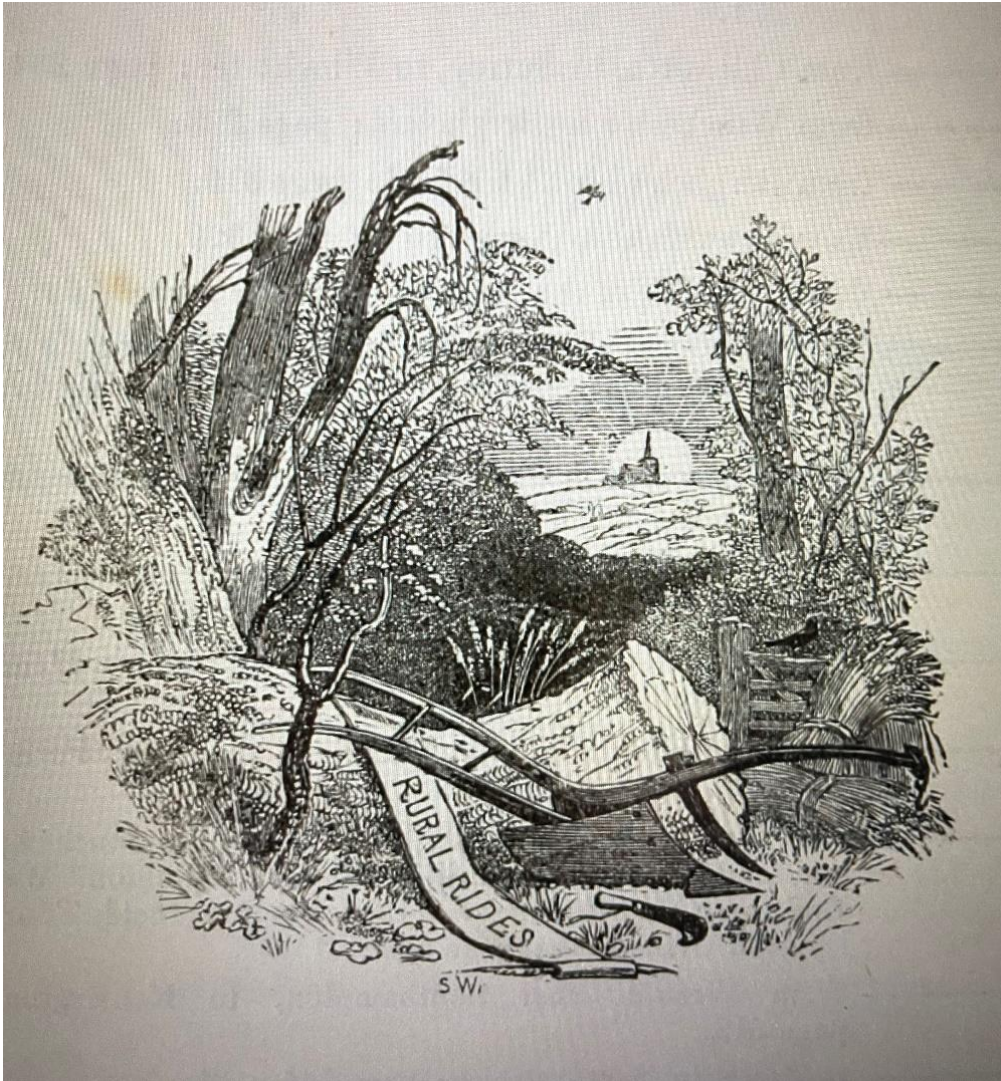


The William Cobbett Society



Cobbett's New Register

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Front Cover Illustration: "Woodland countries are interesting on many accounts." Illustration facing the first page of the 1853 edition of *Rural Rides*. William Cobbett Collection, University Archives and Special Collections, Adelphi University Libraries, Garden City, NY.

ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE OCTOBER 2021
THE MAKING OF *RURAL RIDES*

John Stevenson and James Grande

In 2021, to honour the 200th anniversary of the first Rural Ride, the Cobbett Society hosted a double presentation explaining the background to William Cobbett's Rural Rides.

Annual Memorial Lecture, 2021, Part 1, John Stevenson

Tonight gives us an occasion to celebrate Cobbett's best-known work, *Rural Rides*. As a title, it has scarcely been out of print since his death in 1835, and has, for well over two hundred years, been the work for which he has been most renowned. Out of the literally millions of words Cobbett wrote, it is the one that reveals his most distinctive characteristics of fine, evocative descriptions of the English countryside combined with frequently damning accounts of the condition of its inhabitants and forthright, often choleric, condemnations of those who he believed responsible for the poverty and wretchedness he often found. A combination of rural lyricism and well-informed comments on farming and husbandry is combined with, in his own words, 'Economical and Political Observations relative to matters applicable to, and illustrated by the State of those counties [covered in the Rides] respectively.'

Behind those bland words 'Economical and Political Observations' lay a blistering critique of much of what he saw in 'this once happy and now miserable country': 'fathers trembling for the fate of their children' and 'honest and laborious men compelled to starve quietly'. For Cobbett, *Rural Rides* provided the evidence of the disaster that had befallen the country he had known as a child in Farnham in the 1760s and 1770s. War, huge debts, high taxation, and political and financial corruption had destroyed the good life available to the honest labourers and yeomen of his childhood. If no other work of Cobbett existed, *Rural Rides* could properly have been called the essential Cobbett. It contains almost all his convictions and enthusiasms, almost all his prejudices and *bêtes noires*, and above all his passion. Cobbett did not hold back, and it could lead him to say the most outrageous, unjust, and unpleasant things. Even by the 1830s, the ferocity of his language, like the more savage and suggestive cartoons of the Napoleonic and Regency era, was already almost too much for the more temperate and refined public discourse of polite society. Today, a less

squeamish age in some matters, but more sensitive in others, can be both thrilled and shocked by Cobbett's forthright and heartfelt style.

Many books, when investigated, have a somewhat complicated background and, indeed, the book we know today as *Rural Rides* is no exception. It was not put together in book form until 1830, but had its origin in Cobbett's first tours of the southern counties made in the autumn of 1821, and further forays into southern England subsequently undertaken in the years up to 1826. These were published intermittently in Cobbett's weekly *Political Register*. 1826 was not the end for the 'rides' which continued in the late 1820s when there were journeys to the northern counties and Scotland, published separately in 1832. An edition in 1853, edited by James Cobbett, consolidated the tours of the southern counties with the northern ones, but excluded Scotland.¹

Equally, like many prolific authors heavily involved in political campaigns, it is doubtful if Cobbett attached particular importance to the account of his first rural tour. 1821, as James Grande will later reiterate, had been a tumultuous year for Cobbett, coming on top of a hectic period of activity - exile, and return to England - since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. If asked, one suspects Cobbett would have said his most important publication that year was his reprint of a collection of articles inveighing against the National Debt, published in May 1821, to accompany a January republication on the same theme, *Paper Against Gold*, first published in 1815 and again containing views about the economy which Cobbett had been pursuing for almost two decades.² For Cobbett, the National Debt and the onerous taxation needed to support paying the interest on it, was the principal cause of the impoverishment of his fellow countrymen. Almost from the resumption of the Napoleonic Wars in 1803, after a short-lived truce, Cobbett had become uneasy at the way the financing of the wars - through loans and paper money supported by high taxation - was ruining the common labourers and small farmers from which he had sprung. He had become convinced that a corrupt nexus of financiers and politicians were profiting from a war that they incompetently mismanaged and were resisting any effective criticism. It was what made Cobbett, at heart a patriotic loyalist, a campaigner for parliamentary reform, and eventually one for radical reform, including universal suffrage and annually elected parliaments. Initially hoping that electing uncorrupt candidates for

¹ For the publishing history of *Rural Rides* see M.L. Pearl, *William Cobbett: A Bibliographical Account of his Life and Times* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1953), pp. 160-1.

² See Pearl, *William Cobbett*, pp. 81-92, 117-18.

parliament would be sufficient, he was soon forced to accept that a wholesale reform of parliament would be necessary in order to bring about the policies he desired: reductions in taxes, huge cuts in the interest on the National Debt, the purging of corrupt office holding, and the promotion of a sound agriculture.³

The post-war world Cobbett encountered, however, was a nightmare culmination of the fears he had harboured for more than a decade. There was a gigantic, ballooning debt based on credit and paper money, which Cobbett was convinced could only lead to a disastrous collapse when politicians attempted to bring the country's finances under some kind of normal control. In the meantime, the propertied members of parliament had thrown off in 1816 the Income Tax introduced in 1797, and left the weight of taxation upon the poor through taxes on consumption. Widespread poverty, Cobbett believed, was the result, with labourers and small yeomen living below the levels he remembered when a boy. As a result, obtaining parliamentary reform to remedy bread and butter grievances was Cobbett's central message to would-be rioters or machine-breakers in the towns, as it was to the small farmers and labourers in the country. But attempts to reform parliament through petitions or agitation in the press were met with repression, forcing Cobbett himself into exile in America in 1817-19. Even as the times seemed to be set against reform, Cobbett maintained his steady stream of publications, setting out his case on the economy, obvious abuses of the system, and the need for reform.

By the autumn of 1821, with public agitation at a low ebb, Cobbett was also aware that the reform cause was in danger of pulling in different directions. The farmers suffering from low prices after investing heavily to capitalise upon wartime high prices, were clamouring for more protection for domestic agriculture, despite having already obtained an Act in 1815 which kept foreign grain out until it reached very high prices. This would only make the plight of the labourers even worse, raising the price of their staple bread diet. The farmers, Cobbett believed, had a duty to make common cause with their labourers. The labourers needed convincing that political action, reform of parliament, was their real remedy, and that their enemy was not the farmers but the fund-holders and stock-jobbers protected by the unreformed parliament. Hence Cobbett hoped to unite the rural world to his view that parliamentary reform, and reform of the corrupt establishment, would answer all their ills and return

³ See large sections in J. Grande, J. Stevenson, and R. Thomas (eds.), *The Opinions of William Cobbett* (Ashgate, Farnham, 2013), pp. 35-9, 55-76.

the country to its former happy state. His decision was to find out for himself, only two years back in England after his exile, 'what gentlemen, farmers, tradesmen, journeymen, labourers, women, girls, boys and all have to say, reasoning with some laughing with others, and observing all that passes'.⁴ He was prepared to speak to farmers' meetings, which were already taking place, but also, as the above shows, to anyone he encountered. *Rural Rides* was launched; little did Cobbett know it would be his most enduring work.

Annual Memorial Lecture, 2021, Part 2, James Grande

For all the scores of books and millions of words that Cobbett published over his long career, *Rural Rides* is undoubtedly the basis on which his legacy as a writer rests, to the extent that his name is almost synonymous with this single work. It's easy to think that Cobbett was born to write *Rural Rides*: after all, he boasted of being 'bred at the plough-tail [...] in the Hop-Gardens of Farnham' and seems almost destined to become the author of the Rides, a work that brings together his twin identities as a vociferous campaigner for political reform and the virtual embodiment of rural England.

I want to suggest, however, as we mark the 200th anniversary of the first of Cobbett's Rides, that there was nothing inevitable about it. In fact, I think *Rural Rides* is a much stranger and more original work than it is often taken to be and that we overlook how its creation was heavily contingent, almost accidental, and inseparable from the conditions of the early 1820s.

This, after all, is a work that was completely unprecedented in Cobbett's career – never before had he set out to assess the state of the country, talk to people he met on the road, and write about their lives. It is easy to take this for granted – after all, this has become our idea of what a reporter does, and the influence of *Rural Rides* can be traced in twentieth-century classics such as J.B. Priestley's *English Journey* and George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* and into the present day. To give one example, the *Guardian* journalist John Harris's 'Anywhere but Westminster' series over the past few years seems to capture something of the spirit of Cobbett in focusing on politics away from Westminster and in the country at large.

In the 1820s, however, this kind of reporting had not yet been invented – indeed, Cobbett's Rides pioneered this new approach to political

⁴ Cited in I. Dyck, William Cobbett: *Rural Rides* (Penguin Books, London, 2001), Introduction, xxii.

journalism. Cobbett was already in his late fifties when he set out on these journeys and 30 years into his career as a political writer. The Rides were a departure from his previous style of commentary and polemic, which until this point had been closely engaged with parliamentary debates and foreign news – indeed, foreign affairs dominated the pages of the *Political Register* right up to Waterloo.

Why, then, did Cobbett take to the road and start writing about what he found? There doesn't seem to be any evidence that he was consciously adopting a new approach, or, in 1821, that he had any idea that this would be the beginning of a series of articles that would run throughout the decade and be collected in book form. Instead, the inception of the Rides was highly contingent, based on a number of personal and political circumstances. One of these was the fizzling out of the urban reform movement after the death on 7 August 1821 of Queen Caroline, who had briefly been an unlikely figurehead for reform and a focus for the anger directed at her husband, the new king George IV (even the far-from-radical Jane Austen had written 'I shall support her as long as I can, because she is a woman, & because I hate her husband'). Cobbett had become Caroline's adviser and speechwriter – a kind of spin doctor – and the whole family had been heavily invested in the royal divorce drama. Ten days after Caroline's death, Cobbett wrote to his Norfolk friend Samuel Clarke,

I will, if alive and well, be with you the first of September [...] I propose to take a son and a daughter with me; and to stay about a week [...] I have never before known what depression of spirits was; but I really feel it now. I am just going into Sussex for a week to take my eldest daughter, who is ill, downright ill, on account of the death of this injured lady.¹

After this trip, Anne Cobbett wrote to her brother James that 'in Norfolk we found what we owe and shall always owe to the poor Queen, for many places where Papa was received with unbounded admiration he would not have dared to show his nose before the Queen's cause turned so many hundreds of hearts from the side of the government.'² These journeys to Sussex and Norfolk, taken in the late summer of 1821 as way of assuaging their grief at Caroline's death, became the germ of *Rural Rides* as Cobbett

¹ Cobbett to Samuel Clarke, Kensington, 17 August 1821. Papers of William Cobbett in the library of Nuffield College, Oxford, XXX/148/1.

² Anne Cobbett to James Paul Cobbett, Kensington, 27 December 1821. Nuffield, XXX/161/1.

sensed a changed political mood in the country, spilling over beyond the urban political centres, and newly sympathetic to his arguments for reform.

Despite this deep-seated desire for reform, 1821 marks the end of the era famously described by E.P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* as the ‘heroic age of popular radicalism’, the five years of political agitation following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, encompassing Peterloo, the Spa Fields riot, the Cato Street Conspiracy plot to assassinate the Cabinet, and the Queen Caroline affair. Political protest did not continue on the same scale through the 1820s, due in part to some measure of economic recovery but also to the government’s effective suppression of dissent through the Six Acts, which imposed tight limits on the size of public meetings and high taxes on cheap publications such as Cobbett’s ‘Twopenny Trash’. At a stroke, Cobbett’s circulation was drastically reduced, from 50,000 to as few as 5,000 weekly copies. Without the same reach, he began to develop a new style, away from the vociferous editorials of the ‘Twopenny Trash’ and towards the hybrid form of *Rural Rides*.

