no heated greenhouse; members employing not more than one gardener and a boy; and members employing more than this.<sup>82</sup>

This was deemed to be a 'fairer scale' than judging in handicraft exhibitions, since it took the availability of money and time account.

In the organisation of handicrafts as well as horticulture, these tensions had a continuing relevance. In a survey into handicraft work undertaken by the NFWI in 1950, the Guild's organisers discovered that a lack of time discouraged many women from participating in handicrafts.<sup>83</sup> The Lindsay branch wanted a week's interval in between craft classes provided under the

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<sup>81</sup> 'Judging at Women's Institute Exhibitions', Letter to Editor from F. Blissett, *H&C*, October 1928, 501.

<sup>82</sup> The Surrey Federation of Women's Institutes Horticultural Exhibition, 24/7/1937, ED 17/416, TNA.

<sup>83</sup> Summary of Federations' replies to NFWI questionnaire on teaching provision, 5FWI/E/4/2/09, LSE.

travelling teacher's scheme, since few members could give up time to attend three consecutive days in one week,<sup>84</sup> and twenty counties said that lack of time was their greatest difficulty in getting WI members trained as teachers. Bedfordshire county federation added that many members were 'too shy and are discouraged by the standard shown in the loan specimens' as well as home ties, and many members new little or nothing of the Guild of Learners.<sup>85</sup>

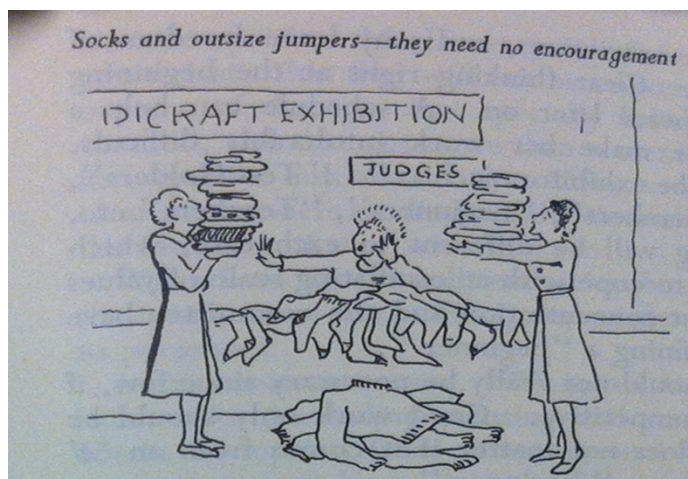
By the late 1940s, the NFWI was concerned about the low entries and pass rates for the proficiency tests. The pass mark was seventy-five per cent, which they reflected was quite high compared with professional exams. They questioned whether seventy per cent would be more realistic and whether grades or classes should be adopted instead of marks to prevent the disappointment felt by candidates who failed by one mark. Judges were encouraged to give constructive and helpful comments: 'There is no doubt of the fact that tactless and narrow-minded judging does occur and has a very discouraging effect on the timid member'.<sup>86</sup> Individual members may have had a variety of motivations for wanting to learn a new craft, and were not necessarily in a position to devote the time or resources to produce objects of 'good design' following a standard set by the Guild, who continued to reiterate artistic value of crafts:

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Future Policy on Handicrafts, 1949, 5FWI/E/4/2/32, LSE.



**Figure 10: 'Handicraft Exhibitions' illustration, in *Handicrafts* (London: NFWI, 1954) 5FWI/E/4/1/4 (Women's Library Collection, London School of Economics)**

The image in figure 10 taken from a 1954 booklet about handicrafts depicts a judge overwhelmed by offerings of 'socks and outsize jumpers' by ordinary members at a handicraft exhibition. The message is clear— such items may be created by members for their own 'home life', but they have no place in national exhibitions. The practice of crafts in everyday life contrasted with the ideals of the Guild, which remained a remote body for many. A hand produced bulletin of the Newton WI for example, described a competition for 'the best darned sock or stocking', and 'the best piece of knitting' with prizes awarded by either the vicar or Lady Walston, following village social hierarchies.<sup>87</sup>

Recognition of WI standards was crucial for enabling them to justify their receipt of grants from the Development Commission, and they sought to extend their grant by drawing on their incremental success. They were initially funded to train teachers, then to develop a travelling teachers scheme, and in 1930, the NFWI proposed that it should be used to pay the salaries and expenses of its organising staff, especially their two experts, Armes and Miss Rowe, who visited branches to provide technical advice and address the needs of individual members.<sup>88</sup> By November 1930, 258 Guild members had been trained as Guild teachers, in addition to the 559 Guild

<sup>87</sup> Newton Women's Institute Magazine, 1925, 5FWI/H/54, LSE.

