

‘A richness that is lacking now’: country childhoods, nostalgia and rural change in the Mass Observation Project.¹

I was born in the country just after the Second World War. I remember horses in the fields; my father repaired some of the earliest combines ... I remember when cows weren't all black and white and when corn fields were full of poppies. I literally saw the fields of my childhood turned into a housing estate. But I also remember low wages and houses without toilets or tap water. I have stood with a union banner while a family was turned out of a cottage, which had been their home for the best part of 20 years. So in a way this is the background to my own story – the land of lost content where ‘... I went and cannot come again’ is my past as well as the past of rural England and Wales.²

- Alun Howkins, 2003

In the spring of 1995, the national life-writing organisation, the Mass Observation Project (MOP), asked its panel of volunteer writers ‘do you think the countryside has changed in your lifetime?’ The open-ended question was accompanied by numerous others on the British countryside, including those on the topic of living and holidaying in the country and the countryside in film, television and radio, as well as the shipping of live animals, road building and the National Trust. The ‘directive’, which was commissioned by rural historian

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Alun Howkins, was, in the Project's own words, 'perhaps a bit difficult'. The answers given by respondents were varied and detailed, and were shaped by numerous factors including the age of the respondent and their personal connection with the countryside. However, there were also significant similarities between the responses. The most prominent of these was the importance of the respondents' own individual lifecycle to the way in which they conceptualised rural change in the twentieth century. Similar to Howkins, the respondents wrote evocatively of their childhood memories of the countryside and significantly, even for respondents who had not grown-up in a rural setting, childhood experiences played a central role in how Mass Observers grappled with, and made sense of, rural change. As a result, nostalgic tropes surrounding idyllic rural childhood were regularly intertwined by the respondents with discussions of the state of rural Britain at the end of the twentieth century. This is in many ways unsurprising; it is the nature of MOP to encourage respondents to be introspective in their writings and to reflect on their own experiences, beliefs and values, and the directive question itself explicitly asked members to reflect on change 'in their lifetime'. Despite this, the answers are hugely revealing as, in many ways, they support the continued symbolism of the countryside in public consciousness at the end of the twentieth century.

Scholars have long acknowledged the centrality of the rural, and particularly the English countryside, in conceptualisations of British national identity. David Lowenthal suggested that the image of the countryside as a 'sacred garden' is often used to represent an archetypal ideal of Englishness: a symbol of 'quintessential national virtues'.³ By extension, as Paul Readman

noted, such landscapes could also have meaning in broader notions of Britishness.⁴ In the twentieth century, romantic ideas about the relationship between the British people and the landscape were perpetuated within popular culture – such as in film, music, radio, advertising and magazines – as well as education and political channels. These idealised images of the countryside, often framed by class and gender, were once understood by scholars as being nostalgic, ‘anti-modern’ and backward looking – a response to the perceived decline of rural society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵ However, increasingly scholars, including Peter Mandler, Frank Trentmann and David Matless, have challenged this interpretation suggesting that, rather than being solely a symbol of the past, throughout the twentieth century the countryside instead was utilised in complex ways by individuals and organisations.⁶

Building on these interventions historians have increasingly identified the countryside as a site of the development of liberalism and modern conceptualisations of citizenship in the twentieth century, and in doing so have challenged the extent to which the celebration of the rural can be understood as traditional or nostalgic.⁷ Further challenging simplistic understandings of the idyll, sociologists and geographers have argued for the subjective and highly individualized meanings that underpin romanticized images of the rural.⁸ For example, in his study of Norwegian youth Johan Fredrik Rye noted that the rural is ultimately ‘located in people’s minds, rather than as a material and objective reality’.⁹ This work has highlighted the ways that rurality is socially and culturally constructed and is therefore a complex, subjective category of analysis. The personal writings housed in the archive of MOP thus

offer an exciting opportunity to consider the way the rural was subjectively constructed and understood at the end of the twentieth century.

MOP, a revival of the mid-century social investigative organisation the Mass-Observation Archive (MOA), began in 1981. The project aims to collect the writings of volunteer contributors on a variety of topics, ranging from reactions to newsworthy events to everyday life and past experiences, and by 1993 the archive had 2,500 writers from across the United Kingdom.¹⁰ Mass Observation respondents are asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions sent out in quarterly 'directives', which encourage reflection on the present, alongside retrospective accounts. As Annebella Pollen noted, MOP can come under a number of significant criticisms that had also plagued the first-phase of the archive.¹¹ In particular, there are issues of representativeness, with the panel being statistically older, female, middle-class, from the South East of England and self-selecting.¹² As Howkins acknowledged, when we analyse these responses we are essentially 'discussing middle-aged and middleclass opinion'.¹³

Of course, the lack of representation on the MOP panel does have significant implications for the historian interested in studying memories of, and feelings about, the countryside. As Rye noted, an individual's conceptualisation of rurality needs to be understood within the social and cultural contexts in which they sit, with structural elements including class and gender playing a central role in shaping people's understanding of, and association with, the rural.¹⁴ Meanings of the countryside therefore can vary and can be understood as being dependent on individual circumstance. The larger proportion of urban, southern and middle class women within the

responses is therefore reflected in the definitions of the rural and distinctive regional imagery that they chose to reflect upon.

It is noteworthy that the proportion of Mass Observers (active in the 1990s) who grew up in the countryside was relatively small, meaning that the dominant voice of the cohort is largely (although not solely) from an urban perspective, and therefore within this small cohort a range of rural backgrounds is not necessarily represented. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the archive has been heralded by many as a valuable source of life history, providing historians with unprecedented access to the detailed thoughts, feelings and memories of 'ordinary' people on a variety of topics ranging from the extraordinary to the mundane.¹⁵ As Anne-Marie Kramer identifies, there is a 'temporality' to the way that respondents write to the archive, which leads to rich self-reflective responses that are carefully located within wider historical contexts.¹⁶ Subsequently, the life writing found in the archive of MOP provides a rich opportunity to map the respondents' everyday interactions with the countryside and explore the subjective meanings of the rural for members of the British public at the end of the twentieth century.

The archive distributed its directive on 'The Countryside', on which this study is based, in the spring of 1995. The directive, which also included sections asking respondents to complete a day diary and write on the topic of television soap operas, guided respondents by stating: 'We would like you to think, and write, about the countryside, especially the British countryside', before continuing with a number of open-ended questions covering a variety of topics related to the countryside including: farming, road building and living in the countryside.¹⁷ The questions proved extremely popular and the

directive received two boxes of replies, consisting of 348 responses, spanning 1459 pages.¹⁸ The directive included responses from Mass Observers covering a range of ages, regions, occupations, political beliefs and educational backgrounds, as well as those who identified as living in urban and rural areas. As usual for MOP, while some wrote extensive commentaries on their opinions about the state of the countryside in the twentieth century, others wrote very little.¹⁹ Despite these differences, there were some underpinning similarities between the responses. Structurally, most respondents followed the guidance sent to them and as a result many of the replies followed a systematic order. The directive itself reflected the tricky situation of agriculture in 1995, as respondents were directed to write about their opinions on topics ranging from the representation of the countryside in books, television and radio programmes (specifically *The Archers*), to the controversial topics of shipping of live animals, road building and protesters, as well as the National Trust, which at the time was celebrating its hundredth anniversary.