With the passing of the Six Acts, Cobbett also took a hit to his personal finances, already damaged by fines and imprisonment in Newgate after his 1810 conviction for seditious libel and his forced exile in America following the suspension of habeas corpus in 1817. Within two months of his return from America, Cobbett was declared bankrupt and forced to sell his farm at Botley. His new base of operations was a four-acre small-holding and nursery-garden at Kensington, on the site of what is now High Street Kensington station. His large-scale farming ambitions were now effectively over, but Kensington was still the site of prodigious feats of productivity, as he boasted to one of his friends:

I think I have a million of trees; and, in the paths between the beds, I have enough vegetables for two or three families, and enough for cow and pigs, and green stuff enough for horses (they like fine cabbages) besides [...] We have raised, 12 ducks, 10 chickens, and 18 Turkeys, the two former came against our will. My sow had 11 pigs last Monday three weeks. I killed 5 yesterday, that weighed 8¾ lb each. I shall kill three more of them, and keep 3 to kill for bacon in March. I have now 3 of her January farrow, for bacon in the winter and spring. So much for my farming.³

³ Cobbett to W. Palmer, Kensington, 5 August 1825, Nuffield, XX/12/1-5.

His main project at Kensington was ‘to form a Nursery for American Forest-Trees, and Apple trees’, with Cobbett ‘very anxious to keep my foot on the American soil’ in case he had to flee England again.⁴ Having left his son James on Long Island to co-ordinate the American side of the venture, Kensington soon became the headquarters of a transatlantic seed business. This project provided Cobbett with an alternative source of income at a time when the government was determined to suppress radical publications through taxes and prosecutions.

Kensington became the starting point for Cobbett’s tours of southern England, which first appeared in serial form in the *Political Register*, beginning on 3 November 1821, under the heading ‘Journal’, with the memorable opening line, ‘Fog that you might cut with a knife all the way from London to Newbury’. And this is a line that I think Dickens, who we know was a great reader of Cobbett, had in mind, thirty years later, when he wrote the set piece opening of his state-of-the-nation novel *Bleak House*: ‘LONDON. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall. Implacable November weather [...] Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights.’

There is then, nothing inevitable, about *Rural Rides*, which represents an entirely new direction in Cobbett’s writing, one that only came about through the particular political and personal circumstances of 1821. This was a low ebb in Cobbett’s career, with the failure of the Queen Caroline affair, his bankruptcy, and the body blow of the Six Acts, yet out of this moment he embarks on his most enduring work. It is a hybrid work, part descriptive, part polemic, in continued dialogue both with the people he meets on the road and the politicians back in the ‘Great Wen’. Nothing quite like it had existed before, but we might tentatively identify some earlier kinds of writing that might have influenced it. In one sense, Cobbett follows in the footsteps of Arthur Young’s famous agricultural tours of the 1770s and 1780s and less well-known examples of the genre such as the radical orator John Thelwall’s ‘Pedestrian Excursion’ at the end of the 1790s, which was serialized in the *Monthly Magazine* and included reports

⁴ Cobbett to J. P. Cobbett, Kensington, 24 July 1821, Nuffield, XXX/147/1-4; Cobbett to J. P. Cobbett, Botley, 23 December 1819, Nuffield, XXX/68/1.

on the state of the crops, the rural economy, and the condition of the labourers.

The Rides also draw on a much longer and more diffuse tradition of pastoral writing, stretching back to classical times. Pastoral might seem to be an escapist, apolitical form, but often has a political end in view, drawing a pointed comparison between rural innocence and the corruption of courts and cities – think of the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, or Jez Butterworth’s 2009 play *Jerusalem*. In *Rural Rides*, the pastoral exists in fleeting and self-consciously staged moments, as an alternative to Cobbett’s restless movement and political purpose. For example, when he visits the Worcestershire estate of the M.P. and improving landowner Sir Thomas Winnington, Cobbett describes it as ‘one of the finest spots in all England’ and introduces a Faustian dialogue:

‘Well, then,’ says the devil of laziness, ‘and could you not be contented to live here all the rest of your life; and never again pester yourself with the cursed politics?’ ‘Why, I think I have laboured enough. Let others work now. And such a pretty place for coursing and for hare-hunting and woodcock shooting [...] and never, never again to be stifled with the smoke that from the infernal WEN ascendeth for ever more and that every easterly wind brings to choke me at *Kensington!*’ The *last word* of this soliloquy carried me back, slap, to my own study [...] and bade me think of the Gridiron; bade me think of the complete triumph that I have yet to enjoy: promised me the pleasure of seeing *a million of trees of my own, and sown by my own hands this very year* [...] ‘Go, George, and tell them to saddle the horses’; for, it seemed to me, that I had been meditating some crime.⁵

Pastoral life and country sports are here a source of temptation, luring Cobbett away from his political commitments, until the memory of the smoke from the infernal Wen, drifting across to Kensington like the fog of political malaise and corruption, snaps him out of his reverie.

Such pastoral moments are, however, no more than brief interludes and the literary tradition that the Rides perhaps most closely belongs within is the georgic, a genre that stretches back to Virgil’s *Georgics* in the first century B.C. Cobbett might not seem like an obvious writer to think about in connection with classical poetics, given his remoteness from elite literary culture and notorious disparagement of classical learning. He ridiculed

⁵ W. Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, ed. G. D. H. and M. Cole, 3 vols (London: Peter Davies, 1930), vol. 2, pp. 437-9.

‘those dens of dunces called Colleges and Universities’, insisting ‘*what they call the LEARNED LANGUAGES are improperly so called; and that, as a part of general education, they are worse than useless*’.⁶ However, Cobbett’s own writing contains recognisably pastoral and georgic themes, tropes, and rhetorical strategies.⁷ In contrast to the idyllic world of pastoral, georgic writing focuses on ‘the practicalities of working landscapes’ (Gifford) and Virgil’s *Georgics* are a kind of instruction manual for farmers, with separate books devoted to fruit trees, animal husbandry, and beekeeping. It was an influential book for eighteenth-century writers, spawning an entire genre of georgic poems. The critic Anthony Low gives a useful working definition of the georgic worldview:

Farming is a heroic activity, a kind of constructive warfare [...] Farming is also a cultural and a civilizing activity, a means of building up the state and ensuring its peaceful prosperity [...] As an initial working definition [...] we may say that georgic is a mode that stresses the value of intense and persistent labor against hardships and difficulties; that it differs from pastoral because it emphasizes work instead of ease.⁸

This fits well with *Rural Rides*, which focuses not only on the value of agricultural work but on Cobbett’s own strenuous method: as he declares in the first Ride in the 1830 edition, ‘my object was, not to see inns and turnpike-roads, but to see the *country*; to see the farmers at *home*, and to see the labourers *in the fields*; and to do this you must go either on foot or on horse-back’.⁹

Virgil wrote the *Georgics* in the aftermath of civil war and vividly imagines the farmer’s plough uncovering javelins and helmets in the soil. Cobbett also describes a post-war landscape and often records his encounters with demobbed soldiers, fallen on hard times, tramping through the countryside and trying to make sense of their experiences.

I met, at Worth, *a beggar*, who told me, in consequence of my asking *where he belonged*, that he was born in *South Carolina*. I found, at last, that he was born in the English army, during the American rebel-war; that he became a soldier himself; and that it had been his fate to serve under the Duke of York, in Holland; under General Whitlock,

⁶ *The Opinions of William Cobbett*, ed. J. Grande, J. Stevenson and R. Thomas (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 17; ‘Proceedings in Parliament’, *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 10 January 1807, col. 36.

⁷ W. Cobbett, *A Year’s Residence in the United States of America* (London, 1819), vi.

⁸ *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 12.

⁹ W. Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, ed. G. D. H. and M. Cole, 3 vols (London: Peter Davies, 1930), vol. 1, p. 85.

at Buenos Ayres; under Sir John Moore, at Corunna; and under ‘the Greatest Captain’ [Wellington], at Talavera! This poor fellow did not seem to be at all aware, that, in the last case, he partook in *a victory!* He had never before heard of its being a *victory*. He, poor fool, thought that it was a *defeat*. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘we *ran away*, Sir.’ Oh yes! said I [...] but it is only in *certain cases* that running away is a mark of being defeated; or, rather, it is only with certain commanders. A matter of much more interest to us, however, is that the wars for ‘*social order*’, not forgetting Gattou and Old Sarum, have filled the country with beggars, who have been, or who pretend to have been, soldiers and sailors.¹⁰

History is not buried in *Rural Rides*, but continually uncovered, as Cobbett seeks to challenge the official, triumphalist narrative of the war and show its continued effects in the English countryside.

When he reaches Dover, Cobbett surveys with rising incredulity and anger the coastal defences, built in anticipation for invasion by Napoleon’s armies:

I got into Dover rather late [...] here is that cliff which is described by SHAKESPEARE in the Play of King Lear [...] containing probably a couple of square miles or more, hollowed like a honey-comb. Here are line upon line, trench upon trench, cavern upon cavern, bomb-proof upon bomb-proof [...] more brick and stone have been buried in this hill than would go to build a neat new cottage for every labouring man in the counties of Kent and of Sussex!

Dismissing the utility of these defences, or the likelihood that Napoleon’s armies would ever choose to land at Dover, Cobbett concludes that what Pitt’s ministry wanted, ‘was to prevent the landing, not of Frenchmen, but of French principles; that is to say, to prevent the example of the French from being alluring to the people of England.’¹¹ If the cliffs of Dover have long been a symbol of English identity and separation from mainland Europe, Cobbett subverts this tradition, with an image instead of georgic communality:

It is impossible to be upon this honey-combed hill; upon this enormous mass of anti-jacobin expenditure, without seeing the chalk-cliffs of Calais and the corn-fields of France. At this season, it is impossible to see those fields without knowing that the farmers are

¹⁰ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, vol. 1, p. 155.

¹¹ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, vol. 1, pp. 227-8. Dover, Wednesday, Sept. 3, 1823 (Evening).

getting in their corn there as well as here; and it is impossible to think of that fact without reflecting at the same time, on the example which the farmers of France hold out to the farmers of England.¹²

Refusing any jingoistic celebration of victory over Napoleon, Cobbett's view from Dover holds out the possibility of political reform in Britain, through the image of the French farmers getting in their corn – without, he pointedly observes, having to pay any tithes.

Throughout the Rides, Cobbett stresses his preference for productive and variegated landscapes with woodlands and downs, less likely to be subject of new enclosures. After riding from Farnham to Alresford, he describes how, 'large sweeping downs, and deep dells here and there, with villages amongst lofty trees, are my great delight'; similarly, the countryside between Whitchurch and Burghclere is 'high, chalk bottom, open downs or large fields, with here and there a *farm-house in a dell*, sheltered by lofty trees, which, to my taste is the most pleasant situation in the world.'¹³ By contrast, on the Isle of Thanet in Kent, he observes how,

the richer the soil, and the more destitute of woods; that is to say, the more purely a corn country, the more miserable the labourers. The cause is this, the great, the big bull frog grasps all. In this beautiful island every inch of land is appropriated by the rich. No hedges, no ditches, no commons, no grassy lanes: a country divided into great farms; a few trees surround the great farm-house. All the rest is bare of trees; and the wretched labourer has not a stick of wood, and has no place for a pig or cow to graze, or even to lie down upon. The rabbit countries are the countries for labouring men.¹⁴

For Cobbett, such monocultural systems of farming, which deprive the labourers of their customary rights, mark the distance between the idealised England of his childhood and the present state of things across much of the country. By contrast, after crossing the High Weald, he is able to report, 'The labouring people look pretty well. They have pigs. They invariably do best in the *woodland* and *forest* and *wild* countries. Where the mighty grasper has *all under his eye*, they can get but little.'¹⁵

¹² P. Readman, *Storied Ground: Landscape and the Shaping of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 34; Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, vol. 1, p. 229.

¹³ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, vol. 1, pp. 297, 314.

¹⁴ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, vol. 1, p. 233.

¹⁵ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, vol. 1, p. 207.

This may be as good a place as any to leave Cobbett, out on the High Weald. I hope, then, to have persuaded you that we should recognise *Rural Rides* as a stranger and more original work than we usually think of it as, one born out of the circumstances of 1821 but drawing on earlier traditions and genres to create something entirely new. As Cobbett crossed and re-crossed the southern counties of England he built up a minute account of the English countryside and the state of rural labour, shaped by the aftermath of the long wars with France. He attempted to inhabit a rural ideal even as he recounted its erasure or increasing impossibility, with his own imprisonment, exile, and repeated dispossession standing for the experiences of many in a period of mass migration, emigration and economic dislocation. It is, then, ultimately a hybrid work, that combines earlier literary modes such as pastoral and georgic with the context of the 1820s to create a new way of writing about politics and rural life.

OF INTEREST TO RURAL RIDERS: RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

*Elayne Gardstein, Senior Adjunct Professor,
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Two recent articles were published in issue #90 (November 2021) of *The Globe*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Australian and New Zealand Map Society, Inc.¹ Brendan Whyte, a librarian at the National Library of Australia and editor of *The Globe*, is the author of both papers. Whyte acknowledges the expert assistance of Dr. Richard Thomas and David Chun of the William Cobbett Society and Professor Robert Hall of the Ball State University history department for reviewing these studies.

The first article is “Cobbett’s Cartography: Identifying the Map from his 1826 Rural Ride Down the Vale of Avon” by Brendan Whyte. Here is the abstract:

Rural Rides (1830), the best-known work of prolific English radical journalist and politician William Cobbett, includes an account of his three-month 1826 ride across south-western England. The book

¹ Brendan Whyte. “Cobbett’s Cartography: Identifying the Map from his 1826 Rural Ride Down the Vale of Avon.” *The Globe*. Number 90 (November 2021), 45-61. Brendan Whyte. “Mapping Cobbett: Maps of the Six Excursions Made by William Cobbett in his *Rural Rides* (1830).” *The Globe*. Number 90 (November 1821), 62-79.

contains a single map, of the Vale of Avon, traced by the author from an unidentified "very old map of Wiltshire" and showing 58 unnamed locations, only 16 of which Cobbett identifies in his text. Analysis of Cobbett's text and map reveal the source map he traced is most likely one of two 1760s reprints of Emanuel Bowen's 1755 county map of Wiltshire, from which information the locations depicted can almost all be identified. The reason Cobbett used a source so out of date, when three more accurate and up-to-date surveys of the county were available to him, is also discussed.²

In "Cobbett's Cartography" the caption for figure 1 reads "Cobbett's untitled map of the Vale of Avon (Cobbett, 1930 v.2 facing p. 359; orig. pub *Political Register*, Sat. 16 Sept. 1825, cols. 711-712; repr. *Rural Rides*, 1830, facing p. 355)". Whyte's meticulous study concludes, "the most likely map that Cobbett traced was either the 1760 or 1763 reprints of Bowen's large 1755 Wiltshire county map." According to Whyte, Cobbett could have utilized Emanuel Bowen's *An Improved Map of Wilshire, divided into its Hundreds* to depict the present impoverished state of the agricultural landscape and its rural population by comparing it with that 'about sixty years ago'.³

Brendan Whyte's second article is entitled "Mapping Cobbett: Maps of the Six Excursions Made by William Cobbett in his *Rural Rides* (1830)". This is its abstract:

Between 1822 and 1826, radical English journalist William Cobbett made six horseback rides through southern England. He published accounts of these excursions in his weekly paper the *Political Register*, later collecting them in his book *Rural Rides* (1830), which remains in print today. Despite nearly two centuries having passed since their first publication, the rides have never previously been mapped in detail. Maps of each of these six rides are therefore presented here for the first time.⁴

In addition to Whyte's individual maps for Cobbett's rides in 1822, 1823, 1825 and 1826, there is a locator map for all six rides in England. A legend for maps of the six rides has markings for Cobbett's routes (per 1830 text and inferred) and county boundaries; there are symbols for start/finish, overnight stop, other villages, towns and cities, 'The Wen' (London), and

² "Cobbett's Cartography," p. 45.