<sup>88</sup> Memorandum of Handicraft work of the NFWI. 1930.

members who held the 'A' test in various crafts, which qualified them to teach other WI members.<sup>89</sup> Though the sale of handicrafts had been discouraged by the Guild, funding had become a type of important 'market', in that the NFWI received an income from the Development Commission for educational work.

However, nurturing a high standard of craftsmanship through education encouraged an underlying trend towards commercialism; the very nature of craft objects was to be used rather than just displayed. Marston was concerned that the increasing skill and output of WI handicrafts created 'a problem in economics', in that co-operative work at exhibitions were either so 'delicate and fragile' or of such high 'monetary value' that they could not form part of a cottage home.<sup>90</sup> Reiterating Preece's earlier exhortations about the relationship between citizenship and domestic craft work, he urged the movement to develop 'a more intelligent understanding of citizenship' hinging on 'self respect' which recognised the beauty of everyday, utilitarian objects which had a 'place' in the working-class rural home, over luxury items suited for display in urban, middle-class homes.<sup>91</sup>

Marston warned against the danger of members placing themselves in the position of all craftsmen who 'supply a class more wealthy than themselves, leaving their own homes, like the proverbial shoemaker's children "the worst shod"'.<sup>92</sup> Though he admitted that it was problematic of him, as a 'mere man' to criticise the WI's approach, he insisted that he was not trying to cap their creative aspirations. Rather, he wanted to encourage WI members to sustain their co-operative practices and define their own standards instead of leaving themselves subject to the dictates of the market. However, by urging the WI to make simple, functional products he also distanced them from potentially profitable trade.

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<sup>89</sup> Briefing notes from meetings between NFWI and Development Commission, 5FWI/E/4/2/36, LSE.

<sup>90</sup> Marston, 'Co-operation', 342-3.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

These tensions arising from WI crafts being both for home use and of commercial value were heightened with the economic depression. In 1931 the Secretary of the Development Commission, R. T. Warner wrote to the NFWI to make them aware of a complaint made by the National Federation of Furniture Trades.<sup>93</sup> The Federation had complained to the Board of Education over a proposed scheme of classes in upholstery for schoolteachers in Hull, who were to be taught with a view to providing instruction to the WIs, on the grounds of 'unfair subsidised competition with trade interests'.<sup>94</sup> Since the upholstery trade had suffered during the depression with resulting unemployment, the Board of Education cancelled the classes, but maintained that this was out of sensitivity towards the situation, rather than because they accepted that the classes would have interfered with the trade.<sup>95</sup>

The Development Commissioners felt that since numerous related classes were held under the auspices of the WI, partly as a result of their grants, the NFWI should be informed so that classes could be conducted in a way which gave no 'legitimate ground for complaint from the trade'.<sup>96</sup> In his letter to the NFWI Warner accentuated the gendered nature of WI craft work, and explained that it was not believed that their work could pose any significant threat to the upholstery trade:

The Commissioners apprehend that the sort of furniture and upholstery work which is taught to women in their Institutes is of the nature of rural or home industries, such as repairing and re-stuffing sofas and chairs and making such simple articles of furniture as stools for home use...and that the cases in which the students taught at these classes could compete with the trade must be very rare.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Letter from R.T. Warner to NFWI, 4 June 1931, 5FWI/E/4/2/36, LSE.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Report, interview with the secretary of the Development Commissioners, 25 June 1931, 5FWI/E/4/2/36, LSE.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from R.T. Warner to NFWI, 4 June 1931, 5FWI/E/4/2/36, LSE.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

With WI craft work being associated with both 'rural' and 'home' industries it was not conceived as a 'legitimate' threat to the real world of trade and commerce. This encompassed a particular conceptualisation of the rural as 'other' to mainstream, urban industry, and of handicrafts as women's work, separate from industry.