In asking these questions, MOP encouraged respondents to think critically about the status of the British countryside at the end of the twentieth century: the questions themselves implicitly suggested that rural Britain was a home in which all was not well. Dovetailing these were questions that took a more personal direction, focusing on where the respondent lived, whether they holidayed in the countryside and the extent to which the countryside had changed in their own lifetime. It was the intersection of the personal and the political (or the ordinary and extraordinary as Stephen Brooke has described it), which allowed many respondents to stake a claim to an authority over the

landscape and to justify their position on rural issues.²⁰ Significantly, many respondents gave ample space to critiquing the representation of the countryside in the media. *The Archers*, for example, was regularly criticised for being an unrealistic portrayal of rural life, although many were avid listeners regardless. Such criticism often stemmed from respondents' belief that they were particularly knowledgeable of rural life. As one woman in her fifties commented: 'I could write a book on countrylife then, but will leave this to Mr Alun Howkins'.²¹ Central to these claims of authority was respondents' childhood experiences, which served to reinforce the idea that certain Mass Observers had a particularly strong connection with the countryside that legitimized their position on rural matters. Much like post-war incarnations of 'ordinariness', identified by Claire Langhamer, it was thus memories of everyday interactions with the landscape that allowed many Mass Observers to speak with authority on matters of the countryside.²²

Rather unsurprisingly considering the nature of the questions asked, many respondents spent significant time reflecting on their childhoods and the place of the countryside within it. Numerous scholars have identified country childhood as a source of romantic perceptions of the rural, with popular discourse perpetuating the idea that the countryside can provide a healthier and more rewarding upbringing.²³ However, in recent years, impelled by an increasing interest in what Chris Philo has termed 'neglected rural geographies', scholars have begun to challenge such narratives.²⁴ For example, in their study of rural Northamptonshire, Hugh Matthews et al. explored the ways in which children experienced living in the countryside at the turn of the twenty-first century, with a focus on the individual voices of the

children themselves. Their conclusions were revealing. Building on the work of scholars who have identified the complex and subjective nature of rurality, Matthews et al. suggested that there is no one experience of rural childhood and point to the way in which experiences could be shaped by both economic and social factors, ranging from economic circumstance to parental authority.²⁵ Significantly, employing Bourdieusian analysis, Rye's study in the early 2000s revealed the way in which understandings of the rural were hugely varied amongst young people based on the habitus of the individual, including levels of economic and cultural capital, gender and relationship to agriculture.²⁶ For example, Rye argued that the rural habitus in which children of farmers are situated means that they are more likely to look positively on rural life, while rural girls often see the countryside in a less romantic way to boys.²⁷ Scholars have also increasingly looked to the adolescent lifecycle as a means of understanding and interpreting life narratives that challenge the idyll of country childhood. In particular, the idea of the 'rural dull' or the 'anti idyll' has been found to be prominent amongst rural adolescents, particularly as the romantic symbolism of the rural as traditional and peaceful sits uneasily with the predominantly urban popular image of youth culture.²⁸

However, although recent scholarship has challenged idyllic notions of rural childhood by focusing on the adolescent experience and addressing the 'agency' of youth, historical research has been less successful in considering the experiences of rural young people in the past.²⁹ With the exception of some notable work by Rebecca Andrews, Alice Kirke, Melanie Tebbutt and Selina Todd, few historians have approached the study of youth from a rural perspective and as such historical understanding of youth and youth culture in

the twentieth century has remained metro-centric.³⁰ This is true despite the fact that, as Helena Mills has found, geographical differences shaped experiences of post-war youth culture, with women from small towns or rural areas acknowledging the impact their location had on their lives.³¹ Such findings support the work of Michael Leyshon and Jacob Bull, who argued that places and spaces inhabited by the individual in the past are central to the creation of a 'storied-self' through memory.³² By focusing on the memories of MOP respondents in relation to growing up in the countryside, this article seeks to move beyond the urban, considering the way rurality shaped the childhood and adolescent narratives of those who 'came of age' in the mid-twentieth century.

Central to this endeavour is the idea that individuals are active participants in the retelling of the past, inserting agency over the ways that they construct and narrate their memories. This is extremely pertinent when considering the writings of the MOP respondents, who often narrate romantic, wistful and sentimental stories about their experiences of the countryside. Yet, as Ben Jones has acknowledged, rather than being a product of an uncritical engagement with the past, nostalgic reminiscences can be an effective tool used to engage with, and challenge, the present.³³ While Joe Moran has suggested that childhood nostalgia is both reflective of anxieties about social and economic change and its impact on the child, and the individual sense of identity and belonging, present in everyday life.³⁴ Indeed, this study asserts that the romanticised memories of the Mass Observers recounted in the early 1990s were intimately framed by the personal life stories of the individual, as well as the social, cultural, economic and political position of the British

countryside at the end of the twentieth century. A study of memories of rural childhoods can therefore illuminate both the complex nature of the rural experience in the twentieth century and contemporary debates surrounding the future of the countryside (and who had the authority to speak to them) in the nineteen-nineties.

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‘These moors and dales with the tabular hills and the high cliffs of the Yorkshire coast are “my patch”; the countryside I first knew as a young child, the place I call “home”’.³⁵ When responding to the 1995 MOP spring directive on the countryside this respondent, a sixty-nine year old female from Scarborough, wrote of the ways in which for her (despite living away from the area for many years), rural and coastal spaces of Yorkshire were tantamount to ‘home’. Feelings of belonging and attachment to rural spaces were expressed by numerous respondents in their replies to the directive, with a significant number identifying that their love of the countryside began in childhood. The statement exemplifies the romantic position that the rural had in the life stories of many respondents, both urban and rural, who regularly began their submissions with a discussion of their childhood memories of the countryside. As one sixty-eight year old woman from London told MOP, ‘I have lived in London most of the time since 1958. But I am a countrywoman in my bones and core because I was born in the depths of West Wales, which was home until I was 19’.³⁶ Both women exemplify that while ‘the rural’ was a slippery concept for Mass Observers to define, country childhoods could be formative in shaping a respondent’s self-identity.

The idea of rural upbringing has taken on a somewhat mythological presence in popular understandings of what constitutes a 'good' childhood. Discourses of idyllic country childhood often celebrate the freedom, safety, innocence and nurturing influence of the natural world (as a result of being distanced from the urban) and the impact that it can have on young people. As Owain Jones explained, these ideas are 'the continuing projections of romantic visions into the fabric of modernity. In such visions, the idealised countryside, as surrogate nature, is an innocent space, and it becomes the optimal setting for the innocence that is childhood.'³⁷ Rural childhood has thus been given significant cultural value in society, which regularly celebrates access to rural space as being a vital component to a fulfilled childhood.