³ "Cobbett's Cartography," p. 51.

⁴ "Mapping Cobbett," p. 62.

named hills with height in feet. Whyte includes a table with chapter details and rides for the 1830 edition of *Rural Rides*. Another table lists persons whom Cobbett visited or lodged with on his ride, largely based on the notes in the Cole (1930) and Dyck (2001) editions.

Whyte's extensive notes and references deepen understanding of *Rural Rides* and encourage further inquiry. In "Cobbett's Cartography", the notes include commentary on the various book editions, map descriptions, available high-resolution images, and Cobbett quotations. The notes in "Mapping Cobbett" have information about county boundaries and bridge locations. Both articles include online sources in the reference lists. Whyte's expertise in cartography and ability to relate maps to the text make his recent articles valuable additions to the study of Cobbett's *Rural Rides*.

NOT LAND ALONE - WILLIAM COBBETT'S HAMPSHIRE ESTATE

David Chun

In V.S. Naipaul's fine book *The Enigma of Arrival*, his narrator observes, 'Land is not land alone, something that simply is itself. Land partakes of what we breathe into it, is touched by our moods and memories.'¹ This captures something of the relationship that William Cobbett enjoyed with the property he owned, which was always as much a matter of emotion as practicality. One only has to reflect on how just the *idea* of his land at Botley, his fields and coppices, helped to sustain him during his two-year incarceration in Newgate. However, it is important to remember that in Cobbett's time land ownership was also imbued with far greater political significance than it is now, particularly when it was viewed in contradistinction with the more nebulous world of finance, of stock-jobbing and fundholding. In contrast with possessors of government stock and other forms of moveable wealth, owners of land were in for the long haul and could not simply up sticks when things got tough, and this, it was argued, ensured their loyalty. This idea underlies Cobbett's claim that his ownership of land and his improvement of it were proof against charges of seditious intent made against him:

¹ Naipaul. *Enigma of Arrival*, 1987, p. 366.

For a man, who has real property, to wish for the annihilation of those laws, by which alone that property is secured to him, is not very likely; for a man, who, like me is planting trees and sowing acorns and making roads and breaking up wastes, to wish for the destruction of order and law and property is still less likely [...].²

And in a word, landowners were also ‘independent’, not reliant on government patronage nor beholden to anyone else, and such independence legitimised their participation in politics.

Cobbett was, therefore, not simply some hobby farmer.³ His decision to buy land was concerned as much with the acquisition of political power and status as with the desire to be a working farmer and is one of the keys to understanding the progress of his career in the early 1800s. As George Spater observed, ‘we know that Cobbett liked land not only for the things it could grow, but perhaps even more for the less tangible benefits: the right to hunt, the right to vote, the right to run for parliament and that inestimable blessing available to a nineteenth-century landowner “weight in the county”.’⁴

A couple of years ago, I wrote an article about the estate in the neighbourhood of Botley in Hampshire that Cobbett had acquired in a piecemeal manner between 1805 and 1811.⁵ It identified the various properties that comprised his estate and explored the possible motivations for its acquisition. The article was accompanied by a sketch map that showed the approximate positions of the various farms and other properties that he owned. Since publication of this article, further information about the locations of some small pieces of land that were acquired from William Hallett in 1809 has come to my attention. This has prompted me to update my map and, with the assistance of Dr. Brendan Whyte, a new member of the Society, to give it a more professional appearance (Figure 1). The new version shows the location of the four

² *Political Register*, 14.7.1810. col. 21. The pro-government newspaper *The Satirist* (1.9.1810) retorted ‘Cobbett exultingly asks – how he can wish that nation to be conquered where all his property *lies*? The answer is plain, Buonaparte always *promises* and sometimes *grants* indemnity and riches to those who serve him.’

³ Though, to be fair, one might suggest, somewhat cheekily, that some of the uses he made of his land may have been more akin to the antics of Jeremy Clarkson on his Cotswolds estate, as shown in the 2021 Amazon television series *Clarkson’s Farm*, than to the practices of a hard-nosed agriculturalist!

⁴ George Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man’s Friend*, 1982, vol. 1, pp. 173-174.

⁵ David Chun, “‘As to the Land, Buy by All Means’ – the Hampshire Estate of William Cobbett (1763-1835)”, *Hampshire Studies*, 75.1. (2020): 88-100. ‘Estate’ is how Cobbett described his landholdings – for example, see British Library, Add. MS. 22907, f. 34.

pieces of land acquired from Hallett and alterations to the boundary between Raglington Farm and the property called Silford and Hole.⁶

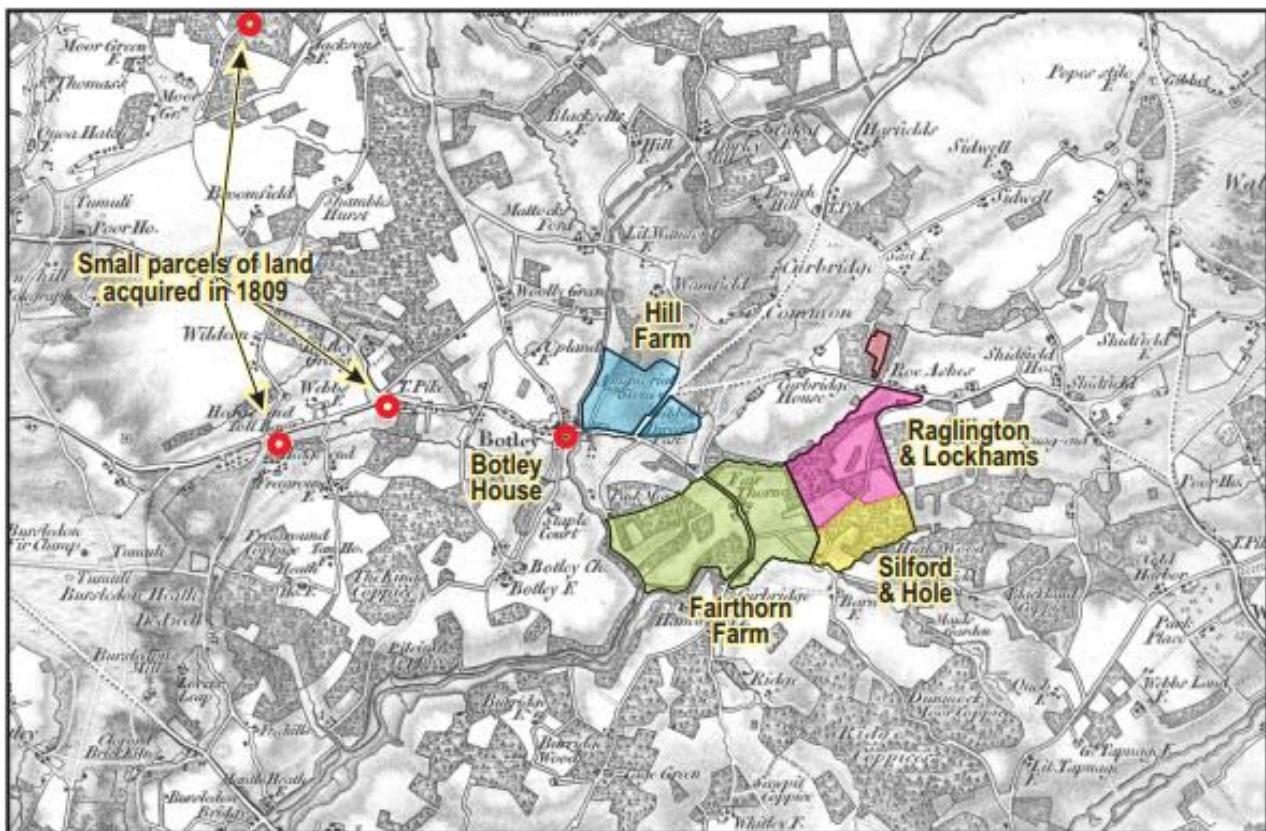


Fig. 1 Map showing approximate extent of William Cobbett’s principal landholdings near Botley in 1811. The principal properties comprising the estate were Botley House (acquired 1805), Fairthorn Farm (acquired 1806), Silford and Hole (acquired 1808), Raglington and Lockhams (acquired 1808) and Botley Hill Farm (lease taken in 1811). He did buy another farm called Cott or Cock Street in 1805, but this was in the Meon valley, some distance from Botley, and was separately farmed by Cobbett’s brother Tom.

The acquisitions from Hallett require particular mention, as some of the information has come to light since my article appeared in 2020. Cobbett purchased these pieces of land at an auction in 1809 with the intention of making John Wright and a number of his friends and relatives (including his brother-in-law Frederick Reid and Peter Finnerty) freeholders.⁷ The cottage purchased for Wright, which appears to have been in Burness Lane (now called Burnetts Lane) close to the junction with Bubb Lane (and the most northerly of the three points on the map), was duly transferred into Wright’s name. It was transferred back to Cobbett in 1811, as part of the

⁶ There are only three locations for this land marked on the map because two of the pieces of land were contiguous.

⁷ British Library, Add. MS. 22907, f.189, letter to Wright dated 18th August 1809. A copy of the auction particulars is in the collections of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, 315/28-18. This shows the lots that Cobbett purchased and the price paid for each one.

settlement of a dispute between them.⁸ The total price paid by Cobbett at the auction was £161. In his statement of 1820, he indicated that he had bought four separate pieces of land in the parish of South Stoneham for, to the best of his recollection, £200. He also said he had bought a cottage for £30, which would have made a total of 5 pieces of land.⁹ So he may have bought an additional piece of land from Hallett, or had perhaps misremembered.

It must be stressed that, as to the boundaries of the farms, the map is still very tentative, even at this small scale. There are lists of the properties that Cobbett owned, which include information such as the acquisition dates and acreages, but, so far as I am aware, no contemporary maps of his estate have survived.¹⁰ It is known that there were such maps. When he was in low spirits in Newgate, beset with the financial difficulties that had been precipitated by his imprisonment – Cobbett's son William never, he said, recalled him 'so haggard or jaded' or with 'so old a beard or so slovenly' – he contemplated selling his land at Botley to Sir Francis Burdett. Cobbett lent Richard Crabtree, Burdett's steward, maps of his land so that Crabtree could survey it.¹¹ The sale to Burdett did not proceed, and the maps were presumably returned to Cobbett, who no doubt continued to use them to prepare the sketch maps that he sent down to Botley with instructions for the farming tasks to be carried out. The map that accompanies this article is, therefore, necessarily based on a number of sources, including an estate map made just before Cobbett's acquisition (Figure 2),¹² the tithe maps and awards for the parishes of Botley, Bishop's Waltham, Droxford and South Stoneham, as well as Cobbett's own sketch maps in the library of Nuffield College, Oxford.¹³

Even using these and other contemporary sources, I have found it a formidable challenge to reconstruct the exact boundaries of Cobbett's estate. Quite apart from my own limitations in interpreting the historical

⁸ Library of Nuffield College, University of Oxford ('Nuffield'), XXIX/27/1-2, letter dated 3rd July 1811 from WC to Anne Cobbett. This letter refers to the cottage in Burness Lane and to a Henry Duffin, the tenant.

⁹ Statement of 1820, Rare Books and Special Collections, Library of the University of Illinois, Urbana, Post-1650 MS 348.

¹⁰ These are in Cobbett's statement of 1820 (see note 9), 'Note of Land bought by Cobbett in Hampshire' by Susan Cobbett in the library of Nuffield College, University of Oxford, XVIII and John Paul Cobbett' which lists the properties purchased between 1804 and 1809 and the list made by John Paul Cobbett in his book of recollections of his father which is now in the Museum of Farnham, 152/B/01.

¹¹ 'Cobbett Monument', *Political Register*, 23 July 1836, cols. 36-37.

¹² Hampshire Record Office, 45M69/133. Plans of Swanwick, Titchfield, showing land of manor and John Hornby's estate.

¹³ Nuffield, XXIX/27/1-2, 'Plans of the fields and directions for work'.

documents, I have faced a number of challenges: intervening physical alterations to the landscape - including those made by Cobbett himself, who removed hedges and grubbed out coppices - changes to field names,



Fig. 2 Detail showing Fairthorn Farm from Plans of Swanwick, Titchfield, showing land of manor and John Hornby's estate. Hampshire Record Office: 45M69/133.

and the amalgamation of properties. Later maps, in particular the relevant tithe maps of the late 1830s and early 1840s, no longer distinguished the original boundaries of the farms that Cobbett had amalgamated.

Despite these difficulties, the new map does show the locations and, broadly, the extents of all the properties that Cobbett acquired in the vicinity of Botley between 1805 and 1811. And to see Cobbett's properties shown on a map is, I feel, helpful for two main reasons. First, the location of these properties has at times been problematic for Cobbett's biographers, even in the twentieth century. G.D.H. Cole, for example, in the revised edition of his *Life of William Cobbett* (1947), correctly states that his subject purchased 'a farm called Fairthorn, on the river [Hamble] between Botley and Curbridge' but he seems to have conflated the farmhouse there with Botley House, Cobbett's residence in the village of Botley.¹⁴ As later biographers have made clear, and the map shows, these were separate properties, and some distance apart. Even George Spater, one of the most diligent of Cobbett's biographers, indicated that Hill Farm, the property he had rented in 1811, was 45 acres whereas its true size was 106 acres.¹⁵

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, to be able to see at a glance the full extent of Cobbett's estate laid out on a map makes other things clear. In one of the articles that were later published in book form as *Paper against Gold*, Cobbett claimed that he derived more pleasure from the 1811 Bullion Committee report, which recommended a return to the gold standard, than he would have derived 'from being made the owner of the whole of Hampshire', which is perhaps revealing of the direction of his ambitions if not, in practical terms, their scale.¹⁶ One of his contemporaries described Cobbett as being, during the period he was assembling his Hampshire estate, 'a rather aristocratical character'.¹⁷ This was probably going too far, but he does appear to have been somewhat seigniorial in his attitudes and very concerned with status, seeing himself as a man of property and aspiring to be a large, if not great, landowner, and the maker of extensive plantations of trees. The ambition to have a country estate was fulfilled by Cobbett's acquisitions in Hampshire in the early 1800s and it was undoubtedly one of the great disappointments of his life that he was ultimately to lose his property there. By the end of the second decade of

¹⁴ Cole, *Life*, 1947, p. 92.

¹⁵ Spater, *William Cobbett*, 1982, vol. 2, p. 358. Spater seems to have been confused by the area upon which Cobbett used for growing wheat in 1814, assuming it was the total acreage of the farm. He does not appear to have had access to the bound volume of letters in the library of Nuffield College (XXIX, Letters, 1806-1812), which contains correspondence relating to the taking of the lease.

¹⁶ William Cobbett, *Paper against Gold*, 1817, cols. 75-76.