The WI responded by cancelling classes in upholstery, and reiterating that there would be no sales, or even orders taken at their next national handicraft exhibition in 1932.<sup>98</sup> The exhibition handbook stated that, 'the Institute Stall with a mixture of crafts serves no useful purpose and gives to any exhibition an undesirable bazaar-like appearance'.<sup>99</sup> Any hint of commercialism clashed with the aesthetic staging of the exhibition, the function of which was primarily educational. The gendered nature of craft work was reinforced by Alice Armes in an article on 'Thrift Crafts' published in the journal of the Rural Industries Bureau. Armes wrote that, if a man had completed the necessary repairs to the woodwork of a chair or sofa at an occupational centre, his wife could then 'clean the fillings, renew the webbing, set up the springs, wash the cover and re-fix it'.<sup>100</sup> This gave women an active and skilled role, but it was supplementary to the main repairs carried out by a man. The discourse of 'thrift' prominent during the 1930s stressed the importance of women's role in domestic management, but the 'make-do-and-mend' mentality located the craft object firmly in the home. There was no middle way between home and industry for such objects, since they were not made with any expectation of being sold.

The craft object continued to be positioned firmly within the home in the 1930s as an educational activity practiced in leisure time. Furthermore, the emphasis in NFWI policy on handicrafts shifted away from self-help and towards social service. In February 1934 the NCSS asked the NFWI to

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<sup>98</sup> Letter, Secretary of NFWI to Secretary of Development Commission, 10 July 1931, 5FWI/E/4/2/36, LSE.

<sup>99</sup> NFWI *Exhibition Handbook* (NFWI, 1932), 5FWI/G/1/3/3/5, Folder 1, LSE.

<sup>100</sup> Alice Armes, 'Thrift Crafts for Women', reprinted from *Rural Industries* c.1920, 5FWI/H/42, LSE.

administer a grant for the organisation of handicrafts in voluntary occupational centres for the unemployed.<sup>101</sup> The NFWI executive committee agreed and appointed a joint committee with representatives from the NFWI, Rural Industries Bureau, NCSS, National Union of Townswomen's Guild and Ministry of Labour to work together on the initiative. They clarified that, in agreeing to undertake the work the NFWI 'is not in any way dealing with the problem of unemployment but is trying to devise means whereby unemployed people may usefully occupy their leisure time'.<sup>102</sup> In doing so they made a firm distinction between leisure and work, and emphasised that the WI was not overstepping the boundary into dealing with such macro issues as unemployment and industry. The NFWI elaborated that it agreed to undertake the work because the institutes had been helped by public money, so it was appropriate to respond to work of national service, and that they looked at handicrafts as a means of 'utilising leisure and not as a commercial undertaking'. In addition, they pointed out that institute teachers had studied thrift crafts, which was of particular interest to the centres, and that many WI members who had trained as teachers would be available and 'would welcome extra work'.<sup>103</sup>

The depression forced the NFWI to clarify its position on handicrafts. Whereas in the early 1920s there had been some scope for commercial activity at a local level, by the 1930s the NFWI sought to distance itself, and even discourage the selling of craft work lest it compete with more established trade interests. Ideally, members would make money from crafts only indirectly, through teaching. This change in tone was evident in their national exhibitions, which increased in size throughout the 1930s. At the 1935 exhibition at the New Horticultural Hall, Westminster, held over the course of a week in November, demonstrations were held during four, two hourly time slots throughout the day in a range of crafts, such as rugs, basketry, rush-work, thrift, quilting, spinning and weaving, patchwork, plain

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<sup>101</sup> Memorandum, 'Handicrafts in Occupational Centres for the Unemployed', 5FWI/E/4/2/09, LSE.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> *Annual Report* (NFWI, 1934), 5FWI/A/2/2/05, LSE.

sewing, toy-making and raffia.<sup>104</sup> It attracted national press coverage and large audiences and, three years later, at the 1938 exhibition, arrangements were made with railway companies to enable visitors to the exhibition to make a one day visit to London for a single reduced fare.<sup>105</sup>

The exhibitions included an orders department, separated from the main activity of the displays, where orders for sales could be initiated.<sup>106</sup> The 1935 exhibition handbook stated that although orders for craft items could be taken, no actual sales were permitted at the exhibition, no exhibits could be taken away from the hall, and the exhibition committee would not take any responsibility for subsequent correspondence between 'would-be purchasers and WI members'. Unlike at the initial 1918 exhibition, which, as *Home and Country* proudly reported, had made money for members by the sale of work, the 1935 exhibition catalogue side-lined the exchange of money. The exhibitions were predominantly for aesthetic appreciation showing the artistic and cultural value of WI handicrafts. Yet, photographs of the exhibition halls, which show their bustling, market-day atmosphere and labels used for exhibits which clearly included information about the price of individual items,<sup>107</sup> betray the extent to which, for many of the craftswomen present, the exhibitions remained commercial ventures.