This tendency is not new; in *The Child in the Country*, Colin Ward identified romanticized ideas about country upbringing as having a long history, arguing that notions of idyllic rural childhoods were embedded in popular literature and philosophical thinking of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁸ However, in the twentieth century the growth of children's consumption and the rise of commercial industries, including the cinema, saw the idyllic image of the rural continue to dominate conceptualizations of good childhoods. For example, scholars have identified the way that idyllic rural lifestyles are recalled through childhood play and marketed through contemporary children's toys and television, such as *Sylvanian Families* and *Postman Pat*, and in doing so are consumed in the everyday.³⁹ Jones meanwhile has highlighted the way idealised images of childhood rurality have been perpetuated in popular film and literature, for example the works of Enid Blyton.⁴⁰ Significantly, however, sociologists have

identified the way in which such conceptualisations have purchase in the lived experience of children.⁴¹ Although, as Gill Valentine and Hugh Matthews et al. noted, the ideal of country childhood as being safer, healthier and more rewarding does not go unchallenged by both parents and youth – meaning that country ideals of childhood can have multiple meanings at any point in time.⁴²

Despite this, it is clear from the responses of Mass Observers that romantic notions of country childhood held significant sway in popular consciousness at the end of the twentieth century. When questioned about their attitudes and opinions towards the countryside, respondents regularly replied with recollections of their rural upbringing. These recollections drew upon evocative descriptions of country scenes, sounds and smell and were positioned as a justification for the respondent's love of the countryside. As one forty-five year old housewife from Stockport wrote:

I was equally lucky as a child. I was brought up in a small village, until the age of four actually on a farm, the granddaughter and great niece of farmers. My first memories are of the farm, the cows soft, wet steamy noses and ... the lazy kittens nestling in the hay bales where their half-wild mother had secreted there; searching for warm hen's eggs in all the likely places. Next to the farm was a stone-walled field of emerald green grass where I would play among the buttercups in the sunshine. ... The countryside of my youth until I left home at eighteen

was a secure and friendly place. ... Every year the children from the village school would descend on the field at cowslip time and gather the pretty pale yellow flowers in armfuls and carry them home. The same field would become the sledging run when the snow came and we all congregated at the top and sledged down the slope towards the river. The Avon flooded at least once a year and its wide flood plain of fertile cattle grazing land could be covered up to several feet ... The teenagers would take old tyres and lots of wood to use as rafts and we'd paddle in our wellingtons ... To this day I love the smell of fresh cow dung.⁴³

This respondent's memories of her childhood in the country typify some of the reoccurring themes within the MOP responses. In particular, she recalls farming activities and farmyard animals, as being central to her childhood, while at the same time emphasizing the significance of outdoor recreation for children and teenagers growing up in rural areas. These recollections were seemingly timeless, as respondents of a variety of ages recalled similar experiences. For example, one female respondent who had lived in the countryside for almost her entire life remembered her childhood in a similar fashion:

The woods, the fields, our garden, meant much to me as a child and I loved it all. Climbing trees, swimming in the muddy pond in the wood, catching tadpoles, looking for birds' nests, picking wild flowers, blackberries and wild strawberries, it was all such fun. We climbed the steep grassy slopes of the South Downs and slid down again on tea trays; we played on the frozen ponds and built snowmen in the winter. A visit to a farm was a treat, to see the cows milked and gaze at a new-born calf, or to be lifted on to the broad back of a cart horse. Once, I even climbed a tree to find a squirrel's drey and touched the tiny warm baby squirrels inside it. The countryside held endless joys for us.⁴⁴

Such romanticized memories of the exploration of the countryside were also shared by respondents who grew up in urban areas, with numerous Mass Observers recalling day trips and holidays in the countryside as being formative childhood experiences. As one forty-four year old female respondent, working as a school secretary in Buckinghamshire, reminisced about her experiences growing up in the city of Oxford: 'my friends & I used to take off into the open countryside during school holidays. We would go & sit in cornfields or do "nature study", collecting feathers & leaves & so on'.⁴⁵ While a thirty-five year old male respondent from Stockton-on-Tees similarly recollected: 'My sister and I were often taken out into the country, from areas

with streams in which to paddle, ruined castles and abbeys to explore or stately homes to discover'.⁴⁶ Central to memories of the countryside such as these were friendship and family, with the idea that the countryside offered a more authentic space for social interaction and bonding. As one sixty-one year old male remembered of his time walking over the South Downs with his mother: 'fresh breeze, bluebells, chalk blue butterflies, click of crickets when you sat on the grass, sky larks, sheep, springy turf, and down into a dry valley and always a tea shop with cakes ... My mother gave me her love of the countryside, a huge free gift'.⁴⁷

Here the respondent's memory of idyllic trips into the countryside was shaped by personal memories of his relationship with his mother. In these recollections the emotional geographies of the landscape was central. While one female respondent born in 1951 wrote of the way picnics on the South Downs with her family left her feeling 'exhausted but thoroughly contented', another woman in her sixties, who was a retired librarian and had lived in a large city for thirty years wrote: 'I have happy memories of sliding down haystacks, seeing cows milked – & being chased by a bull! (Not so happy!) We kept poultry, I used to make pets of the hens & remember carrying one around on my shoulder and giving them names.'⁴⁸ Such recollections speak to the deeply intimate nature of the countryside for Mass Observers, with respondents describing how the rural space made them feel. In doing so, they constructed the country as being a happier and more uplifting environment in comparison to the experiences of urban contemporaries or the modern day countryside. Therefore, it was often implied that the country was the most

desirable place to grow up for the nurturing impact that nature could have on the physical and emotional well-being of children.

The countryside also seemingly provided Mass Observers with freedom from parental supervision during childhood and was portrayed as a site of endless opportunity and adventure. As one sixty-seven year old woman fondly remembered her time exploring the countryside ten minutes from her home in wartime:

My friends and I used to walk for miles, mostly in the summer holidays. I remember we used to eat Hawthorn leaves (known as bread and butter). I remember the bluebells in the woods and in the Autumn the crunch of leaves underfoot. We looked among the leaves for hazel and beech nuts and chestnuts. The chestnuts were taken home to roast on a shovel on the open fire. I can smell them now. The sound of Church bells on a Sunday while we were out walking is a lovely memory. When I had a bike about 1943 I cycled for miles on empty roads, except for the occasional Army convoy. My friends and I cycled to Southend from Brentwood along the Arterial Road, impossible now of course. We went to Tilbury one day and took the ferry to Gravesend, what an adventure!⁴⁹

Importantly, both male and female respondents shared memories of adventurous activities. As one thirty-eight year old woman recalled of her post-war childhood:

With my parents, I climbed mountains, went in caves and visited some of the remotest places in the land. Looking back, I realise that we could have done some quite dangerous things, as we never took any special equipment. I used to go climbing up mountains in the rain, wearing high-heeled sandals and a mini skirt, up cliffs and gorges, through bogs – we thought nothing of going ten miles like that.⁵⁰

Such recollections are significant. While Jones has argued that the notion of idyllic country childhood is inherently gendered, meaning that girls who want to experience rural adventures are labeled as ‘tomboys’, and Phoebe Foy-Phillips and Sally Lloyd-Evans have suggested that gendered expectations impact upon children’s freedom to independently explore the countryside, the female respondents recall the ways the rural environment allowed them to subvert traditional gendered expectations of behaviour.⁵¹ This is not to suggest that their behaviour went unchallenged or that it was accepted, but simply that the countryside is recollected by some women as being a space of adventure, freedom and opportunity. As a fifty-two year old journalist from the North East of England informed MOP:

I grew up in the country, at least, for the first nine years of my life. It was an undistinguished village on the edge of the fens but there in the 1940s we had freedoms undreamed of by my town-bred daughter. Apart from being forbidden the river bank (none of us could swim) until we were old enough to handle a rod and go finishing, we raked about almost anywhere. ... We ate anything edible, climbed trees crawled through culverts and generally did things which should have poisoned, killed or at least seriously injured us.⁵²

At the heart of such stories about the freedom of country childhood, was a concern about the nature of children's lives at the end of the twentieth century. The idea that the 1990s were a particularly dangerous time for children, with ever-present risks ranging from traffic accidents to child abduction, loomed large over the respondents. As one seventy-eight year old retired teacher stated:

Life goes on & I can adapt, but childhood for me was a happy world of wonders and challenge, what a shame modern children can't just walk to somewhere in safety where they can climb trees & run free whenever they want to. We use to walk to the river & paddle & fish from a young age without supervision – walk out after dark with

out even considering safety.⁵³

Statements such as this suggest that the changing discourse surrounding urban space and children's safety in the post-war period, identified by Matthew Thomson, was also reflected in the way rural space was understood, as respondents described how dangers of road traffic and concerns about child welfare restricted children's use of the countryside.⁵⁴ The troublesome nature of modern childhood was thus described by one forty-three year old woman who contrasted her experiences of growing up in Chaldon, Surrey with her perception of modern children: 'We used to take packed lunches and go off on our bicycles or on foot for the day. I put the decrease in this sort of activity down to two main causes. Firstly, there are the distractions of television or computer games which keep children indoors to play in generally a more passive way. Secondly there is the danger of letting children out on their own as perceived by parents'.⁵⁵

Romanticised recollections of rural childhood were thus employed as a tool to critique modern day childhood. In doing so respondents made value judgements about the nature of 'good childhood' and justified their position through their own lived experience on the landscape of the country. However, if the Mass Observers utilised their childhood memories to comment on the changing relationship between children and the landscape, then present day concerns about the state of the British countryside, and more specifically agriculture, was equally significant in framing respondents contributions to the archive.

In his 2003 book, drawing from the replies to the 1995 MOP directive, Howkins identified the way that Mass Observers expressed concern over a variety of changes that had seemingly occurred in the British countryside in the second half of the twentieth century ranging from the mechanization of agriculture, the use of pesticides, the removal of hedgerows, changes in meadowland, urbanization and the demise of village life and community, all of which signaled to respondents the so-called deterioration of country life.⁵⁶ A self-proclaimed 'countrywoman', one sixty-eight year old woman from London wrote:

I am deeply, viscerally concerned about the state of the countryside – not only because of the roads and the volume of traffic on them, but the ugliness of set aside fields sprayed with chemicals to keep down the weeds; the acres and acres of corn grown on the same land year after year, turning the landscape into an utterly boring monotony of dull green turning to dull brown.⁵⁷

Such observations of rural change were not falsities, as Howkins acknowledged, there really were noticeable changes in the sights of the countryside, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century.⁵⁸ One man, a seventy year old chartered librarian, asserted the legitimacy of the changes that he had witnessed: 'I can remember when our countryside was a

patchwork of fields harbouring birds and insects amid flowering shrubs; when wild flowers grew in profusion in the grass; when hens roamed around in the farmyard. This isn't just a romantic dream – this was the way things really were'.⁵⁹ The position of lived childhood experiences in such claims for the authenticity of memories and for authority in rural matters were highly significant, as comments on the issues faced by the countryside as a result of modern changes, were consistently juxtaposed with Mass Observers' recollections of their childhood interactions with the country and its inhabitants. As one female respondent from a Dorset village succinctly expressed: 'Change! Yes, not 'arf! Hedges down for larger machinery. Roads & lanes tarmac for tyres everywhere. Noise. Now considered "unsafe" alone. Never when I was young'.⁶⁰ Subsequently, reflections on rural childhood were intricately interweaved with judgements about the modern day countryside, and childhood experiences on the land were attributed significant value. Recalling her experiences as a child watching harvest time in post-war Kent, one fifty-two year old respondent, informed Mass Observation that while perhaps some things had changed for the better, the modern countryside could simply not compare:

As a child I remember harvest time in Kent, the reaper slowly encircling the field till the rabbits ran out, + the waiting guns popped them all. The stooks setting in the sun, + the wild flowers in the margins, + hedges, very old hedges full of animals flowers + birds. There seemed to be more of everything, a richness which is lacking now.⁶¹

Although partly a result of the personal circumstances of the respondent – she was living in an urban area and felt a great loss from not having regular contact with the countryside – the idea that there was a ‘richness which is lacking’, intangible as it may seem, was a statement that summarised many respondents perspectives on rural change in the twentieth century, particularly since the Second World War.

Such concerns about rural change were fundamentally centred around long-debated questions of who and what the countryside was for, with some wanting to protect and preserve the nostalgic and traditional image of the rural idyll that was at the heart of their childhood reminiscences, which increasingly had little place within lived experience in the 1990s.⁶² The majority of these recollections were particularly framed around agricultural change, with Mass Observers often contrasting the personal nature and beauty of the agriculture of their childhood, with the impersonal nature of mechanised agriculture of the modern day. One Buckinghamshire woman who was born after the Second World War and had lived most of her life in large towns and cities exemplified this:

The countryside has changed a lot since I was a child.
Every year when I was a child my mother took my sister
& I to stay on her aunt’s farm in Kent for a week, & it was
idyllic. It wasn’t primitive by any means – there was
milking by machine – but all the cows had names, not
numbers. There were no EEC quotas or set-aside.⁶³

This respondent's recollection that 'cows had names, not numbers' reflects the way some Mass Observers believed that increased intervention in agriculture from both the government and Europe, was seemingly impacting the relationship between farmers and the land. Equally, mechanization was identified as dramatically changing the farmer's relationship with the land: as one woman who had been born in 1925 declared, 'the day of the small farmer is over'.⁶⁴ Mechanisation was also critiqued highly for its impact on wildlife, animals and the aesthetic of the countryside. As a forty-nine year old Health Promotion Officer from Brentwood, commented, 'we never used to see bright yellow fields of oil seed rape & now blue ones of flax – even the pigs have changed shape'.⁶⁵ Similarly one man, a sixty-six year old chartered surveyor from Oxford, wrote that:

... if you look closely at the wild life, what toll has befallen them! We used to have great crested newts in the pond at home, but petrol seepage or something saw the end of them along [sic] time ago ... It is a saddening tale how wild life has curled up and died in our streams and rivers, in the fields and in the gardens.⁶⁶

Evocative descriptions of the impact of modern farming methods were particularly prominent amongst the responses, due to the centrality of the land

in memories of the childhood play of Mass Observers. The countryside, conceptualised as an rich and open play space for children, was depicted by respondents as becoming increasingly restricted and dangerous as a result of mechanisation and the use of pesticides. This was particularly true for the respondent who had identified something 'lacking' in the modern countryside. The ex-teacher, commenting on the impact of pesticides and agribusiness on the land, wrote:

Now we have fields of wildflowers - rape- which make us all suffer breathing difficulties for the purpose of filling yet another warehouse with unusable seeds. Meanwhile, in the early spring, the slightest breeze wafts acres of top-soil over the roads. The soil is now so light, so sandy, so dead it needs tons + tons of artificial fertilizers. Then later they douse it with weed killers + pesticides so that it is rare to see birds or even insects in the summer fields. In fact people do not linger in the agri-buisness fields - its dangerous. Yet I can remember playing hide + seek in wheat which we called corn - lying in the spaces between the stalks on the porched earth.⁶⁷

For this respondent her memories of childhood play within the farming fields of the post-war countryside are situated in stark contrast with the changed landscape of the late-twentieth century. Childhood experiences were

thus utilised by Mass Observers as a means to comment on and justify their opinions of modern day agricultural practice. Subsequently, idyllic childhood memories were drawn upon as a rallying cry to reverse rural change. For example, one woman from the East End of London recalled her experiences of free-roaming animals and blackberry picking as an evacuee during the Second World War. She concluded that, 'These times will never return but we must try to salvage what is left. There is nothing like the real thing'.⁶⁸ While another respondent, a housewife and artist from St Leonards on Sea, wrote that, 'The danger is already upon us that we will have very little countryside left for future generations to enjoy. Very soon this country will be one major concrete road leading no where. I am saddened by what technological change has done to our countryside'.⁶⁹

The idea that rural life was somehow more 'real' or authentic in the past was also evident in concerns expressed by Mass Observers regarding the decline of rural community life, as a result of changing occupational structures and the encroachment of the urban. According to the respondents, while agricultural change sparked the beginning of the erosion of community, particularly as a result of the declining numbers of workers on the land, the encroaching urban influence in the countryside saw the further destruction of the landscape and of rural culture. As one woman who had grown up in the countryside commented, 'The greatest change is with the inhabitants themselves, gone is the community spirit and the help we gave each other'.⁷⁰ A forty-one year old Mass Observer admitted that in the early 1960s she felt resentment toward the retirees who had moved into her grandparents Sussex village, a place where she had grown up exploring the woods and fields.⁷¹

Similarly, another respondent commented on the environmental impact that the shifting population of rural areas, with the growth of commuters and second homeowners. The thirty-eight year old woman from Watford, who had visited the countryside regularly with her parents when she was a child, stated, 'People want to live in the countryside and commute to work, but this is the reason that the countryside is being destroyed by new housing, out-of-town superstores and big roads, and why we are all suffering air pollution and noise'.⁷²

Underpinning these concerns about the changing nature of the countryside were judgments about what the countryside was for, and most importantly who it was for. Indeed, the self-identified countrywoman mentioned previously, emotively wrote of the incursion of townspeople on the land. Reflecting on her opinions she informed MOP that, 'Perhaps what I have written above about the countryside and my attitude to the [sic] it just shows that it is very private, beloved and particular to me, not to be shared. It pains me that my granddaughters will never have the same feeling because they won't have known it [the countryside] as children. In effect this response is a cry of pain'.⁷³ Similar to this respondent, many other Mass Observers also expressed concern about the increasing restrictions placed upon young people's activities in the country, although often did so in reflection on the issue of right to roam. Childhood memories were therefore deployed by some respondents to challenge what they saw as the restrictive nature of rural access in the 1990s. One seventy-eight year old retired teacher remembered the seemingly once harmonious relationship between farmers and local children:

As children we were free to roam – no one accosted us if we crossed a field providing we were doing no damage. When a [backwater] of the Thames froze sufficiently hard for skating – the whole village rushed out although it was private property we crossed, owners were more tolerant. We knew them, they knew us. They owned the fields where the cows who provided our milk & their livelihood grazed. There was give and take, & we appreciated that without taking advantage. I was brought up on the edge of the most exclusive “stockbrokers” developments in Surrey in the 1920s – we were ever banned from the private roads, there were few cars then, but our regular walks as children plus dogs was round the roads + footpaths, without let or hindrance. Now? PRIVATE KEEP OUT.⁷⁴

Similarly, a rural environment teacher born in 1926, informed Mass Observation:

Where I was actually brought up there was a canal nearby and an old quarry. At the top of the quarry there was a bluebell wood and I used to climb the quarry and go and pick the primroses and bluebells. Now no child would be allowed to do that alone and if they picked the flowers some busy-body would stop them on the way home & give them a lecture about preserving flowers ... Along with so many things now-a-days the country has been spoilt for children

by warnings and 'don'ts' ... I think we've lost the freedom of the countryside.⁷⁵

Such notions of a loss of freedom are important. On the one hand they are based in truth as, both Matthews et al., and Robert Giddings and Richard Yarwood have acknowledged, by the end of the twentieth century there were very few 'wild' spaces left for children to independently explore.⁷⁶ On the other hand, these statements speak to the way that romantic or nostalgic narratives of country childhood were underpinned by political opinion and contemporary debates over who and what the countryside should be for. Indeed, they exemplify the complex nature of numerous Mass Observers position on issues of access to and protection of the countryside. While many called for the restoration of the seemingly authentic (often pre-war) rural life and the protection of the landscape from urban encroachment, simultaneously respondents were also passionate about providing access to the countryside for future generations. Memories of country childhood was thus actively drawn upon as a way of critiquing agricultural change in the present-day and presenting how they hoped the countryside could be in the future. For many Mass Observers this was an active political statement: organic farming and public ownership were routes to recapturing the beauty and freedom of rural childhood. As one younger Mass Observer, who had lived with his family in a small farming village in North Devon, stated: 'I am not nostalgic for the past, only worried for the future'.⁷⁷

In many ways, Mass Observers' memories of childhood bought into and reinforced nostalgic images of the rural idyll. Evidence from MOP suggests however that these ideas about rural childhood were not drawn upon uncritically, with replies revealing the way, sometimes in the same paragraph, respondents could challenge idyllic assumptions about the countryside. As one Brighton Mass Observer, who as a teenager spent his weekends with his friends in a Sussex village, wrote 'I think people who live in towns have a romantic idealism about the countryside. They think of all the nice bits, larks in the spring ... [It] Really is different. This came as a tremendous shock to me when I was about fifteen'.⁷⁸ His reply exemplifies the way in which Mass Observers critiqued the mythology of idyllic rural life, with numerous respondents challenging popular representations of country living, through the assertion of their own lived experience as children and teenagers or their observations of the experiences of those around them.