¹⁷ *Hampshire Advertiser*, 29 May 1826.

the nineteenth century, the freehold and copyhold land had been repossessed by the mortgagee and the lease of Hill Farm forfeited.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Eric Reed for advising me as to the location of the 1809 auction particulars in the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre collections and for supplying me with a copy of the Townhill Park estate map of the early 1800s in his possession. I am also very grateful to Dr. Brendan Whyte, who is the Coordinator of Special Collection Retrieval at the National Library of Australia and the former Curator of Maps there, for his help in creating the map, though he is not responsible for any errors in its content which derives from my research. Barbara Biddell kindly entrusted me with her 1802 valuation of Bishop's Waltham which includes later annotations relating to Cobbett's property in that parish, and this has been of great assistance.

RURAL RIDES ON THE SHELF AT ADELPHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN GARDEN CITY, NY

Elayne Gardstein, Senior Adjunct Professor, Adelphi University Libraries

Over a dozen different editions and printings of *Rural Rides* are on the William Cobbett Collection shelves in Special Collections at Adelphi, dating from 1830 to 1998. Notable examples include the first edition of 1830, James Paul Cobbett's new edition of 1853, Pitt Cobbett's edition of 1885, Everyman's Library 1912 reissue of the 1853 edition and the Coles' edition of 1930. Related biographical and bibliographical materials support the *Rural Rides* holdings, as do past and recent scholarly resources. Archival records provide details about several of Adelphi's *Rural Rides* acquisitions.

In addition to issues of the *Political Register* detailing Cobbett's rides, Adelphi's collection has a copy of *A Ride of Eight Hundred Miles in France* by his son, James Paul Cobbett (1803-1881). Charles Clement published the younger Cobbett's October to November 1823 tour of northern and western France in 1824. In its original boards, the book has a spine label, "A Ride in France By J. P. Cobbett." On the title page, James Paul is the "student of Lincoln's-Inn". In addition to his father's style of

numbered paragraphs, there are a list of “Mr. Cobbett’s Publications”, a view of the finances with receipts for 1822 and expenditures for 1823, and an index. During this time, James Paul’s father William published accounts of his own travels through the countryside in the *Register*. In the January 2, 1830 issue of *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, Cobbett included *Rural Rides* among the advertisements. He wrote, “I have now collected these, and published them, in one volume of considerable size, price 10s. Many persons have wished to possess them in this form; and, therefore, I have thus published them. I say *published* ; but perhaps, the volume will not be ready for sale until next week.”¹

The First Edition of 1830 and Its Printings

There are two copies of the first edition of *Rural Rides* at Adelphi. In boards and leather binding, the first example combines two titles: *Rural Rides* (1830) and *Cobbett’s Poor Man’s Friend* (1826) followed by a twelve page “List of Mr. Cobbett’s Books.” Purchased during the 1968-1969 academic year, it was included in the library’s 1969 William Cobbett exhibition. The second copy is of particular interest, as it has the original boards with quarter green cloth back binding and remnants of its original spine label, “Cobbett’s Rural Rides” with “Price 5s” at the bottom. It was purchased during the 1975-1976 academic year for \$125. Arnold Meadowcroft Muirhead described four variants of the spine label: the first issue with 10/s, the second variant with its price crossed out in ink and corrected to 5/s, the third variant with ‘Five s’, and the smaller fourth 4 cm label variant with ‘Price 5s’.² Adelphi’s copy falls between the third and fourth variants, as its label measures 5.8 cm high like the first three variants but has its price indicated numerically. The three larger variant labels include county names after the title; very faint printing on Adelphi’s label indicates their possible presence.

Muirhead, in his Cobbett bibliography, refers the reader to his more detailed description of the first *Rural Rides* edition in *Bibliographical Notes and Queries*. In the latter source, he provides the label wording: “COBBETT’S / RURAL RIDES / IN THE COUNTIES OF / SURREY, KENT, SUSSEX, HAMPSHIRE, / WILTSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, HERE- / FORDSHIRE, WORCESTER-SHIRE, SO- / MERSETSHIRE,

¹ *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*. 2 January 1830, Vol. 69, No. 1. column 31. Accessed via HathiTrust, February 23, 2022.

² Arnold Meadowcroft Muirhead. *An Introduction to a Bibliography of William Cobbett*. London: Bibliographical Society; Oxford: Reprinted by the University Press, 1939, p. 34. A. M. M. [Arnold Meadowcroft Muirhead]. “Query No. 271. Cobbett: Rural Rides. (Vol. II, No. 10, p. 8)” published in *Bibliographical Notes and Queries*. Vol. II, No. 12 (May 1939), p. 3.

OXFORDSHIRE, BERK- / SHIRE, ESSEX, SUFFOLK, NORFOLK, / AND HERTFORDSHIRE”. He also notes the smaller type size, some rearrangement of county names, inferior printing ink and “watered” backing of the third label variant.³ Adelphi’s copy one has a “List of Mr. Cobbett’s Books” bound with *Rural Rides* and *Cobbett’s Poor Man’s Friend*, while copy two has its list titled “The Cobbett Library”, printed by “Wm. Cobbett, Johnson’s-court, Fleet-street.” Muirhead also comments about inconsistent use of later book lists in first editions of *Rural Rides* and remarks, “I suspect Cobbett was not a great business man and often sold copies of a new edition before the stock of the earlier one was exhausted.”⁴ However, towards the end of 1830, Cobbett recognized the need to reduce the price for *Rural Rides* in order to sell more copies, and lowered its price on the spine label. Advertisements appeared in the October 23 and November 20 issues of the *Register*. “These are published in a thick volume, duodecimo ; the price was to be 10s., I shall sell the volume at *five shillings*, in boards ; It is a collection of all my rides... The book contains 668 pages, and is neatly put up in boards : the volume is printed in a manner to fit it for a library.”⁵

Cobbett promoted his book again in the December 11, 1830 issue of the *Register*. In his report about discussion of famine by the House of Commons, he railed against food waste and lack of men for proper crop cultivation. “Get a copy of my *Rural Rides*, read it through, and then you will know something about England, of which, at present, you seem to know no more than you do of the moon.”⁶ Before turning to subsequent editions of *Rural Rides*, another early title is of note.

Cobbett’s Tour in Scotland

Adelphi’s copy of *Cobbett’s Tour in Scotland; and In the Four Northern Counties of England: In the Autumn of the Year 1832*, in original boards, was published at 11, Bolt Court in 1833. According to the introduction, dated London, 28 Dec. 1832, it was Cobbett’s first book since being chosen to represent the Borough of Oldham in Lancashire. Cobbett returned to London from Scotland on November 23, 1832 and stressed the importance of learning more about “that very much misrepresented part of

³ A. M. M. “Query No. 271”, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 23 October 1830. Vol. 70, No. 17, col. 543 and 20 November 1830, Vol. 70, No. 21, cols. 797-798. Accessed via HathiTrust, January 23, 2022. The October advertisement noted 668 pages while the November advertisement noted 600 pages.

⁶ *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 11 December 1830. Vol. 70, No. 24, col. 970. Accessed via HathiTrust, January 23, 2022.

the kingdom.”⁷ From September 23 to November 21, 1832, Cobbett described the countryside, towns, and situation of workers through northern English and Scottish lands. Interestingly, a former owner of this book, W. A. J. Munby of Lake of the Temple, provided a note in pencil on the inside rear cover and criticized Cobbett for saying nothing about women’s work.

The 1853 Edition and Its Reprints

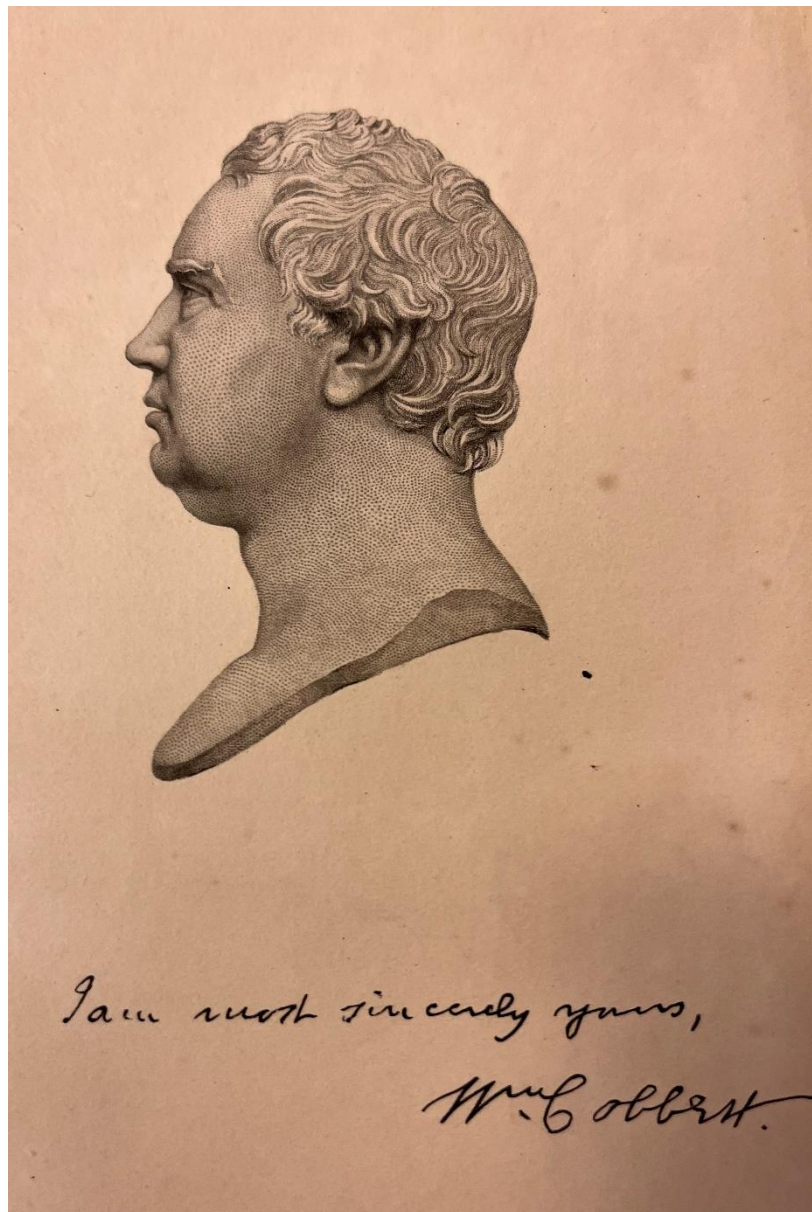


Fig. 1 Portrait of William Cobbett by Peter Rouw. Frontispiece to the 1853 edition of *Rural Rides*. William Cobbett Collection, University Archives and Special Collections, Adelphi University Libraries.

In 1853, a new edition with notes by James Paul Cobbett, Barrister-at-Law at 137, Strand, was published by his sister Anne Cobbett (1795-1877).

⁷ William Cobbett. *Cobbett’s Tour in Scotland; and In the Four Northern Counties of England: In the Autumn of the Year 1832*. London: Published by William Cobbett, 1833, p. vii.

James Paul Cobbett (1803-1881), William's son, dated the book's preface Manchester, June 1853. James Paul described the frontispiece as the most accurate portrait of his father "from a model for a medallion, made by an eminent artist, Mr. Peter Rouw, in 1824, when the Author was in his 62nd year."⁸ There is a rustic scene with fallen tree trunk, *Rural Rides* banner and distant church by an anonymous "S. W." facing the first text page. Beneath the image is a lengthy Cobbett quote about woodland countries taken from page 63 of this edition. Pages 642 to 679 contain explanatory notes on the rides.

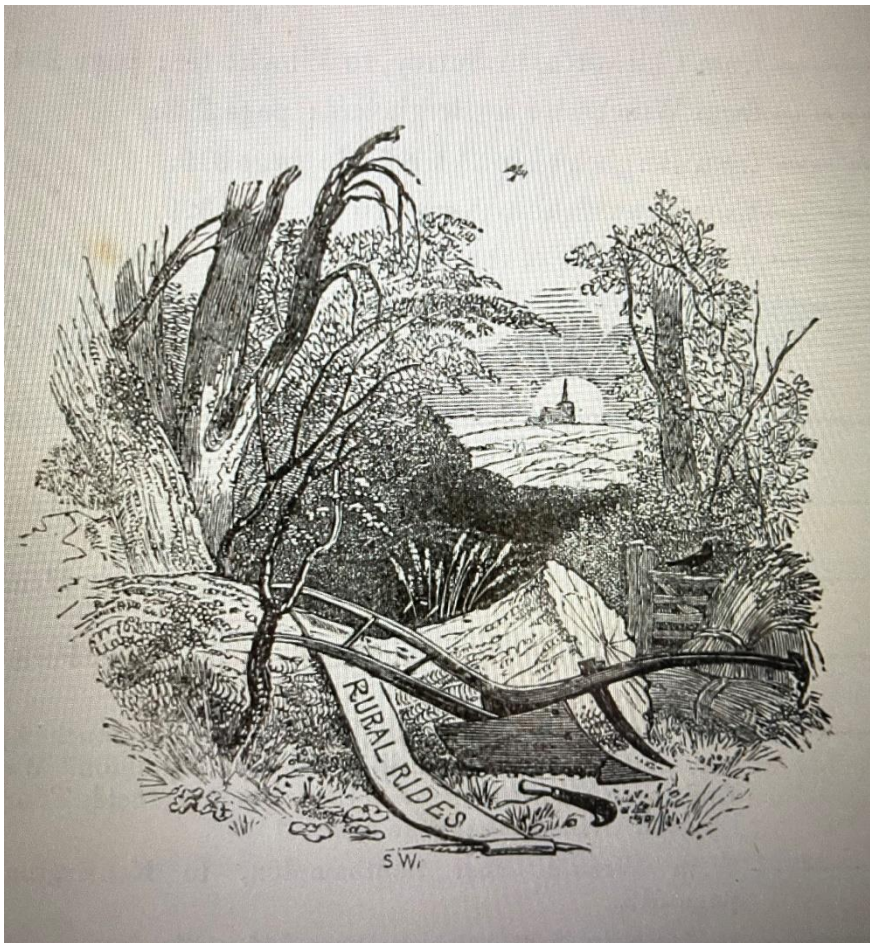


Fig. 2 "Woodland countries are interesting on many accounts." Illustration facing the first page of the 1853 edition of *Rural Rides*. William Cobbett Collection, University Archives and Special Collections, Adelphi University Libraries.

Adelphi owns reissues of this edition, most notably published in 1912, 1925, 1941 and 1973 by J. M. Dent & Sons in London and E. P. Dutton & Co in New York. Issued in two volume sets, they were part of the

⁸ William Cobbett. *Rural Rides*. A New Edition with Notes by James Paul Cobbett. London: A. Cobbett, 1853. Preface.