## Conclusion

Women's involvement in the Guild of Learners was a way of negotiating boundaries between work and home, and between traditional and modern, during the social and political changes following war. The WI promoted the idea of continuity whilst reformulating traditions associated with domestic and rural life, and their story of rural craft work as part of women's history functioned as a springboard for 'active citizenship'.<sup>108</sup> The arts and crafts revival of the interwar years, and the idea that 'good taste' and beauty could

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<sup>104</sup> NFWI *Exhibition Handbook* (NFWI, 1935), 8-9, 5FWI/E/4/2/05, LSE.

<sup>105</sup> Stamper, 'Teaching and Preserving Crafts', 5.

<sup>106</sup> NFWI *Exhibition Handbook* (NFWI, 1935), 6, 5FWI/E/4/2/05, LSE.

<sup>107</sup> Exhibition labels, 5FWI/E/4/2/5, LSE.

<sup>108</sup> Beaumont, 'Citizens not Feminists', 416.



be found in everyday objects further raised the status of their handicrafts. This aesthetic focus enabled the WI to 'renegotiate domesticity',<sup>109</sup> by revaluing their domestic craft work as skilled and relevant.

Initially, the artistic, educative and commercial functions of craft objects were not necessarily in conflict. By emphasising the high standards achieved, and by locating industry within the locality, the production of WI handicraft work became invested with a broader social purpose. However, by the mid-1920s, NFWI handicraft policy moved closer towards an emphasis on learning and leisure, a shift which gathered momentum following the depression. During the 1930s vested trade interests drew on the WI's invented tradition of rural women's handicraft work to position the WI craft object solely in the rural home, as something to be preserved and admired, but not bought.

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<sup>109</sup> Morgan, 'Jam Making, Cuthbert Rabbits and Cakes', 209.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

From Fry's and Nicholls' experimental progressive schools to the nation-wide YFC and WI movements, the educational initiatives studied in this thesis revolved around particular conceptions of the rural community as a means to develop social service, citizenship and democracy. Exploring the relationships between them demonstrates the influence of rurality on educational ideas and practices, and has significance for a fuller understanding of dominant themes in the history of education, including progressivism, the expansion of the national education system following the First World War and informal education. More specifically, it highlights the particular character of progressive and child-centered approaches in rural settings; the changing meanings of rural bias and the role of the village school; and the collaboration between the state and voluntary sector in the provision of continuation and adult education in the countryside. This research contributes to rural history by exposing the different ways in which the rural community was conceptualised among various individuals and groups, in relation to changing ideas about voluntarism, citizenship and gender.

While Burchardt has examined the intellectual origin of the concept of 'rural community',<sup>1</sup> and its centrality in the work of RCCs,<sup>2</sup> this thesis demonstrates its wider relevance and contends that an understanding of its meaning and use informs historical understanding of education in the countryside. The notion of rural community prevalent in the progressive schools, village schools and voluntary organisations examined here was predominantly middle-class. Though class identities were complex, the dominant voices in these educational initiatives can all be identified with the middle-class professions of teaching and public administration, and they embodied the

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<sup>1</sup> Burchardt, 'Rethinking the Rural Idyll'.

<sup>2</sup> ---, 'State and Society in the English Countryside'; ---, "'A new rural civilization'", in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 26-35.

professional values of efficiency, expertise and public service.<sup>3</sup> They represented a form of 'conservative modernity',<sup>4</sup> in that they promoted the idea of rural community in relation to a liberal, rather than a socialist, conception of democracy. They did not advocate fundamental social change, but they had a modernising current. While the rhetoric of community potentially undermined more far-reaching calls for change, subduing the voices of agricultural labourers as well as those who lived in the countryside but were not involved in agriculture, it also gave agency to certain individuals and groups, sometimes in unanticipated ways, which facilitated shifts in authority and introduced different forms of hierarchy.

### **Reconceptualising rural education: innovation rather than decline**

While revisionist histories of interwar rural England argue that it was characterised by regeneration, innovation and growth,<sup>5</sup> longstanding associations between the countryside and decline in the history of education have continued to inform understandings of rural education. This discourse of decline has limited consideration of experimentation and change originating within the countryside itself. Morris' Village College has been hailed as the most wide-ranging experiment in progressive and community education in the countryside, an isolated example of innovation.<sup>6</sup> Rural schools are mostly depicted as peripheral and slow to change, constrained by the continued dominance of the landed elite,<sup>7</sup> and agricultural education has been marginalised in histories of continuation and technical education, which usually emphasise the problems associated with institutional settings.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, 218; Burchardt, 'State and Society in the English Countryside'.