Such critiques were often expressed in one of three ways. The first was the discussion of the experiences of the rural working class. In this instance the largely middle class Mass Observers acted as documentarians of other people's experience. These stories challenged the idea that the twentieth century could be seen as one of decline and instead acknowledged the positive changes that had occurred as a result of social shifts, which took place in the second half of the twentieth century. Although Matthews et al. have suggested that the plight of the rural poor is often forgotten with nostalgic narratives of rural life, many Mass Observers identified the improved conditions of the rural working class as being one of the most significant

changes that had occurred throughout the twentieth century.⁷⁹ As one respondent born in 1953 highlighted, 'Yes the countryside has changed but I do not see the dreadful poverty I saw in farm labouring families in Long Sutton when I was small'.⁸⁰ Similarly a retired typist in her sixties wrote that, although the town was increasingly encroaching upon the country, 'villages are in a better state now that [sic] in my youth when country folk were often very poor and their homes in bad repair'.⁸¹ The poor amenities of rural homes was also commented on by Mass Observers who had themselves grown up in such circumstances, although these conditions were sometimes remembered fondly. As one eighty-year-old woman wrote of growing up in the Essex countryside:

From 10 I lived in what then was Essex countryside. The thing I remember most was the way we preserved water. This was not piped into our bungalow home, but was sold at the village shop. For 6d. Old money we walked about eighth of a mile with buckets everyday and withdrew water from a standpipe. This water was only used for cooking and drinking. We had rainwater tubs, with pipes from the roof and we used this water for washing etc. No dirty water was thrown away but kept for scrubbing floors or watering the garden. The Toilet was down the garden, we called it the bucket and chucket. As a child I always wondered why every cottage grew rhubarb, now I know why, but it was lovely.⁸²

The prominence of stories of rural hardship before the Second World War thus reveals the way in which respondents challenged the narrative of decline that dominated discussions of the countryside. While agricultural change was undeniably considered a negative for a large proportion of respondents, social change within villages could be understood by Mass Observers as a positive and was actively used by Mass Observers to challenge romantic images of the rural. For example, one free lance ex-restaurant and fire arms businesswoman, born in 1932, challenged the lack of representation of rural poverty by recollecting her experiences of growing up in rural Norfolk:

Many of my rural peers in the late '30s at the village school would arrive barefoot. In summer – in winter. In adult boots or sacking. Mr Carter the Master had a pile of slippers in his room for them on arrival. The rural slums of the pre-war years rarely get a mention in the media shows.⁸³

This was not to suggest that rural poverty had been completely eradicated. As one respondent, who in the same reply had worried over the changing nature of the countryside, recognized: 'Sadly, the poverty still exists in pockets. The only difference sometimes is they have a plumbed in bath +

water closet'.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Mass Observer's reflections on rural poverty hint at the ways that the largely middle class members of the organisation acknowledged the class inequality that had persisted in rural society across the twentieth century and had, in their view, partly diminished as a result of rural tourism and increasing affluence of some rural communities. In these replies, respondents recognized the benefits of some rural change and challenged the idea that the twentieth century had been solely one of rural decline.

The second way in which Mass Observers challenged the idyllic representations of country childhood, was through their own experiences of working on the land as a child. Indeed, while the archive is full of replies that recall the excitement and fulfillment of hop-picking or wartime work on the land, numerous others recall the difficult conditions experienced by children from agricultural families. One female respondent, working as a part time literacy tutor, recalled her childhood during and after the Second World War. After writing evocatively of her love of the sounds and sights of the countryside, she informed Mass Observation of her experiences growing up with a father who worked on the land:

Although I dearly love many aspects of the countryside, I wouldn't want to romanticise life there. ... In my youth I spent days in Fen Fields picking up potatoes in the howling wind, so much mud on my boots I could hardly move, fingers freezing, back breaking, the one pleasure to turn at the end of the field so the wind was behind me

instead of in my face - and I didn't have to do this kind of work everyday.⁸⁵

Such stories of childhood participation in agriculture were found more regularly in the writings of those Mass Observers born before the Second World War, although agricultural work or fruit picking was more often included in a positive manner by those who lived in urban areas.

The final way that Mass Observers challenged the rural idyll was through their experiences as rural teenagers. Mary Ann Powell et al. have argued, the period of adolescence might in many ways be understood as part of an 'anti-[rural] idyll'.⁸⁶ Importantly, their study supports other research that has highlighted the significance of the adolescent lifecycle in shaping experiences of the countryside – particularly the way in which teenagers often experience, and respond to, rural living in more negative ways, challenging the dominant popular understanding of idyllic rural life.⁸⁷ Indeed, while for children the countryside can symbolize freedom and independence, in adolescence the teenager can feel isolated and stifled by boredom.⁸⁸ This was particularly true for those born during or after the Second World War, a period that saw the strengthening of commercial youth culture. Subsequently, these Mass Observers recollected feelings of isolation and boredom with the country pursuits they had once relished. As a thirty-four year old Classroom assistant wrote of her childhood growing up outside a Sussex village, 'I've had several days to mull this over and cannot think of a single bad point. There was nothing to do when I was a teenager but that's years behind me'.⁸⁹ Alternatively, village life could also be annoying for teenagers, as small

communities could feel claustrophobic. As the woman who had told of the difficult conditions of agricultural work remembered, 'In my teens I found village life annoying in that it was so "close" - everybody knew everybody else & their business!' ⁹⁰ A number expressed the feeling of 'missing out' from urban youth culture and expressed clearly the idea that their teenage years had been distinctive from their urban counterparts as a result.

Bound up in this were ideas about authenticity of experience and the belief that there was a 'real' or 'true' teenage experience. Indeed, the idea of difference was ingrained in the Mass Observers, as respondents frequently contrasted the lack of leisure opportunities that was available them with the seeming excitement of the urban teenage experience. Importantly, the image of popular youth culture, which has dominated popular and personal memory of the period after the Second World War, is frustratingly urban. This, as Helena Mills noted, has had a significant impact on the way individual life stories of growing up have been recalled and interpreted. In her study of women's memories of the 1960s, Mills argued that the popular image of the 'swinging sixties' has a powerful impact on the way women recall their youthful experiences, particularly when this image, for a number of reasons, did not match their own lived experience. Mill's interviewees would often express a feeling of 'missing out' from the authentic experience of youth culture, while at the same time challenging the accuracy of popular narratives.⁹¹

This was true for some Mass Observers who identified a feeling of 'missing out' from the excitement of the city. As a clerical worker from Derby wrote of her experiences growing up in the 1950s and 60s in a 'medium sized'

Midlands village: 'As a child I felt lonely growing up on the outskirts of the village and in my teens I came every close to hating it - seeing all the bright lights on the far horizon and the resultant feelings of isolation from the imagined excitement'.⁹² Subsequently the act of moving away from the countryside marked an important moment some respondents' life stories. This was best exemplified by a fifty-one year old Probation Officer who recalled her experience of growing up in villages and small towns in Yorkshire:

As a young child in a small village my world was limited, familiar, simple, detailed and secure. Life was monotonous but not boring ... When my family moved to the city when I was 14 I was ready to become part of a larger, more busy, more exciting environment. I was ready to take advantage of the wider opportunities offered, like films, plays, concerts and a better school.⁹³

The move away from rural areas or 'growing out' of the countryside thus presents itself as an important element in the life history narratives of Mass Observation respondents. This is not to suggest that all individuals experienced rural adolescence in this way. Of course, a variety of factors could serve to shape experience of growing up in the countryside, including but not limited to the proximity to urban centres and availability of transport. Nonetheless, a significant number of Mass Observers juxtaposed their country childhood with the experience of being a rural teenager. In doing so,

they utilised their own lived experience as means through which to actively challenge popular representations of the rural idyll.

IV

Speaking of his memories of growing up in rural England, Alun Howkins encapsulated the complex ways that Mass Observers, from both rural and urban backgrounds, made sense of rural change at the end of the twentieth century. In particular, many recalled the countryside of their childhoods as evidence of the richness of rural upbringing. In doing so, many Mass Observers made arguments for the beneficial nature of rural childhood and subsequently, made value judgements about urban and modern day childrearing. In many ways then, replies to the 1995 directive reveal the continued importance of the countryside in British public imagination at the end of the twentieth century.