Everyman's Library Travel & Topography Series, edited by Ernest Rhys (1859-1946). According to the current Knopf/Doubleday website,

Everyman's Library was founded on February 15, 1906 with the publication by Joseph Dent (1849-1926) of fifty titles. Dent, a master London bookbinder turned publisher, was a classic Victorian autodidact.... Dent promised to publish new and beautiful editions of the world's classics at one shilling a volume, 'to appeal to every kind of reader: the worker, the student, the cultured man, the child, the man and the woman [so that] for a few shillings the reader may have a whole bookshelf of the immortals; for five pounds (which will procure him with a hundred volumes) a man may be intellectually rich for life.'⁹

Robert Lynd, as editor of the *News Chronicle*, wrote an obituary for Ernest Rhys in 1946. Lynd described Rhys "as the editor of the greatest venture in popular publishing this country has known."¹⁰

The 1912 set, bound in green cloth and only 17 cm high, has dustwrappers printed in green, ivory and black. It has the publisher's quote, "Everyman, I will go with thee, and by thy guide, in thy most need to go by thy side." In addition to Cobbett's biographical information facing the title page, the second volume has notes, an index and an eight-page list of Everyman's Library titles arranged alphabetically by author. Adelphi's copy of this set was included in the Cobbett Collection bequest from the family of C. Rexford Davis in 1958.

The poet Edward Thomas (1878-1917) wrote the introduction to the inexpensive Everyman's Library editions of *Rural Rides*. Clare Griffiths provides interesting commentary about Thomas. In her chapter entitled "Rural Riding: Revisiting Cobbett's Countryside in the Twentieth Century", she noted Thomas' emphasis on Cobbett's character, biography, writing style and above all, his Englishness. Griffiths also adapted her study of *Rural Rides* for the Cobbett memorial lecture, published in *Cobbett's New Register* as "Cobbett's *Rural Rides*, Politics and Englishness."¹¹ She described the Everyman edition as "one of the

⁹ <http://knopfdoubleday.com/imprints/#everymans-library>

¹⁰ Robert Lynd. "Inspired, Unselfish Mr. Everyman." *News Chronicle*. 27 May 1946. Accessed via http://www.everymanslibrarycollecting.com/rhys_obit.htm

¹¹ See Clare Griffiths. "Rural Riding: Revisiting Cobbett's Countryside in the Twentieth Century." In James Grande and John Stevenson, eds. *William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment: Contexts and Legacy*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2015, pp. 137-156. Accessed January 22, 2022 via *ProQuest Central*. See

most accessible and affordable versions of *Rural Rides* for several decades.”¹² Adelphi’s reprints of the 1912 edition date from 1925, 1941 and 1973, with some variation.

The 1925 printing’s two cloth bound volumes are numbers 638 and 639 of Everyman’s Library, with an elaborate two-page title presentation. On the left is the Ben Jonson quote for the Travel & Topography Series, “To The Wise Man All the World’s A Soil.” On the right are the title and cities of publication, London and Toronto for J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd. and New York for E. P. Dutton & Co. The 1941 reissue has green and ivory printed dustwrappers. The front paper flap lists Cobbett’s *Rural Rides* along with other travel titles by Captain Cook, Marco Polo, R. L. Stevenson and Defoe. Despite the thin, yellowing paper of this wartime printing, the introduction by Edward Thomas praises Cobbett’s writing style and proclaims, “It is not necessary, as has been done in the only cheap reprint, to cut down the political diatribes.”¹³ Asa Briggs (1921-2016), Victorian scholar and renowned academic at universities in England and the United States, edited the 1973 Everyman’s Library reissue and wrote its introduction in 1956. These volumes have attractive golden yellow and orange paper dustwrappers; the front wrapper illustration of Sheffield is a detail from an old engraving. In addition to the Everyman’s Library printings emanating from James Paul Cobbett’s 1853 edition, the Cobbett Collection has another nineteenth-century edition of note.

Pitt Cobbett and *Rural Rides* in 1885

In 1885, Reeves and Turner brought out a two-volume set of *Rural Rides*. Pitt Cobbett wrote the preface dated February 1885, provided his own foldout map between pages 56 and 57 and added editorial notes to earlier ones by James Paul Cobbett. However, it remains unclear if there was a familial connection to the author. Facts about Pitt Cobbett are limited to his former occupation as a wine merchant in Adelaide, Australia, his emigration from Australia to England in 1864, ordination and role as Vicar of Crofton, Hampshire from 1874-1901.¹⁴ Almost immediately, there were

also Clare Griffiths. “Cobbett’s *Rural Rides*, Politics and Englishness.” *Cobbett’s New Register*. Vol. 11, No. 7, 2016, pp. 31-39.

¹² Griffiths, “Rural Riding”, p. 141.

¹³ Edward Thomas. “Introduction.” *Rural Rides*. London: J. M Dent & Sons Ltd.; New York: E. P. Dutton Co. Inc., 1941, p. x.

¹⁴ Brendan Whyte. “Cobbett’s Cartography: Identifying the Map from his 1826 Rural Ride Down the Vale of Avon.” *The Globe*. Number 90 (November 2021). p. 58, note 14. This information about the elder Pitt Cobbett appeared in the Wikipedia entry for his son, William Pitt Cobbett (1853-1919), repeated from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. University of Melbourne Press, 1981, volume 8.

positive reviews for Pitt Cobbett's edition. Bernard Shaw's book reviews were published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* from 1885-1888 and were reprinted in 1991. Shaw's review of *Rural Rides* dated from July 27, 1885. He wrote, "The reprint of *Rural Rides* has been edited by the Rev. Pitt Cobbett very sensibly and faithfully. There is no tampering with the text, no Bowdlerization, no editorial impertinences. Mr. Pitt Cobbett evidently considers that his author went rather fast in one or two places; but he does not complain nor interfere, he simply hints that he does not endorse."¹⁵ Martin J. Wiener, in "The Changing Image of William Cobbett," mentioned a positive review of this edition by Charles Milnes Gaskell in 1886. Gaskell praised Cobbett's "word-paintings" of the countryside and wrote, "As a writer of pure English, Cobbett stands out almost unrivalled....He did not draw his illustrations from the fantasies of a perplexed brain, but from that nature which is always ready to reveal her secrets to those who love her."¹⁶

The 1885 edition has green cloth binding with gold lettering, and the spines depict two riders on horseback facing one another. The frontispiece depicts a bust-length profile portrait of Cobbett, taken from a model for a medallion made by Peter Rouw. There is a reproduced signature, "I am most sincerely yours, Wm Cobbett". Adelphi owns similar Reeves and Turner printings of this edition from 1893 and 1908. The 1885 set found a home upon publication, as volume two is inscribed, "To my father August 1885 from Hugh". Brendan Whyte provides a lengthy critique of Pitt Cobbett's crude foldout map, a replacement of Cobbett's original map with new numbering, necessitating edits to the text, and some changed village names. As Whyte described, the later printings of Pitt Cobbett's edition include better quality maps printed by Stanford's Geographical Establishment of London.¹⁷

Scholarly Interest in *Rural Rides*

G. D. H. Cole (1889-1959) wrote *The Life of William Cobbett, with a Chapter on Rural Rides by the late F. E. Green*. Adelphi owns three paper editions of this title: a 1924 edition bound in red cloth and published by Harcourt in New York, a new edition with corrections, published by W.

¹⁵ Brian Tyson, editor. *Bernard Shaw's Book Reviews*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991, p. 33. Accessed online via Google Books, January 22, 2022.

¹⁶ Charles Milnes Gaskell. "William Cobbett." *Nineteenth Century*, XIX (February 1886), p. 255. See pages 238-256 for Gaskell's complete article on Cobbett. See Martin J. Wiener. "The Changing Image of William Cobbett." *Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 13, No. 2 (May 1974), pp. 135-154. Accessed August 4, 2021 via JSTOR database.

¹⁷ Whyte. "Cobbett's Cartography", p. 59, note 14.

Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. in 1927, and a third edition revised, published by Horne & Van Thal. The latter, published in 1947, was part of the C. Rexford Davis bequest to Adelphi in 1958. In his preface, Cole admitted his own lack of intimate knowledge of the countryside and his access to papers of the late F. E. Green (1867-1922). In the very first pages of this chapter, the author described Cobbett's work in a positive way. "Written thus in snatches, as a daybook of his travels, *Rural Rides* is astonishingly fresh and vigorous. It brings out what is best alike in Cobbett's mind and in his style of writing."¹⁸ However, in addition to lengthy descriptions of rides by Cobbett and his son Richard, there was criticism. "Eviscerated editions of *Rural Rides* have been published with the political allusions cut out. They fall flat; for the essence of Cobbett is in the mingling of observation and comment."¹⁹ This encouraged the issue of a more complete and scholarly edition.

The 1930 Edition of *Rural Rides*

Adelphi's Cobbett Collection includes the three-volume set of *Rural Rides* edited by G. D. H. and Margaret Cole. Published by Peter Davies of London in an edition of 1,000 for £5/5s, its appearance marked the centennial of Cobbett's first edition. Although Adelphi's set is unnumbered, it is magnificent, bound in half beige cloth and marbled paper over boards, with gold tooled print on black spine labels, A. E. Taylor's endpaper maps, and John Nash's text illustrations. There are many uncut pages, but the paper is thick enough to see Nash's pictures where they appear between them. The publication prompted two contemporaneous newspaper reviews.

The Times Literary Supplement published an unsigned article by Edmund Blunden on October 9, 1930. Blunden praised the completeness of the new edition, with its inclusion of all the rides dating 1821-1834, preliminary essay, annotations and biographical directory. The writer declared, "This is the only edition of the "Rural Rides" which, from its publication, will be consulted with certainty...."²⁰ Blunden also praised the Cole essay for elucidating Cobbett's efforts, successes and failures for reform and improvement of conditions for the working class. On October 12, 1930, *The Observer* published "A New Cobbett" by J. C. Squire in its Books of the Day section. In Squire's view, this edition would supersede earlier

¹⁸ G. D. H. Cole. *The Life of William Cobbett, with a Chapter on Rural Rides by the late F. E. Green*. London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1927, p. 319.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 320.

²⁰ "Rural Rides." *The Times Literary Supplement*. No. 1,487. October 9, 1930, p. 789.

ones. Although costly at “five guineas”, the reviewer advocated its future availability in less expensive reprints.²¹ While others have commented extensively on G. D. H. and Margaret Cole’s roles as editors, less appears about the set’s publisher and illustrators.

The publisher, Peter Llewelyn Davies (1897-1960), and his brothers were orphans in childhood and one of their guardians was J. M. Barrie. Barrie identified Davies as the given name used for his 1904 play and 1911 novel *Peter Pan*. Another literary connection for Peter Davies was his first cousin, the writer Daphne du Maurier (1907-1989).²² With J. M. Barrie’s financial support, Davies founded the publishing house Peter Davies Ltd. in 1926, later incorporated into William Heinemann Ltd.

A. E. Taylor (1887-1959) drew the pictorial endpaper maps of “Cobbett’s Country.” According to the Barron Maps blog, Taylor was a prolific creator of decorative maps in the 1920s and 1930s, especially suited to British travel books. He also designed a well-received mural map of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland for the British Pavilion at the 1939 New York World’s Fair.²³ Brendan Whyte’s recent study of *Rural Rides* maps includes commentary about some inaccuracies made in Taylor’s renditions.²⁴

John Northcote Nash (1893-1977) provided 33 vignette illustrations for the 1930 edition. *ABC for Book Collectors* defines vignette as “A small ornamental or decorative design, used on a title-page or as a head-or-tail piece to a chapter or division of a book.” It can be “Any illustration not enclosed in a border or squared off at the edges but shading away....”²⁵ In 1920, John Nash was a founding member of the Society of Wood Engravers, and by the 1920s and 1930s, he gained a reputation for botanical works and as an illustrator of fine press books. In addition to his roles in the Modern English Water-Colour Society, the Colchester Art Society and as teacher at the Colchester Art School, the Ruskin School at

²¹ J. C. Squire. “A New Cobbett.” *The Observer*. October 12, 193, p. 6.

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Llewelyn_Davies . Accessed February 4, 2022.

²³ <http://barronmaps.com/alfred-edward-taylor-1887-1959/> . Accessed February 6, 2022.

²⁴ Brendan Whyte. “Mapping Cobbett: Maps of the Six Excursions Made by William Cobbett in his *Rural Rides* (1830). *The Globe*. Number 90 (November 2021), p.63.

²⁵ John Carter and Nicholas Baker. *ABC for Book Collectors*. Reprint of corrected 8th edition. New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press; London: The British Library, 2006, p. 229.

Oxford and the Royal College, Nash was elected to the Royal Academy, its first living artist member to have a retrospective exhibition in 1967.²⁶

Largely untrained, John Nash was nonetheless encouraged by his older brother, the modernist artist Paul Nash (1889-1946). In addition to landscape painting and preference for nature subjects, both brothers were masters of the art of woodcut and wood engraving. With the latter technique, the artist achieved greater detail by cutting his design on the endgrain side of a boxwood block. Clare Colvin, in *John Nash Book Designs*, noted that the revival of wood engraving coincided with the appearance of limited edition fine press books after World War I and before the 1930s economic depression.²⁷ Two years prior to publication of the deluxe edition of *Rural Rides*, Nash wrote about the importance of “...an aim worth achieving, the twofold aim of decoration and illustration” in books.²⁸ In his later discussion about the illustrator’s role, Nash explained, “The artist must show proper deference to the book and its author by giving it first place to his consideration and allowing himself to be absorbed by the subject rather than imposing his will upon it.”²⁹ His wood engravings provide an enhanced overall experience while reading about the rides.

While Nash’s vignettes do not necessarily coincide with Cobbett’s entries, they complement the author’s experiences through the English countryside. Nash utilized different techniques depending on the subject. The title page vignettes for volumes one (“The Valley of the Avon”) and three (“The Scarecrow”) are delicate, while the title page illustration for the second volume (“Two Cows Lying Down”) is bold. Of interest, there are more vignettes in the first volume than in the others. Colvin speculates that Nash may not have known how many illustrations to design for the entire set or perhaps he hoped for an extension of his commission by the publisher.³⁰ Colvin praised Nash’s abilities as a landscape, genre and comic illustrator and their appropriateness for *Rural Rides*. A vignette of “the drying ground” of laundry on a windy day has a whimsical quality,

²⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Nash_\(artist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Nash_(artist)) . Accessed February 5, 2022. Jenny Uglow. "Other Brother: A supreme landscape artist overshadowed by his sibling." *TLS. Times Literary Supplement*, no. 6104, 27 Mar. 2020, pp. 14+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, Accessed February 5, 2022.

²⁷ Clare Colvin. *John Nash Book Designs: A Minorities Touring Exhibition*. Colchester, Essex: The Minorities, 1986, pp. 13-18.

²⁸ John Nash. “The History of the Woodcut.” *The London Mercury*, Vol. XIX, November 1928, p. 50. Quoted in Colvin, p. 16.

²⁹ John Nash. “Book Illustration.” *ARK*, No. 1, the Magazine of the Royal College of Art. October 1950, pp. 21-22. Quoted in Colvin, p. 15,

³⁰ Colvin, p. 36.

while others capture the beauty of the land. To Colvin, “It is hard to single out particular drawings in *Rural Rides* because the joy of them is that they each portray a microcosm of English rural life, which viewed together gives us a wonderful chronicle of the country scene.”³¹

Routledge/Thoemmes Press of London reprinted in facsimile the three Coles edition volumes in 1998 as part of a seventeen-volume set, *The Collected Works of William Cobbett*. The use of this reference set inhibits wear-and-tear on the original 1930 volumes. However, during the economic depression of the 1930s and in recent times, publishers met the demand for affordable editions of *Rural Rides*.