<sup>4</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Brassley et al. 'Conclusion' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 235-249.

<sup>6</sup> Adams, 'Rural Education' in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 45-52; Ree, *Educator Extraordinary*.

<sup>7</sup> Horn, *Education in Rural England*.

<sup>8</sup> Sanderson, *Junior Technical School*.

This research challenges the marginalisation of the rural in the history of education by examining a range of educational configurations connected by a shared interest in the rural community, beginning with an assessment of two experimental schools in rural Buckinghamshire. Fry's vision of democracy was not necessarily radical; she wanted reform rather than revolution and was motivated by a fear over her position as part of the upper 'moneyed class'. She reflected on her social position critically and sought to connect with 'the worker' through the physical work involved in farming. Though this did not abate her privilege, or give her the insight into working life she yearned for, it allowed her to challenge the norms associated with her class and gender by emphasising action and service over thought and discussion.

Nicholls also invested in a rosy, liberal ideal of democracy, enacted through committee work and participation in village life, rather than fundamental social change. She did not problematise her comfortably middle-class position, and was content to serve the community as an outside expert, rather than striving to be an independent 'worker' like Fry. However, her experience of village life was influential on her political beliefs as an active member of the NEF. Both women contributed to a wider social discourse about what democracy and citizenship meant in practice, and the educational configurations of the farm and village provided them with learning opportunities which developed their ideas about the relationships between individuals, communities and society.

Particular conceptions of village life in relation to community and class were also fundamental to the Board's policy on rural elementary schools. The 'rural problem' presented particular challenges within emergent ideas about elementary and continuation education in the countryside, and a range of different perspectives competed to influence policy. Rejecting reactionary preservationist views and overtly utilitarian approaches, the Board promoted an expansive view of the rural school as a 'social institution' which contributed to the cultural development of the community.

Shifting the focus away from the deprivation of rural education helps to explain the slow reorganisation of rural schools. Parker argued that the Hertfordshire LEA chose to maintain all-age village schools, rather than reorganise them, in order to stem rural depopulation.<sup>9</sup> My study of HMI reports on rural schools suggests that this was the case more widely, since they implicitly testified to the benefits of maintaining all-age village schools by referring to the sense of community which could be built up among boys and girls across age groups. The Board's view of the rural community, however, was romanticised and uncritical, in that it accepted social hierarchies and that the fate of most country children was to stay in their locality. A focus on the distinctiveness of the rural community worked against the idea of bringing rural and urban education in line; it seemed natural for the country child to have a more practical curriculum. Helping rural children to progress to secondary schools failed to become a priority. The supposed success of the curricular experiments in weaving at Staunton and Ashley Green School potentially undermined the case for further reform to rural schools by the state.

Following a similar line to the Board's policy on elementary education, the Ministry supported initiatives such as the YFC and WI which provided for the social and cultural needs of the community, rather than simply catering for the agricultural industry. With its emphasis on service and co-operation, the YFC supported a movement away from the leadership of the countryside by the landed elite, and was part of the broader professionalisation of English agriculture.<sup>10</sup> However, it overshadowed the particular requirements of agricultural labourers and rested on the assumption that what was good for the supposedly more numerous middle-class farmers and their relatives was good for the rest of the community. At a local level, the movement was often very much a family affair, involving parents and siblings, which contributed to

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<sup>9</sup> Parker, *Hertfordshire Children*; ---, "A Taste for Country Life".

<sup>10</sup> Brassley, 'Professionalisation of English Agriculture'.

its quickly acquired reputation as exclusive to the sons and daughters of farmers.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, while farmers were configured as the natural leaders of the rural community, the reliance in some areas on the county agricultural education staff interrupted assumed hierarchies. Unlike the countryside's traditional ruling elite, the future farmers were to derive their authority as stewards of the land from their ability to farm efficiently, in co-operation with others, and for the benefit of the nation as well as their own pockets. Voluntary service to the community was encouraged, and it attracted individuals such as Batten, a Quaker who did not fit the stereotype of the large, wealthy farmer which came to characterise the movement. The YFC was broadly middle-class and was nationally organised, indicating a shift in influence and authority away from the local gentry and parish authorities.<sup>12</sup>