Yet, the responses to the directive also reveal the complexity of the position of the rural within public consciousness at this time as, like Howkins' recollections, the life stories of the Mass Observers revealed a variety of different rural experiences, with respondents utilising childhood memories as a means to stake a claim to having an authority over contemporary rural matters. Worries about the right to roam, agribusiness and modernized farming methods, as well as urban encroachment, all manifested themselves (and self-consciously so) in respondents celebration of the countryside as they knew it during their childhood. Such replies suggest that tensions between preservation and access that had plagued discussions of the future of the countryside in the earlier period remained prominent at the close of the

century. Therefore, rather than being a product of passive nostalgia, idyllic childhood memories of the countryside were a vehicle through which respondents actively engaged, interpreted and staked a claim to having a voice in rural matters. These voices were conflicting to say the least, with differences in opinion (often shaped by political persuasion) and disparities in experience (shaped by regional difference) between the respondents. Despite this, many Mass Observers laid claim to the authenticity of their own lived experience in the countryside, and in doing so often, although not always, sidelined regional disparities.

On the other hand, other respondents actively challenged the existence of the rural idyll by highlighting the disparity of class experience or challenging romanticized narratives of rural upbringing. In these instances, lifecycle once again acted as a framework through which these criticisms were understood: it was the experiences of the children of the rural poor that were recalled by respondents to challenge the idea of idyllic country childhoods, while numerous replies narrated feelings of 'missing out' on the authentic experience of being an adolescent, particularly in the post-war period. The respondents thus often conceptualised their experiences against the urban, while at the same time using the countryside as a way of framing their own experience of transitioning from childhood to adolescence.

These criticisms are significant. While arguably the lack of representation of rural respondents in Mass Observation means that the replies tell us little about what it was actually like to grow up in the countryside – regional differences alone would have dramatically impacted experiences – they are rich for the way they reveal competing narratives of rural change in

the twentieth century. Most notably, while many respondents pinpointed the post-war period as being the starting point for agricultural change and rural decline, others challenged the celebration of pre-war rural life by highlighting the improvement of living conditions and the increasing access to urban centres in the post-war period. There is thus not one story of rural change presented by the Mass Observers, but multiple (and sometimes contrasting) trajectories, supporting the notion put forward by Rye that the idea of the rural is a fundamentally subjective category of analysis. Rural childhoods were certainly part of 'nostalgic mythmaking', as Lowenthal identified, but they were retold in complex, messy and varied ways, and worked on a deeply personal and political level.⁹⁴

¹ Mass Observation Archive [hereafter MOA] (University of Sussex): Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A1473, female aged 52 from Lincoln]. Many thanks to the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex for allowing the use of this material

² Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900*, (London, 2003), p. 3

³ David Lowenthal, 'British National Identity and the English Landscape', *Rural History*, 2/2 (1991), p. 213

⁴ Paul Readman, *Storied Ground: Landscape and the Shaping of English National Identity*, (Cambridge, 2018), p.19.

⁵ Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980*, (London, 1981), p. 47.

⁶ P. Mandler, "Against Englishness": English culture and the limits to rural nostalgia', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1997), pp. 155-175; David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 62; Frank Trentmann, 'Civilisation and its Discontents: English neo-romanticism and the transformation of anti-modernism in Twentieth-Century western culture', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29/4, (1994), pp. 583-625.

⁷ Alun Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England' in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, eds, *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, (London, 1986); H. Taylor, *A Claim to the Countryside*, (Newcastle, 1997), p. 4; B. Anderson, 'A liberal countryside? The Manchester Ramblers' Federation and the "social readjustment" of urban citizens, 1929-1936', *Urban History*, 38/1 (2011), pp. 84-102; Sian Edwards, *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside: Creating Good Citizens, 1930-1960*, (Basingstoke, 2018); David Matless, Charles Watkins and Paul Merchant, 'Nature Trails: The Production of Instructive Landscapes in Britain, 1960-72', *Rural History*, 21/1, (2010), p.126; Alex Potts, 'Constable Country Between the Wars' in Raphael Samuel (ed.) *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity; V.3, National Fictions*, (London, 1988), p.175

⁸ Johan Fredrick Rye, 'Rural Youths' Images of Rural', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22/4 (2006), p. 412

⁹ Rye, 'Rural Youths' Images of Rural', p. 409

¹⁰ Dorothy Sheridan, 'Writing to the Archive: Mass-Observation as Autobiography', *Sociology*, 27/1 (1993), p. 27 & p. 30

¹¹ Annebella Pollen, 'Research Methodology in Mass Observation Past and Present: 'Scientifically, about as valuable as a chimpanzee's tea party at the zoo'?', *History Workshop Journal*, 75/1, (2013), pp. 213-235

¹² Ibid, p. 219

¹³ Alun Howkins, 'Qualifying the evidence: perceptions of rural change in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century' in David Gilbert, David Matless and Brian Short, *Geographies of British Modernity* (Blackwell 2003), 98.

¹⁴ Rye, 'Rural Youths' Images of Rural', p. 409

¹⁵ Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street & David Bloome, *Writing Ourselves: Mass-Observation and Literary Practices*, (New Jersey, 2000), pp. 214-219

¹⁶ Anne-Marie Kramer, 'The Observers and the Observed: The 'dual Vision' of the Mass Observation Project', *Sociological Research Online*, 19/3 (2014), p. 7

¹⁷ MOA: Spring 1995 directive

¹⁸ MOA: Spring 1995 directive

¹⁹ For Alun Howkins analysis of this material in relation opinions on the countryside see: Howkins, 'Qualifying the Evidence'

²⁰ Stephen Brooke, 'Living in 'New Times': Historicizing 1980s Britain', *History Compass*, 12/1, (2014), pp. 20-32

²¹ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [B1180, female, b.1938 from the South East of England]

²² Claire Langhamer, “‘Who the Hell are Ordinary People?’ Ordinarity as a Category of Historical Analysis’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 18 (2018), p.191.

²³ Hugh Matthews, Mark Taylor, Kenneth Sherwood, Faith Tucker & Melanie Limb, ‘Growing-up in the Countryside: Children and the Rural Idyll’, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16/2, (2000), p.145

²⁴ Chris Philo, ‘Neglected Rural Geographies: a review’, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 8/2 (1992), pp. 193-207. See also Keith Halfacree, ‘Introduction: Turning Neglect into Engagement within Rural Geographies of Childhood and Youth’, *Children’s Geographies*, 2/1 (2004), pp. 5–11 and Mary Ann Powell, Nicola Taylor and Anne B. Smith, ‘Constructions of Rural Childhood: challenging dominant perspectives’, *Children’s Geographies*, 11/1, (2013), pp. 117–131

²⁵ Matthews et al., ‘Growing-up in the countryside’, p. 142 & p. 146

²⁶ Rye, ‘Rural Youths’ Images of Rural’, pp. 418-419

²⁷ Rye, ‘Rural Youths’ Images of Rural’, p. 419

²⁸ Powell et al., ‘Constructions of Rural Childhood’, p. 117; Rye, ‘Rural Youths’ Images of Rural’, p. 411

²⁹ For a challenge to use of term ‘agency’ in conceptualising the experiences of children and youth see: Kristine Alexander, ‘Agency and Emotion Work’, *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 7/2 (2015), pp.120-128.