The Open-Air Library Edition and A Popular Edition in Paperback

Adelphi has two copies of a single *Rural Rides* volume bound in brown cloth and published in 1932. Eric Fitch Daglish (1892-1966) edited the Open-Air Library for E. P. Dutton in New York from 1932-1933.³² In addition to writing, Daglish was a wood engraver and illustrator. He wrote a foreword and provided a frontispiece of a pig outdoors with this quote, “The only security for happiness in a labourer’s family (p. 298)”, thus referring the viewer to Cobbett’s words. Daglish explained the need to omit some portions of the text, “Care has been taken to retain the original ‘flavour’ of the work, so that it should possess the full value of the larger edition, with the advantage of being in one volume of a shape and size suitable for the pocket, the rucksack, or the small bookshelf.”³³ Jesse Merritt (1889-1957) of Farmingdale, Long Island donated one of Adelphi’s copies as early as 1937, the year he became Nassau County Historian. Merritt later assisted in the creation of Adelphi’s first William Cobbett exhibition in 1953.

Penguin Classics published a paperback edition of *Rural Rides* in 1985, originally brought out by Penguin English Library in 1967. The Canadian writer George Woodcock (1912-1995) provided the introduction and edited the volume. Woodcock was an anarchist, described as a “poet, critic, historian, travel writer, playwright, scriptwriter, and editor, whose work, particularly his poetry, reflects his belief that revolutionary changes would take place in society.”³⁴ While praising Cobbett’s ability to combine both documentation and

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See website from Ohio Wesleyan University: <https://seriesofseries.owu.edu/open-air-library/>. Dent & Sons Ltd. published the Open-Air Library in London from 1932-1947.

³³ Eric Fitch Daglish. “Foreword.” *Rural Rides*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., p. xii.

³⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Woodcock-Canadian-writer>

autobiography in the 1822-1826 rides, Woodcock criticized James Paul Cobbett's inclusion of later rides in his edition of 1853. "As Cobbett published them, the *Rides* have a uniformity of tone and structure which is completely lost in the later and more familiar enlarged version."³⁵ Thus, the editor returned to Cobbett's text of 1830, but expanded it. The book's Appendix, "Cobbett Away from Home", has three short passages taken from the 1853 edition: Cobbett's rides to Sheffield and Worcester in 1830 and Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1832. In "A Note on the Text", Woodcock, as editor, justified his retention of idiosyncratic spelling, capitalization and italicizing of words as a means of maintaining Cobbett's tone of writing.³⁶ Easily portable, this paperback edition has as its cover a detail image of *Study for the Leaping Horse* from the Victoria and Albert Museum. Painted by John Constable in 1825, it is indeed an appropriate contemporary to the years of Cobbett's *Rural Rides*.

Given the variety of *Rural Rides* editions and printings from 1830 to 1998 at Adelphi, there remains the quest for a comprehensive representation of this title. The impetus to do this was none other than the late Donald Kelly, the librarian who built the collection over many decades. In his preface to the *The William Cobbett Collection at Adelphi University* exhibition catalog, he wrote, "The book for which Cobbett is best known today, Rural Rides, has seldom been out of print since it was published in 1830."³⁷

COBBETT TOWN WALK AND AFTERNOON TEA SUNDAY 27 JUNE 2021

Katharine Stearn

On 27 June 2021, a collection of members of the Cobbett Society assembled at the Bush Hotel, Farnham, for the first ever Cobbett Town Walk. The idea was originally proposed as an alternative to the annual Rural Ride, which, owing to COVID restrictions, was not possible. Thanks to a great deal of hard work and organising on the part of committee member Rob Sykes, it proved to be a hugely enjoyable day, and a

³⁵ George Woodcock. "Introduction." *Rural Rides*. London: Penguin Books, 1985, p. 17.

³⁶ Woodcock, p. 27.

³⁷ Donald Kelly. *The William Hone Collection at Adelphi University: A Bibliography*. Garden City, NY: Adelphi University Libraries, 1982, p. ii.

wonderful way to celebrate the life of the great man through his memorials in Farnham.

Members arrived at the Bush Hotel at 2.00pm and were greeted by our Chairman Richard Thomas. At 2.30pm all were invited into the Conference Centre at the Bush, to see a video on Cobbett's contribution to democracy, produced by Royal Holloway College as part of its Citizen's Project¹ with the help of the Cobbett Society. It is intended that the video will subsequently go to the Museum of Farnham for public display.

At 3.15pm, despite a slight drizzle, three parties under the guidance of Rob Sykes, Richard Thomas and Katharine Stearn set off to explore some of the key Cobbett sites in Farnham:

1. Cobbett's birthplace, the William Cobbett pub, Bridge Square.
2. The William Cobbett statue on Longbridge.
3. Cobbett's grave at St Andrew's Church, Upper Church Lane.

Below are the commentaries given at each place of interest.

1. The William Cobbett Pub, Bridge Square, Farnham.

The pub we now know as the William Cobbett, was originally called the Jolly Farmer, and is the place where Cobbett was born in 1763. We will let Cobbett himself tell us about his birth:

I was bred at the plough-tail, and in the Hop-Gardens of Farnham in Surrey, my native place, and which spot, as it so happened, is the neatest in England, and, I believe, in the whole world. All there is a garden. The neat culture of the hop extends its influence to the fields round about. Hedges cut with sheers and every other mark of skill and care strike the eye at Farnham, and become fainter and fainter as you go from it in every direction. Arthur Young calls the vale between Farnham and Alton the finest ten miles in England....

A Year's Residence in the United States of America, William Cobbett, 1891, 3rd edition 1822, chapter 4, para. 8.

All that I can boast of in my birth is that I was born in old England... With respect to my ancestors, I shall go no further back than my grandfather, and for this very plain reason, that I never heard talk of any prior to him. He was a day-labourer, and I have heard my father

¹ The Royal Holloway Citizens' Project was launched in January 2017 to "explore, research, share and map the history of liberty, protest, rebellion and reform from Magna Carta to the Suffragettes and beyond". See website: <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/research-and-teaching/departments-and-schools/history/what-will-i-study/citizens-project/>

say, that he worked for one farmer from the day of his marriage to that of his death, upwards of forty years. He died before I was born, but I have often slept beneath the same roof that had sheltered him, and where his widow dwelt for seven years after his death. It was a little thatched cottage with a garden before the door. It had but two windows; a damson tree shaded one, and a clump of filberts the other. Here I and my brothers went every Christmas and Whitsuntide, to spend a week or two, and torment the poor old woman with our noise and dilapidations. She used to give us bread and cheese for supper. Her fire was made of turf cut from the neighbouring heath and her evening light was a rush dipped in grease.

The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine, William Cobbett, Philadelphia, 1796, paras 1-2.

My father used to set me off to work in the morning, dressed in my blue smock-frock and woollen spatterdashes, with my bag of bread and cheese and bottle of small beer swung over my shoulder on the little crook that my old god-father Boxall gave me...

Remarks of the pamphlets lately published against Peter Porcupine, para. 1, from *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, page 93.]

All three readings were taken from: Reitzel, *The Progress of a Ploughboy to a seat in Parliament, as exemplified, etc*, (1933), 1935 reprint.

2. Cobbett Statue, Longbridge, Farnham.

This wonderful statue of Cobbett was unveiled on 5 September 2016 by Dame Penelope Keith, actress and former High Sheriff of Surrey. It was created by the late Sheila Mitchell, a celebrated sculptor and fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors and president of the Society of Portrait Sculptors. Sheila was born in Farnham and felt passionately that there should be a permanent statue of William Cobbett in Farnham to commemorate the man and his birthplace. Sheila worked in her studios at Puttenham between and near Ash, where Cobbett died.

Sheila designed and created the maquette of Cobbett on his favourite horse and with his dog but, sadly, she died before she was able to begin the sculpture itself. However, thanks to modern technology, it was possible to scale the model up to its final three-quarters life size.

Much of the credit for the statue must go to Sheila's husband, Charles Bone, also a celebrated artist and long-time member of the Cobbett

Society. Charles worked tirelessly to bring the project to fruition, raising funds and organising the realisation of the final statue after Sheila's death.

After admiring the statue, a reading from the Rural Rides was given that illustrates both Cobbett's childhood in Farnham, and the state of the labourers when he revisited Farnham as an adult.

From *Lea* we set off this morning about six o'clock to get free-quarter again at a worthy old friend's at this nice little plain market-town. Our direct road was right over the heath through *Tilford to Farnham*; but we veered a little to the left after we came to Tilford, at which place on the Green we stopped to look at an *oak tree*, which, when I was a little boy, was but a very little tree, comparatively, and which is now, take it altogether, by far the finest tree that I ever saw in my life. The stem or shaft is short; that is to say, it is short before you come to the first limbs; but it is full *thirty feet round*, at about eight or ten feet from the ground. Out of the stem there come not less than fifteen or sixteen limbs, many of which are from five to ten feet round, and each of which would, in fact, be considered a decent stick of timber. I am not judge enough of timber to say anything about the quantity in the whole tree, but my son stepped the ground, and as nearly as we could judge, the diameter of the extent of the branches was upwards of ninety feet, which would make a circumference of about three hundred feet. The tree is in full growth at this moment. There is a little hole in one of the limbs; but with that exception, there appears not the smallest sign of decay. The tree has made great shoots in all parts of it this last summer and spring; and there are no appearances of *white* upon the trunk, such as are regarded as the symptoms of full growth. There are many sorts of oak in England; two very distinct; one with a pale leaf, and one with a dark leaf: this is of the pale leaf. The tree stands upon Tilford-green, the soil of which is a light loam with a hard sand stone a good way beneath, and, probably, clay beneath that. The spot where the tree stands is about a hundred and twenty feet from the edge of a little river, and the ground on which it stands may be about ten feet higher than the bed of that river.

In quitting Tilford we came on to the land belonging to Waverly Abbey, and then, instead of going on to the town of Farnham, veered away to the left towards *Wrecklesham*, in order to cross the Farnham and Alton turnpike-road, and to come on by the side of *Cron dall* to *Odiham*. We went a little out of the way to go to a place called the

Bourne, which lies in the heath at about a mile from Farnham. It is a winding narrow valley, down which, during the wet season of the year, there runs a stream beginning at the *Holt Forest*, and emptying itself into the *Wey* just below Moor-Park, which was the seat of *Sir William Temple* when *Swift* was residing with him. We went to this Bourne in order that I might show my son the spot where I received the rudiments of my education. There is a little hop-garden in which I used to work when from eight to ten years old; from which I have scores of times run to follow the hounds, leaving the hoe to do the best that it could to destroy the weeds; but the most interesting thing was a *sand-hill*, which goes from a part of the heath down to the rivulet. As a due mixture of pleasure with toil, I, with two brothers, used occasionally to *desport* ourselves, as the lawyers call it, at this sand-hill. Our diversion was this: we used to go to the top of the hill, which was steeper than the roof of a house; one used to draw his arms out of the sleeves of his smock-frock, and lay himself down with his arms by his sides; and then the others, one at head and the other at feet, sent him rolling down the hill like a barrel or a log of wood. By the time he got to the bottom, his hair, eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, were all full of this loose sand; then the others took their turn, and at every roll there was a monstrous spell of laughter. I had often told my sons of this while they were very little, and I now took one of them to see the spot. But that was not all. This was the spot where I was receiving my *education*; and this was the sort of education; and I am perfectly satisfied that if I had not received such an education, or something very much like it; that, if I had been brought up a milksop, with a nursery-maid everlastingly at my heels, I should have been at this day as great a fool, as inefficient a mortal, as any of those frivolous idiots that are turned out from Winchester and Westminster Schools, or from any of those dens of dunces called Colleges and Universities. It is impossible to say how much I owe to that sand-hill; and I went to return it my thanks for the ability which it probably gave me to be one of the greatest terrors, to one of the greatest and most powerful bodies of knaves and fools, that ever were permitted to afflict this or any other country.

From the Bourne we proceeded on to *Wrecklesham*, at the end of which we crossed what is called the *river Wey*. Here we found a parcel of labourers at parish-work. Amongst them was an old playmate of mine. The account they gave of their situation was very

dismal. The harvest was over early. The hop-picking is now over; and now they are employed *by the Parish*; that is to say, not absolutely digging holes one day and filling them up the next; but at the expense of half-ruined farmers and tradesmen and landlords, to break stones into very small pieces to make nice smooth roads lest the jolting, in going along them, should create bile in the stomachs of the overfed tax-eaters. I call upon mankind to witness this scene; and to say, whether ever the like of this was heard of before. It is a state of things, where all is out of order; where self-preservation, that great law of nature, seems to be set at defiance; for here are farmers *unable* to pay men for working for them, and yet compelled to pay them for working in doing that which is really of no use to any human being. There lie the hop-poles unstripped. You see a hundred things in the neighbouring fields that want doing. The fences are not nearly what they ought to be. The very meadows, to our right and our left in crossing this little valley, would occupy these men advantageously until the setting in of the frost; and here are they, not, as I said before, actually digging holes one day and filling them up the next; but, to all intents and purposes, as uselessly employed. Is this Mr. Canning's '*Sun of Prosperity*'? Is this the way to increase or preserve a nation's wealth? Is this a sign of wise legislation and of good government? Does this thing '*work well*', Mr. Canning? Does it prove that we want no change? True, you were born under a Kingly Government; and so was I as well as you; but I was not born under *Six-Acts*; nor was I born under a state of things like this. I was not born under it, and I do not wish to live under it; and, with God's help, I will change it if I can.

We left these poor fellows, after having given them, not '*religious Tracts*', which would, if they could, make the labourer content with half starvation, but something to get them some bread and cheese and beer, being firmly convinced that it is the body that wants filling and not the mind. However, in speaking of their low wages, I told them that the farmers and hop-planters were as much objects of compassion as themselves, which they acknowledged.

We immediately, alter this, crossed the road, and went on towards Crondall upon a soil that soon became stiff loam and flint at top with a bed of chalk beneath. We did not go to Crondall; but kept along over *Slade Heath*, and through a very pretty place called *Well*. We

arrived at *Odiham* about half after eleven, at the end of a beautiful ride of about seventeen miles, in a very fine and pleasant day.

William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*: Odiham, Hampshire, Friday, 27 September 1822.

3. Cobbett's Grave, St Andrew's Churchyard, Upper Church Lane, Farnham

Finally, each group gathered around the grave of William Cobbett to consider his final years.

Cobbett's Final years:

For Cobbett, the politics the arguments, the fights with the "Thing" all had an object in view. Political advancement was not his goal (what a lot he'd have to teach politicians today!) - it was the protection and defence of the rural labourers and farmers that provided the drive behind his endeavours. The people whose lifestyle he had been brought up to love and enjoy, and which he saw as producing the true and admirable character of the English people. For Cobbett it is the rural life with all its rigours that:

...gives the best security for health and strength of body. It does not teach, it necessarily produces early rising; constant forethought; constant attention; and constant care of dumb animals.... The seasons, which wait for no man; the weather, which is no respecter of person, and which will be what it will be, produce an habitual looking forward, and make the farmer provident, whatever might have been his natural disposition [...]