The WI forged a collective identity as rural housewives, giving members common ground across class boundaries.<sup>13</sup> Divisions in terms of wealth and status were not completely permeable, however, and were brought into sharper relief by the economic depression. There was an increasing emphasis in their handicraft programme on thrift and on the educative rather than commercial function of crafts to ensure that they did not compete with trade interests. It is perverse that with the worsening economic situation, which affected the income of many rural families, middle-class leaders discouraged WI members from producing crafts for sale. However, practices of selling continued on a local level, and for many members, craft objects sustained multiple meanings, being sellable as well as educative items which gave form to the skills and value of rural women. Discussions around the purpose of handicrafts in *Home and Country* provided a means to work through conflicting ideas about handicrafts.

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<sup>11</sup> Hirsch, *Young Farmers' Clubs*, 111-2.

<sup>12</sup> Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 144.

<sup>13</sup> Andrews, *Acceptable Face of Feminism*.

### **Education and voluntarism**

There has been research on voluntary organisations as sites of informal education,<sup>14</sup> but little on collaborations between the state and voluntary sector, which was a particular feature of rural education in the interwar countryside. The YFC and WI shared a similar structure, with local branches linked up to a county and national federation, allowing them to draw on the expertise and resources of institutions such as the Ministry, NCSS and Development Commission while adapting to the needs of their locality. They represented a new way of organising practical education, on a bigger scale than what the state could or was willing to support, which was compatible with several strands of educational and agricultural policy. As well as providing agricultural education, for example, the YFC connected to the later stages of elementary education through clubs attached to schools, which offered a way of delivering a rural bias to the curriculum. The WI was the most important driver of educational provision for rural women, and also influenced conceptions of education for girls.

New understandings of the role of leisure and voluntarism in the cultural development of communities also related to education in a less formal sense.<sup>15</sup> The experiments in weaving in rural elementary schools, for example, involved a degree of self-help on the part of rural teachers, whose resourcefulness and creativity won the support of the local education authorities. James in particular had an active role in village life, with the formation of her 'social club' and her successful attempts to get funds from local wealthy patrons as well as the support of the LEA. In both schools, weaving became a hobby for the children practised at home, as well as a part of their school day, and HMI reported that such craftsmanship benefited academic subjects while aiding the personal development of pupils.

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<sup>14</sup> Mills and Kraftl, *Informal Education*.

<sup>15</sup> Snape, 'The New Leisure', 55-57.

While broader trends in education have institutionalised the separation of the intellectual and practical with different schools for academic and vocational education, many of these initiatives stressed the parity between the two. Fry insisted that practical work supported academic study, and that her own intellect was very much alive, though her way of life gave her many visitors a contrary impression. She acknowledged common aims with the YFC and bought livestock from Buckinghamshire clubs,<sup>16</sup> while Nicholls participated in village life through her membership of the WI. Rural leisure was especially important at the Garden School, where teachers and pupils took part in various village activities as part of their broader education in social service. The Board as well as RCCs insisted on the importance of recreational activities such as music and village dramas as a way to stimulate further intellectual interest in literature and history among adults and young people, and, as explored in chapter six, Marston raised concerns that the creative practice of handicrafts would cause an imbalance in intellectual growth between women and men. A strong relationship between the practical and the intellectual, then, was emphasised as a particular characteristic of education in the countryside within these initiatives.

In part, these assertions were part of an active attempt to raise the 'dignity' of rural occupations and traditions. Fry wanted to elevate farming above associations with backwardness and conservatism by highlighting the value of the 'fundamental' way of life of the farmer.<sup>17</sup> The Hadow report on the primary school wanted the curriculum in rural schools to 'dignify the farmer's vocation',<sup>18</sup> ensuring that children were not turned against rural occupations, and *The Young Farmer* celebrated the national importance of farming and portrayed it as a career, on a par with other professions. At the same time, the veneration of the countryside impacted on what could be thought of as

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<sup>16</sup> Stock books AR 87/2005, 1942.

<sup>17</sup> Fry, 'The Farmhouse School', 167-168.

<sup>18</sup> Board of Education Consultative Committee, *The Primary School*, 182-3.



'educational', raising status of vocational, technical and practical instruction by relating it to rural culture, rather than just agricultural work.