³⁰ Rebecca Andrew, ‘The Leisure Identities of Rural Youth: Tradition, Change and Sense of Place in Lakeland, 1930 – early 1950s’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2012); Alice Kirke, ‘Education in Interwar Rural England: Community, Schooling and Voluntarism’,

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- (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University College London, 2016); Melanie Tebbutt, *Being Boys: Youth, Leisure and Identity in the Inter-war Years* (Manchester, 2012); Selina Todd, 'Young Women, Work and Family in Inter-war Rural England', *Agricultural History Review*, 52/1, (2004), pp. 83-98
- ³¹ Helena Mills, 'Using the personal to critique the popular: women's memories of 1960s youth', *Contemporary British History*, 30/4 (2016), p. 471
- ³² Michael Leyshon & Jacob Bull, 'The Bricolage of the Here: Young people's narratives of identity in the countryside', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12/2 (2011), p. 175
- ³³ Ben Jones, 'The Uses of Nostalgia', *Cultural and Social History*, 7/3, (2010), p. 369
- ³⁴ Joe Moran, 'Childhood and Nostalgia in Contemporary Culture', *Cultural Studies*, 5:2 (2002), 171.
- ³⁵ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C2142, female aged 69 from Scarborough]
- ³⁶ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [D996, female aged 68 from London]
- ³⁷ Owain Jones, 'Tomboy Tales: The rural, nature and the gender of childhood', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 6/2, (1999), p. 118
- ³⁸ Colin Ward, *The Child in the Country*, (London, 1990), pp. 18-19.
- ³⁹ Delphine Houlton & Brian Short, 'Sylvanian Families: the Production and Consumption of a Rural Community', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11/4 (1995), pp. 367-385; John Horton, 'Postman Pat and Me: Everyday Encounters with an Icon of Idyllic Rurality', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 24/4, (2008), pp. 399-408
- ⁴⁰ Owain Jones, 'Idylls and Otherness: Childhood and rurality in film' in Robert Fish (ed.), *Cinematic Countrysides*, (Manchester, 2007), p. 190; Owain

Jones, 'Little Figures, Big Shadows: Country Childhood Stories' in Paul Cloke & Jo Little (eds.) *Contested Countryside Cultures: Rurality and Socio-cultural Marginalisation*, (London, 1997), pp. 154-155

⁴¹ Jones, 'Tomboy Tales', pp. 117-136; Phoebe Foy-Phillips & Sally Lloyd-Evans, 'Shaping Children's Mobilities: Expectations of Gendered Parenting in the English rural idyll', *Children's Geographies*, 9/3-4 (2011), pp. 379-394

⁴² Gill Valentine, 'A Safe Place to Grow Up? Parenting, Perceptions of Children's Safety and the Rural Idyll', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 13/2 (1997), p. 147; Matthews et al., 'Growing-up in the countryside', p. 144

⁴³ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [T1843, female aged 45 from Stockport]

⁴⁴ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [P2546, female aged 69 from a small hamlet near Hereford]

⁴⁵ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C1786, female aged 44 from Buckinghamshire]

⁴⁶ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A2464, male aged 35 from Stockton-on-Tees]

⁴⁷ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A883, male aged 61 from Chelmsford]

⁴⁸ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [E2659, female, b.1951, from East Sussex]; MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C2091, female in her sixties from Eastbourne]

⁴⁹ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [B2611, female aged 67 from London]

⁵⁰ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A2212, female aged 38 from

Watford]

⁵¹ Jones, 'Tomboy Tales', p.118; Foy-Phillips and Lloyd Evans, 'Shaping children's mobilities', p. 390

⁵² MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [W633, female aged 52 from the North East of England]

⁵³ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [D2404, female aged 78 from Surrey]

⁵⁴ Matthew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement*, (Oxford, 2013)

⁵⁵ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [G1416, female aged 72 from Suffolk]

⁵⁶ Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, pp. 196-200

⁵⁷ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [D996, female aged 68 from London]

⁵⁸ Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, p. 198

⁵⁹ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [D1606, male aged 70 from the East of England]

⁶⁰ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [H2160, female, b.1912, from the South West of England]

⁶¹ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A1473, female aged 52 from Lincoln]

⁶² Alun Howkins, "What is the Countryside For?" Agriculture, Leisure and the English Countryside, 1900-2000', in E. Roudaut, ed., *Les Usages du temps libre*, *Revue Francaise de Civilisation Britannique*, 14/2, (2007), pp. 165-180; Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 62; D.N Jeans, 'Planning and the Myth of the English Countryside, in the Interwar Period', *Rural History*, 1/2,

(1990), pp. 249-264

⁶³ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C1786, female aged 44 from Buckinghamshire]

⁶⁴ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A1223, female, b.1925, from the East Midlands]

⁶⁵ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [B2170, female aged 49 from Brentwood]

⁶⁶ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [B1509, male aged 66 from Oxford].

⁶⁷ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A1473, female aged 52 from Lincoln]

⁶⁸ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [H260, female, b.1930, from the East of England]

⁶⁹ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [E2659, female aged 44 from East Sussex]

⁷⁰ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [B1180, female, b.1938 from the South East of England]

⁷¹ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [M1498, female aged 41 from the South East of England]

⁷² MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A2212, female aged 38 from Watford]

⁷³ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [D996, female aged 68 from London]

⁷⁴ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [D2404, female aged 78 from Surrey]

⁷⁵ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C2618, female aged 68 from the West Midlands]

⁷⁶ Matthews et al., 'Growing-up in the countryside', p. 144; Robert Giddings & Richard Yarwood, 'Growing Up, Going Out and Growing Out of the Countryside: Childhood Experiences in Rural England', *Children's Geographies*, 3/1 (2005), p.102

⁷⁷ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C2750, male aged 25 from Wales]

⁷⁸ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [F1373, female, b.1932, from the South East of England]

⁷⁹ Matthews et al., 'Growing-up in the countryside', p.146

⁸⁰ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C2078, female, b.1953, from the East of England]

⁸¹ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [B89, female, b.1931, from the East of England]

⁸² MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [B36, female aged 80 from Essex]

⁸³ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [F1589, female, b. 1932, from the West Midlands]

⁸⁴ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [A1473, female aged 52 from Lincoln]

⁸⁵ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C2654, female, b.1942, from the West Midlands]

⁸⁶ Powell et al., 'Constructions of Rural Childhood', p. 117

⁸⁷ Matthews et al., 'Growing-up in the Countryside', p. 148

⁸⁸ Matthews et al., 'Growing-up in the countryside', pp. 149-150

⁸⁹ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [H2577, Female aged 34 from Sussex]

⁹⁰ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [C2654, female, b.1942, from the

West Midlands]

⁹¹ Mills, 'Using the personal', pp. 478-479

⁹² MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [B2170, female aged 49 from Brentwood]

⁹³ MOA: Replies to Spring 1995 directive [L1691, female aged 51 from Staffordshire].

⁹⁴ Lowenthal, 'British National Identity', p. 217