Progress of a Ploughboy to a seat in Parliament, Edited William Reitzel, 1933, p. 285-6: *Political Register*, No. 38, 17 March, 1821. P. 731, 732

Born amongst husbandmen, bred to husbandry, delighting in its pursuits even to the minutest details, never having, in all my range of life, lost sight of the English farm-house and of those scenes in which my mind took its first spring, it is natural that I should have a strong partiality for country life, and that I should enter more in detail into the feelings of labourers in husbandry than into those of other labourers.

Political Register, No. 34, May 5, 1821, p. 34

Nearing the end of his life, Cobbett declared in 1831:

[...] if I have one wish more ardent than all others, it is this; that I, enjoying my garden and few fields, may see England as great in the world, and her industrious, laborious, kind and virtuous people as happy *as they were when I was born*; and that I may at last have a few years of calm at the close of a long life of storms and of tempests.

Political Register, No. 71, Jan 8, 1831. P. 66)

Cobbett's activities in Parliament at the end of a long life of political campaigning:

In 1832, Cobbett finally achieved his long-held aim to become an MP. However it was at the age of 69 and he was beset with family and health problems before his death in 1835. Yet in those final years he continued to be active, his radicalism was undiluted and he did take up the causes of the working classes of the North. It may seem surprising for those who see Cobbett only through the lens of his southern, rural perspective. However, he did what he had always done: saw things for himself and then launched a torrent of invective and righteous indignation against what he saw as the hypocrisy and self-interest of the rich and in defence of the common people. And he was good at it! Here he is in Parliament in 1833 on the occasion of the defeat of the Bill (championed by Fielden) to limit factory hours to ten a day:

I have only one observation to make, and I will not detain the House two minutes in doing so. We have, Sir, this night made one of the greatest discoveries ever made by a House of Commons, a discovery which will be hailed by the constituents of the Hon. Gentlemen behind me with singular pleasure. Hitherto, we have been told that our navy was the glory of the country, and that our maritime commerce and extensive manufactures were the mainstays of the realm. We have also been told that the land had its share in our greatness, and should justly be considered as the pride and glory of England. The Bank, also, has put in its claim to share in this praise, and has stated that public credit is due to it; but, now, a most surprising discovery has been made, namely, that all our greatness and prosperity, that our superiority over other nations, is owing to 300,000 little girls in Lancashire. We have made the notable discovery, that, if these little girls work two hours less in a day than they do now, it would occasion the ruin of the country; that it would

enable other nations to compete with us; and thus make an end to our boasted wealth, and bring us to beggary!

Cobbett's speech in the House of Commons, 18 July 1833, from: *The Curse of the Factory System*, John Fielden (M.P. for Oldham.), page 48, published by A. Cobbett, Fleet St, (1836).

But it was not until 1847 that the Ten Hours Act was passed, and 1867 before there was a further extension of the right to vote!

Entering the House of Commons at an advanced age, as a self-professed member of the 'wrong' class, Cobbett's time in parliament was not easy. A glimpse of how his speeches were received is given by this extract from the *Political Register* of April 20th 1833:

What is wanted in the House is this: ten men, who care not a single straw for all the noises that can possibly be raised against them; who would be just as insensible to the roarings and the scoffings as they would be to the noise of a parcel of dogs howling at the moon; who would preserve their good humour in spite of all the cheerings drawn forth by attacks upon them; and, above all things, who would constantly, steadily, and boldly, persevere ...

Cobbett's Political Register, 20th April 1833.

Cobbett had breached the gates of power, but the long and tortuous journey was only just beginning. Most of his efforts in Parliament were frustrated. However, the value of his achievement was perhaps far greater than any individual bill or motion could have been. He showed it could be done: not only could someone "born to the plough" become an MP, but by sheer courage and dogged determination he could say the unsayable and slowly but surely wear down the opposition.

The end of Cobbett's life

The long hours and change of life at 69 were too much for Cobbett's health. MPs were still unpaid at that time and Cobbett needed to earn his living. His literary output did not lessen in his final years, nor was it any less successful - his three new publications of 1835 had sold 45,000 copies by the end of that year. Cobbett wrote his last entry for the *Political Register* on 13 June 1835, and on June 18th 1835 he died. A short extract from his *Legacy to Labourers*, 1835 makes a suitable epitaph to his life as an MP:

[...] this little book [...] will remind the working people, that they once had a friend, that that friend was born in a cottage and bred to the plough; that men in mighty power were thirty-four *years* endeavouring to destroy him; that, in spite of this, he became a Member of Parliament, freely chosen by the sensible and virtuous and spirited people of Oldham.

Cobbett died at his farm in the village of Normandy, near Farnham on June 18th 1835. The day before he died, he was carried around the farm on a chair fixed on a sort of hand barrow, and took note of all that was going on. 8,000 people came to his funeral on Saturday 27 June in St Andrews Church, Farnham. His four sons carried the coffin, and he was buried in St Andrew's church yard.

End of Town Walk

As each group returned, slightly damp but invigorated, to the Bush Hotel, they were greeted by a very welcome cream tea, and ample opportunity for conversation with other members, in the Bush's lovely tea room.

COBBETT AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Richard Thomas

The Farnham U3A has a project or theme every year. In 2016 it was the Natural World, and the Cobbett Society was invited to give a talk at one of the sessions. The talk below (shortened and slightly edited) was given to an audience of over 100 people. The conceit was that Mr Cobbett (or Bernard Whelan dressed for the part) would read Cobbett's words, selected for him and introduced by Dr Richard Thomas.

Talk given to Farnham U3A, 2016.

Greetings. Most of us think of Cobbett as a passionate journalist and political reformer. However, he began his life on a farm in Farnham, in 1763, and died on another farm, near Woking, in 1835. His deep knowledge and love of the countryside and of the natural world informed everything he wrote.

This is exemplified by *Rural Rides*, his most famous book, and by his *Cottage Economy* which explains in great detail how to make beer, how to

keep bees, the best way to kill the Christmas pig, and so on. Equally, his close observation of the countryside enabled him to make thoughtful remarks about a range of issues: grasping landlords; the curse of taxes and the state of agriculture in Ireland.

Even if we are mainly interested in his reformist activities, it does not take long to realise that most of his political views are grounded in his observations about, and conversations in, the countryside. Most of his rural rides were undertaken in southern England - especially in Surrey, Hampshire, Sussex and Berkshire - but we have, nevertheless, sought extracts from his writing which are international as well as local.

To make this talk more interesting we invited Mr Cobbett himself along to tell you what he saw and what he felt about things - *in his own words*.

Welcome, Mr Cobbett.

I am sure he will forgive us if we begin with some autobiography which, unsurprisingly, locates him in the farming community of Farnham.

I do not remember the time, when I did not earn my living. My first occupation was, driving the small birds from the turnip-seed, and the rooks from the peas. When I first trudged a-field, with my wooden bottle and my satchel swung over my shoulders, I was hardly able to climb the gates and stiles; and, at the close of day, to reach home, was a task of infinite difficulty. My next employment was weeding wheat, and leading a single horse at harrowing barley. Hoeing peas followed, and hence, I arrived at the honour of joining the reapers in harvest, driving the team, and holding the plough. We were all of us strong and laborious, and my father used to boast, that he had four boys, the eldest of whom was but fifteen years old, who did as much work as any three men in the parish of Farnham. Honest pride and happy days!

William Cobbett, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, Philadelphia, 1796, reprinted by Kennikat Press, 1970, pages 20-21.

He goes on:

[There is] a place called the Bourne, which lies in the heath at about a mile from Farnham. It is a winding narrow valley, down which, during the wet season of the year, there runs a stream... There is a little hop-garden in which I used to work when from eight to ten years old; from which I have scores of times run to follow the

hounds, leaving the hoe to do the best that it could to destroy the weeds.

The Autobiography of William Cobbett, ed. Reitzel, 1947, Chapter 1, page 16, from: *Rural Rides*, Odiham, Hampshire, Friday, 27 Sept. 1822.

While working at the Castle in Farnham the Head gardener told him about Kew Gardens and he decided to have look for himself:

At 11 years of age my employment was clipping box-edgings and weeding beds of flowers in the garden of the Bishop of Winchester, at the Castle of Farnham. I had always been fond of beautiful gardens; and, a gardener, who had just come from the King's gardens at Kew, gave such a description of them as made me instantly resolve to work in these gardens. The next morning, without saying a word to anybody, off I set, with no clothes, except those upon my back, and thirteen halfpence in my pocket [...] A long day (it was in June) brought me to Richmond in the afternoon. Two pennyworth of bread and cheese and a pennyworth of small beer, which I had on the road, and one halfpenny that I had lost somehow or other, left three pence in my pocket.

Reitzel 1947, page 18, taken from: *Political Register*, XXXIV, 19 Feb. 1820.

On this trip he purchased a well-thumbed copy of Swift's satire *A Tale of a Tub*. He remarks that:

...it was something so new to my mind, that, though I could not at all understand some of it, it delighted me beyond description; and it produced what I have always considered a sort of birth of intellect.

ibid. page 18-19.

In 1782, Cobbett visited an uncle in Portsmouth and was so enraptured by the sight of the ships that he tried to enlist in the navy, but a kindly Captain, assuming that he was running away from a shotgun marriage, persuaded him otherwise:

I returned once more to the plough, but I was spoiled for a farmer. I had, before my Portsmouth adventure, never known any other ambition than that of surpassing my brothers in the different labours of the field; but it was quite otherwise now; I sighed for a sight of the world; the little island of Britain, seemed too small a compass for me. The things in which I had taken the most delight were neglected; the

singing of the birds grew insipid, and even the heart-cheering cry of the hounds, after which I formerly used to fly from my work [...] was heard with the most torpid indifference. Still, however, I remained at home till the following spring, when I quitted it, perhaps, forever.

William Cobbett, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, Philadelphia, 1796, reprinted by Kennikat Press, 1970, page 27.

In the end he *did* enlist but joined the Army by mistake. He was posted to Nova Scotia in Canada where he continued to educate himself by studying grammar and by reading widely. He learnt to write well:

Every thing I saw was new: bogs, rocks and stumps, mosquitoes and bull-frogs. Thousands of Captains and Colonels without soldiers, and of 'Squires without stockings or shoes.

Reizel, 1947, page 28, taken from: *Life of Peter Porcupine*, William Cobbett, 1796.

Canadian winters were a new experience also:

[...] the snow came; until storm after storm, [...] made the mass, upon an average, ten feet deep; and there we were, nine days out of ten, with a bright sun over our heads, and with snow, dry as hair powder, screeching under our feet.

Reitzel, 1947, page 29, taken from: *Political Register* LXVII, 24 Jan. 1829.

While in Canada, Cobbett rose to the rank of Sergeant Major, discovered corruption in the Military and met his future wife.

In 1791 he returned to England, left the Army, got married and tried to deal with the corruption he had uncovered. He failed and was forced to flee into virtual exile to America. Here he developed some skills as a crusading journalist and very quickly got into the habit of annoying important people, including Chief Justice McKean and Dr Benjamin Rush.

Dr Rush was the most famous doctor in North America (and was, among other things, a signatory of the US Declaration of Independence). He thought he had found a cure for yellow fever; however, Cobbett worked out that Dr Rush's patients survived better when Rush was out of town. Why? Because Rush believed in bleeding them - especially if they had fevers. It is almost certain that Dr Rush's treatment hastened the death of President George Washington. Rush thought that extracting eight pints of

blood would cure them: since the body only contains around 11 pints it would obviously hasten their death if they lost that much. Here is Cobbett's description of one of Rush's treatments for yellow fever:

At the first breaking out of the Yellow Fever, he made use of 'gentle purges'; these he laid aside and had recourse to '*a gentle vomit of ipecacuanha*'; next he '*gave bark in all its usual forms, of infusion, powder, and tincture, and joined wine, brandy, and aromatics, with it*'; this was followed by '*the application of blisters to the limbs, neck, and head*'; these torments were succeeded by '*an attempt to rouse the system by wrapping the whole body in blankets dipped in warm vinegar*'; he next '*rubbed the right side with mercurial ointment, with a view of exciting the action of the vessels through the medium of the liver*'; after this he again returned to bark, which he gave '*in large quantities, and, in one case, ordered it to be injected into the bowels once in four hours*'; and, at last, having found, that wrapping his patient in *blankets dipped in warm vinegar* did no good, he '*directed buckets full of cold water be thrown frequently upon them!!!*'

Surprising as it may seem, his patients *died!*

William Cobbett, *Porcupine's Works*, Volume 11, May 1801, Chapter 4: *The Rush-Light* No. 2, February 1800.

The entire passage is only three sentences – the third eight words only - and it shows Cobbett's rhetorical method. Set up the problem, describe the treatment - using mostly Rush's own written instructions - and then the punch-line '*Surprising as it may seem his patients died!*' Brilliantly done. Rush decided, because of this and other attacks, to sue Cobbett and in turn Cobbett decided, very sensibly, to return to England.

This he did, in 1800, and found he was something of a hero, because, as Peter Porcupine, he had defended the English against those in America who wanted to fight with France against England. He was offered money and editorships if he would support the Government, but he refused, and from 1802, with the publication of the *Political Register*, he started his career as a crusading journalist. He also continued his life as a farmer by buying a farm (in 1805) in Botley in Hampshire. In modern jargon, his contact with farming and the rural community kept him 'grounded'. It also gave him valuable insights into the state of the nation which were not available to those who never left London.

Although a lot happened to Cobbett in the early part of the nineteenth

century, including a further period of exile in the United States (1817-19) and being sent to prison for 'seditious libel' - he had attacked the decision to use Hessian (i.e., German) soldiers to flog mutinous English soldiers in Ely - farming and husbandry continued to be a key part of his life.

Indeed, from the early 1820s he wrote as much about rural and agricultural matters as he did about political and economic issues and it is on these that we shall concentrate.

In 1821, Cobbett published, in parts, the *Cottage Economy* which is perhaps the first self-help handbook. It gives practical advice on such essential items as how to bake bread, explains why tea is such dreadful stuff, and gives detailed guidance on how to keep cows, bees and turkeys.

He also gives a detailed description about how to kill and butcher a pig. He starts by saying that you must fatten your pig throughout the autumn and that 'only by feeding him barley and good quality scraps will you get good bacon'. Over to Mr Cobbett:

About Christmas, if the weather be coldish, is a good time to kill. If the weather be very mild, you may wait a little longer; for the hog cannot be too fat. The day before killing he should have no food. To kill a hog nicely is so much of a profession, that it is better to pay a shilling for having it done, than to stab and hack and tear the carcass about... There are two ways of going to work to make bacon; in the one you take off the hair by scalding. This is the practice in most parts of England, and all over America. But the Hampshire way, and the best way, is to burn the hair off [...] The first method slackens the skin, opens all the pores of it, makes it loose and flabby by drawing out the roots of the hair. The second tightens the skin in every part, contracts all the sinews and veins in the skin, makes the flitch a solider thing, and the skin a better protection to the meat. The taste of the meat is very different from that of a scalded hog; and to this chiefly it was that Hampshire bacon owed its reputation for excellence. As the hair is to be burnt off it must be dry, and care must be taken, that the hog be kept on dry litter of some sort the day previous to killing. When killed he is laid upon a narrow bed of straw, not wider than his carcass, and only two or three inches thick. He is then covered all over thinly with straw, to which, according as the wind may be, the fire is put at one end. As the straw burns, it burns the hair. It requires two or three coverings and burnings, and care is taken, that the skin be not in any part burnt, or parched. When

the hair is all burnt off close, the hog is scraped clean, but never touched with water [...]