### **Rurality and modernity**

Popular images of the countryside often represent it as part of the national past. Many of the individuals and groups examined in this thesis seized on the widespread interest in the countryside at the time, but I argue that their conceptions of rural life were more pragmatic and modern, than ideological and nostalgic. The countryside was strongly associated with farming and the village, but not necessarily as repositories of a tradition connected with 'Englishness'. When the countryside was linked to the nation, it was with a view to understanding the present and imagining the future, rather than longing for the past.

The idea of rural life as fundamental to civilization informed the Board's thinking on rural elementary education, but not necessarily in relation to national identity. Although the experiments with weaving were portrayed as historic and consistent with rural, English traditions, they were also thought to enliven the school curriculum and give it a renewed significance in the social and cultural life of their area. Appeals to Englishness within the YFC and WI tended to be largely rhetorical, often coinciding with drives for more funding or membership. At other times, the celebration of the history of the countryside served a particular function. Within the YFC for example, an emphasis on heritage tempered a modernising drive to introduce scientific methods and concepts such as 'efficiency' and 'business procedure'. Similarly, the WI revived old English traditions of craftsmanship as a way to critique 'standardisation' and modern practices of production. While farming and rural crafts represented a revival of the old and recalled a harmonious national past in terms of the beginning of civilization, they also connected with the modern countryside and ideas about its future.

The relationship between individuals, the community and the nation preoccupied all of these initiatives to some extent, but citizenship was linked to actions within particular spaces and localities, more than to ideas of

nationhood. The WI, for instance, explicitly discussed the meanings of citizenship and rooted it in everyday practices within the home. The sites of the farm and village provided the ideal setting for Fry and Nicholls due to the communal action involved in making them function. Similarly, the YFC encouraged service to the community and nation through aiding food production and organising village social events.

This research supports the idea that constructions of gender are spatial as well as temporal,<sup>19</sup> and this is particularly clear in the case of Fry, James, and the WI. Women were particularly influential in the initiatives described here, as teachers playing an active part in village life, as housewives who were 'partners' in the agricultural industry, as members of rural voluntary organisations and as individuals, negotiating their roles and responsibilities as citizens. Becoming a farmer was central to Fry's renegotiation of her classed and gendered identity, offering her an 'independent' way of life which challenged the conventions associated with her gender. The practical nature of the job contrasted with the 'artificialities' accompanying the performance of femininity. Similarly, the rural identity the HMI inspector ascribed to James, as a 'typical daleswoman', complicated stereotypes around the isolated rural woman teacher.

The notion of women as carriers of heritage, through passing skills between generations, had particular salience in a rural context, since rural life itself was perceived to be in decline.<sup>20</sup> The Denman report drew attention to women's influence over their children and their educative role as rural mothers. Though this was conservative in reiterating traditional roles ascribed to women, skills connected to the home took on new meanings. The WI, for example, insisted that rural handicrafts were an expression of modernity and citizenship, and the Denman report described men and women as 'partners' in agriculture. *The Young Farmer* ambiguously

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<sup>19</sup> Hughes, 'Rurality and Cultures of Womanhood', in Cloke and Little, *Contested Countryside*, 125-6.

<sup>20</sup> Verdon, 'Modern Countrywoman', 92.

portrayed girls as interested in the same activities as boys, with the additional responsibilities associated with domesticity.

### **Future research**

The connections between progressive educators and members of the rural community movement existed not only at an organisational level, through the intellectual ambitions of ‘key players’ such as Morris, but also at a local level through the ideas and practices of individual educators. This can be seen through the links between Nicholls and the WI, and Fry and the YFC. The significance of rural environments in progressive education, where so many schools were situated is under-examined. The historiography points to either the conservatism and empty aesthetic of the countryside as an appropriate setting for the education of the privileged,<sup>21</sup> or it makes assumptions about the links between the rural environment and healthiness, as well as its potential for stirring curiosity in the child. Buckinghamshire’s amiable surroundings and a close proximity to nature were certainly important to Fry and Nicholls, but I argue that the democratic potential of community developed in a rural environment was the chief attraction. Through looking into some of the other schools featured in the *Modern Schools Handbook*, the relationship between rurality and community in progressive education could be interrogated further.

The predominant focus on the south of England in this thesis is partly a reflection of broader regional variations in the organisation of both education and agriculture. Most of the progressive schools featured in the *Modern Schools Handbook*, for example, were in the south of England, perhaps because they were within reach of London by rail. It is not adequate to rely on the notion of a north/south divide in terms of wealth, but this concentration of new, fee-paying schools in the south is significant, and warrants further research. Regional farming patterns were also fundamental to the initiatives described here. The YFC, for instance, was initiated in Devon, and was more successful in pastoral farming areas which focused on the rearing of

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<sup>21</sup> Wiener, *English Culture*; Allsobrook, *Schools for the Shires*.

livestock. This helps to explain why the club and county federation archives I examined were in pastoral areas of the south and south-west, rather than arable areas of the east. Going forward, it would be valuable to conduct case studies focused on specific geographic areas.

For example, it would be interesting to chart the changing meaning and practices of rural bias, in relation to ideas about agriculture, the countryside and education, in different locations. This would develop insights into the history of related educational areas such as agricultural instruction, nature study, environmental education, and the place of arts and crafts in the curriculum. The HMI reports examined in chapter three of this thesis raise questions around whether rural bias was encouraged as part of local education policy, or whether it was mainly pursued on the initiative of individual teachers, and it would be valuable to conduct a case study of an LEA to address this. Following the HMI report of Staunton School in Nottinghamshire, for example, it would be interesting to examine the educational policy of the Nottinghamshire LEA.

To understand the development of continuation education in the countryside, it is necessary to conceptualise the education system broadly, taking into consideration configurations of education outside of institutional settings, and this may be the case for other forms of technical education. The extent of collaboration between the state and voluntary organisations in providing education could be examined further, to see how this changed beyond the Education Act of 1944. Looking at the YFC in the second half of the twentieth century, for example, would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of agricultural and technical education. Focussing on agricultural education supported by the Ministry and pursued in collaboration with the voluntary sector draws attention to innovation at a local level, with different types of educators, such as county agricultural education staff as well as teachers, experimenting with ways of engaging young people and adults. A more expansive view of technical education in the historiography, concentrating on non-institutional settings and relationships with industry as well as the policy

and procedures of the Board and local education authorities, might similarly expose different, localised forms of vocational education.

In studying education through the YFC and WI, this study contributes to research on the relationship between education and social change in rural history, and raises questions for further exploration. As well as adding necessary detail to the under-researched YFC movement, this thesis argues that it fostered collaborations between farmers and county agricultural education staff, helping to build up the 'quasi-corporatist' relationship between the state, organised groups of farmers and scientific staff which went on to dominate English agriculture in the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> The YFC also offers a lens through which to view the shifting 'place' of the farmer in rural society in relation to how the countryside was governed. Farmers represent a variable social group, from the wealthy farmer with thousands of acres to the tenant farmer who may also have owned land, to the smallholder, and there are few sources from which to research their social and cultural life.<sup>23</sup> Whilst literature in rural history suggests that farmers took on a greater role in the social leadership of the countryside after the First World War, it concentrates on the activities of professional bodies such as the NFU and neglects other agencies and organisations.

This research also develops existing accounts of handicrafts in the WI movement, offering a more critical perspective on the work of the Guild of Learners. It complicates celebratory accounts of the WI's role in enabling rural women to 'renegotiate domesticity' by highlighting the tensions involved in middle-class attempts to define the function of craft objects at different points throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Today, 'traditional' crafts such as knitting, needlework and crochet are enjoying a renewed popularity following concern over waste and Britain's 'throwaway culture'<sup>24</sup> and the WI, which is

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<sup>22</sup> Sheail, 'Agriculture in the wider perspective'.

<sup>23</sup> Hoyle, ed., *The Farmer in England*.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Britain's 'throw away culture' has been reported on in the press, see 'Householders should make do and mend to cut waste, says Tory minister' *The Telegraph* (7 August 2013); Luke Johnson, 'Animal Spirits: Handmade in Britain- the Quiet Revolution for

now open to urban as well as rural women, is enjoying a resurgence amongst young, professional women in cities. The East London branch, the Shoreditch Sisters, for example, is strongly invested in crafts, community and campaigning.<sup>25</sup>

This research connects topics in the history of education and rural history, developing understandings of the countryside as an educative space. It shows that the 'rural' had an active influence on educational ideas in the interwar years; it was not the case that education in rural areas was lagging behind, or directed by, urban provision. Overall, this thesis argues for a more critical understanding of rural education, one that acknowledges how the representational significance of the rural has changed over time. In the interwar countryside, rurality was an active influence on educational ideas, particularly in terms of the concept of 'rural community'.

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<sup>25</sup> The Shoreditch Sisters WI. Website, 'About Us' page.

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