The inwards are next taken out, and if the wife be not a slattern, here, in the mere offal, in the mere garbage, there is food, and delicate food too, for a large family for a week; and hog's puddings for the children, and some for neighbours' children, who come to play with them [...]

William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, 1821-2, paragraphs 146-7.

Cobbett then goes on to describe how to prepare, cure, smoke and keep the bacon. The level of detail ensures that any of us could do this ourselves - if we really wanted to!¹

One of Cobbett's most well-known *bêtes noires* was the potato, or – as he described it – the '*root of extreme unction*'. His anger arose from attempts to replace bread with a cheaper substitute in the diet of the labouring classes; but his hostility was also related to a belief that potatoes were synonymous with dirt, and reduced labourers to the level of pigs.

... this root is become a favourite because it is the suitable companion of misery and filth. It can be seized hold of before it be half ripe, it can be raked out of the ground with the paws, and without the help of any utensils, except, perhaps, a stick to rake it from the fire, can be conveyed into the stomach, in the space of an hour. We have but one step further to go, and that is, to eat it raw, side by side with our bristly fellow-creatures, who, by the by, reject it as long as they can get at any species of grain or at any other vegetable. —I can remember when the first acre of potatoes was planted in a field, in the neighbourhood of the place where I was born; and I very well remember, that even the poorest of the people would not eat them. They called them *hog*-potatoes; but now, they are become a considerable portion of the diet, of those who raise the bread for others to eat.

It is not many years ago that a bill was brought into Parliament for the giving of premiums for the cultivation of this ruinous root. It was

¹ The tradition of keeping a pig fed on household scraps, the method of killing it and removing the hair, and the information on salting, curing and wrapping up the bacon in muslin would have made perfect sense to many British farmers until the 1950s - certainly in the days before electricity and refrigerators.

thrown out, to be sure; but the bare fact of its having been brought in, was a disgrace to the country.

‘Price of Bread’, *Political Register*, 2 October 1813.

He was also against *tea* and famously wrote:

The drink, which has come to supply the place of beer has, in general, been *tea*. It is notorious, that tea has no *useful strength* in it; that it contains nothing *nutritious*; that it, besides being *good* for nothing, has *badness* in it, because it is well known to produce want of sleep in many cases, and in all cases, to shake and weaken the nerves. It is, in fact, a weaker kind of laudanum, which enlivens for the moment and deadens afterwards. At any rate it communicates no strength to the body; it does not, in any degree, assist in affording what labour demands. It is, then, of no *use*. And, now, as to its *cost*, [...] the wretched thing amounts to a good third part of a good and able labourer's wages! For this money, he and his family may drink good and wholesome beer; [and] in a short time, out of the mere savings from this waste, may drink it out of silver cups and tankards. In a labourer's family, *wholesome* beer, that has a little life in it, is all this is wanted in *general*. [...] I view the tea drinking as a destroyer of health, an enfeebler of the frame, an engenderer of effeminacy and laziness, a debaucher of youth, and a maker of misery for old age [...]

The tea drinking fills the public-house, makes the frequenting of it habitual, corrupts boys as soon as they are able to move from home, and does little less for the girls, to whom the gossip of the tea-table is no bad preparatory school for the brothel.

William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, London 1822, paras 23, 25, 29, 32.

This is not as extreme as it sounds - for not only is tea, and the sugar which goes with it, produced by exploited labour in India and the West Indies but also tea is much less nutritious than beer - which can be made in virtually anyone's back yard. As he explains:

It is impossible for anyone to deny the truth of this statement. Put it to the test with a lean hog: give him the fifteen bushels of malt, and he will repay you in ten score of bacon or thereabouts. But give him the 730 tea messes, or rather begin to give them to him, and give him nothing else, and he is dead with hunger, and bequeaths you his skeleton, at the end of about seven days. It is impossible to doubt in

such a case. The tea drinking has done a great deal in bringing this nation into the state of misery in which it now is [...]

Ibid., para. 30

In 1821 Cobbett began to undertake his Rural Rides, often with his son Richard. Some of his reports contain bucolic descriptions of the countryside; some a close analysis of the soil and the type of farming it encouraged and some are critical of the changes which have had a mostly detrimental effect on the countryside and on the people who lived and worked in it.

Much of what he saw gave him great pleasure - for example in Gloucestershire:

All here is fine; fine farms; fine pastures; all enclosed fields; all divided by hedges; orchards a plenty; and I had scarcely seen one apple since I left Berkshire. Gloucester is a fine, clean, beautiful place; and, which is of a vast deal more importance, the labourers' dwellings, as I came along, looked good, and the labourers themselves pretty well as to dress and healthiness.

Rural Rides, Gloucester, Thursday (morning), Nov. 8. 1821,

In Hampshire, not far from Farnham, he noted:

In former RIDES, and especially in 1821 and 1822, I described very fully this part of Hampshire. The land is a chalk bottom, with a bed of reddish, stiff loam, full of flints, at top. In those parts where the bed of loam and flints *is deep* the land is *arable or woods*: where the bed of loam and flints is so shallow as to let the plough down to the chalk, the surface is *downs*. In the deep and long valleys, where there is constantly, or occasionally, a stream of water, the top soil is blackish, and the surface *meadows*.

[...] The tops of the hills here are as good corn-land as any other part; and it is all excellent corn-land, and the fields and woods singularly beautiful. Never was there what may be called a more *hilly* country, and *all in use*.

Rural Rides, Hurstbourne Tarrant, 11th October, 1826.

In Sussex:

There is an appearance of comfort about the dwellings of the labourers, all along here, that is very pleasant to behold. The gardens

are neat, and full of vegetables of the best kinds. I see very few of “*Ireland’s lazy root*”; [...] I saw, and with great delight, a pig at almost every labourer’s house. The houses are good and warm; and the gardens some of the very best that I have seen in England.

Rural Rides, Singleton (Sussex), Saturday, 2 August 1823.

However, he also noted the rise of a new, less responsible, and purely profit-making class of landed gentry which had drawn its wealth from trade and finance:

There is one farmer, in the North of Hampshire, who has nearly eight thousand acres of land in his hands; who grows fourteen hundred acres of wheat and two thousand acres of barley! He occupies what was formerly 40 farms! Is it any wonder that *paupers increase*?

Rural Rides, Bollitree, Wednesday, 14 November, 1821.

And, as he never tired of pointing out:

[...] the difference between a resident native gentry, attached to the soil, known to every farmer and labourer from their childhood, frequently mixing with them in those pursuits where all artificial distinctions are lost, practicing hospitality without ceremony, from habit and not on calculation; and a gentry, only now-and-then residing at all, having no relish for country-delights, foreign in their manners, distant and haughty in their behaviour, looking to the soil only for its rents, viewing it as a mere object of speculation, unacquainted with its cultivators, despising them and their pursuits, and relying for influence, not upon the good will of the vicinage, but upon the dread of their power.

Rural Rides, Burghclere, Wednesday, 21 November, 1821.

On we trotted up this pretty green lane; and indeed, we had been coming gently and generally *up hill* for a good while. The lane was between highish banks and pretty high stuff growing on the banks, so that we could see no distance from us, and could receive not the smallest hint of what was so near at hand. The lane had a little turn towards the end; so that, out we came, all in a moment, at the very *edge of the hanger!*² And never, in all my life, was I so surprised and so delighted! I pulled up my horse, and sat and looked; and it was like looking from the top of a castle down into the sea, except that the

² A hanger is a steep-sided valley covered with trees.

valley was land and not water. [...] I looked down upon the villages of *Hawkley, Greatham, Selborne* and some others. [...]

The ends of these promontories are nearly perpendicular, and their tops so high in the air, that you cannot look at the village below without something like a feeling of apprehension. The leaves are all off, the hop-poles are in stack, the fields have little verdure; but, while the spot is beautiful beyond description even now, I must leave to imagination to suppose what it is, when the trees and hangers and hedges are in leaf, the corn waving, the meadows bright, and the hops upon the poles!

Rural Rides, From Hambledon to Thursley, November 24, 1822.

He did not return to Farnham very often but one day, on his way to Winchester with his son Richard, he wrote:

We came hither by the way of Waverley Abbey and Moore Park. On the commons I showed Richard some of my old hunting scenes, when I was of his age, or younger, reminding him that I was obliged to hunt on foot. We got leave to go and see the grounds at Waverley, where all the old monks' *garden walls* are totally gone, and where the spot is become a sort of lawn. I showed him the spot where the strawberry garden was, and where I, when sent to gather *hautboys*, used to eat every remarkably fine one, instead of letting it go to be eaten by Sir Robert Rich. I showed him a tree, close by the ruins of the Abbey, from a limb of which I once fell into the river, in an attempt to take the nest of a *crow*, which had artfully placed it upon a branch so far from the trunk as not to be able to bear the weight of a boy eight years old.

Rural Rides, Farnham, Surrey, Thursday, Oct. 27th, 1825.

Of course, he did not restrict himself to bucolic descriptions of the countryside. Although he was enthusiastic about the false acacia (*robinia pseudoacacia*), he did not approve of the planting of firs – they were a cash crop which helped the landowners but not the small farmers or farm workers.

And we got to *Headley* in a short time, over a sand-road, which seemed so delightful after the flints and stone and dirt and sloughs that we had passed over and through since the morning! [...] This is a tract of Crown-lands, or, properly speaking, *public-lands*, on some parts of which our *Land Steward*, Mr. Huskisson, is making some

plantations of trees, partly fir, and partly other trees. What he can plant the fir for, God only knows, seeing that the country is already over-stocked with that rubbish. But this *public-land* concern is a very great concern.

If I were a Member of Parliament, I *would* know what timber has been cut down, and what it has been sold for, since year 1790.

However, this matter must be *investigated*, first or last.

Rural Rides, November 24. From Hambledon to Thursley, 1822.

As he travelled about England, he became increasingly aware of the need for political reform. He saw for himself the growing poverty of the farm labourers and understood why the increasingly desperate workers resorted to machine breaking and rick burning. The government response was not to help the poor but to increase the levels of suppression. There were 220 offences for which you might be hanged – including pretending to be a Chelsea pensioner, ‘stealing from a rabbit warren’, and being ‘out and about with a black face’ - proof that you were up to no good.

To his credit, Cobbett never encouraged violence, although he was constantly calling for political reform. His was an important voice, but he always maintained that the rick burning by the Swing Rioters had an even more significant impact. As he wrote after the 1832 Reform Act:

All across the South, from Kent to Cornwall, and from Sussex to Lincolnshire, the commotion extends. It began by the labourers in Kent entering the buildings of the *great* farmers, and breaking their *thrashing machines*; for, please to observe, one effect of *heavy taxation* is to cause the invention of *machinery*. The farmer or manufacturer is so pressed for money by the government, that he resorts to all possible means of *saving the expense of labour*; and as machines will work *cheaper than men*, the machines were preferred. [...]

The labourers of England see, at any rate, that the *thrashing machines* rob them of the wages that they ought to receive. They, therefore, began by demolishing these machines. This was a *crime*; the magistrates and jailors were ready with punishments; soldiers, well fed and well clothed out of the taxes, were ready to shoot or cut down the offenders. Unable to resist these united forces, the labourers resorted to the use of *fire*, secretly put to the barns and stacks of those who had the machines, or whom they deemed the cause of their

poverty and misery. The mischief and the alarm that they have caused by this means were beyond all calculation. They go in bands of from 100 to 1,000 men, and summon the farmers to come forth, and then they demand that they shall agree to pay them such wages as they think right. [...]

These proceedings would have been put an end to long ago, *had it not been for the FIRES*. The military force, backed by all the great farmers, the land-owners, and especially by the *parsons*, [...] would long ago have subdued these half-starved machine-breakers; but the FIRES! No power on earth could prevent them, if the millions of labourers were resolved to resort to them.

Political Register 1st December 1830. 'State of England: a warning to France.' Letter III. To the Editor of La Revolution at Paris. London. Taken from: *Selections from Cobbett's Political Works* by John M. Cobbett and James P Cobbett. Vol. VI

Cobbett may have exaggerated the role of the rick burning but it is undoubtedly true that for a farmer to see his year's crop of corn - his income and his insurance against poverty - go up in smoke was a dreadful experience. Again, the countryman in Cobbett saw just how powerful – emotionally as well as financially - was the image of a burning rick. It was certainly one of the factors which made the governments of the day see that some reform was necessary - they could not carry on as they were for ever.

However, it seems that the Government in London did feel that they could carry on as before in Ireland:

Cobbett's observational skills, his political engagement, his concern for the poor and his powerful rhetoric all came together in his writings on Ireland.

As early as 1807, long before he visited, he wrote that:

It is the *system of governing Ireland*, that all men, when they speak their minds, say ought to be changed.

Political Register, April, 1807, Letter to the Electors of Westminster.

Cobbett knew that much of Ireland's produce was exported to pay for the extravagant lifestyle of the absentee landlords, and that most of the population lived on the poorest of the poor food, the worst potatoes, called 'lumpers'.

When he finally visited in 1834, after being elected to Parliament, he was already ill himself, but that did not stop him from travelling through the country and getting very angry. He soon noted the disparity between the richness and fecundity of Irish land, and the poverty of the mass of its inhabitants:

From Kilkenny I came to Clonmell, the capital of the county of Tipperary, which is deemed one of the finest in Ireland. The land, in this distance of about 35 English miles, is very fine, except in a few places [...] The harvest was here *all got in*. But, the grass! The fine grass fields covered with herds of fine cattle; fine oxen; fine cows; fine sheep; all seemed fat; and to every miserable thing *called a house*, a fine hog, so white, clean, and fat, so unlike the poor souls who had reared it up and fatted it, and who were destined never to taste one morsel of it; no, not so much as the offal.

Cork, 17 Oct. 1834. Letter 5 in *Not by Bullets and Bayonets: Cobbett's Writings on the Irish Questions 1795-1835*, 1983, Molly Townsend, pp.78-9.

Cobbett, like other commentators on the Irish situation, blamed the greed of the absentee landlords. He addresses his letters to the labourer, John Marshall:

You will think it strange, that all this food should be sent out of the country, and that the people should *get nothing back* for it. You will think, that we must send them *clothes and household goods and tea and sugar and soap* in return for the hogs and other things. To the *rich* we do; and to the *barracks*; but, the millions of working people have only rags for parts of their bodies, and they have neither goods nor tea nor sugar nor plate nor knife nor fork nor tea-kettle nor cup nor saucer.

The case is this: the owners of all the great estates *live in England or in France or in Italy*. The *rents are sent to them*; and, as there are *no poor-rates*, they get all the produce of the land from the miserable farmer, except just enough to keep him alive. They *spend these rents out of Ireland*; so that the working people here, who might eat meat three times a day, are compelled to live upon *lumpers!*

Ibid. (p. 80)

Even though Cobbett was now an MP, his last two to three years were not particularly happy ones. He was ignored by the government and was

having little effect in Parliament. While his visits to Ireland and Scotland were well reported, they did not really influence government policy. Certainly not in the short run.

Cobbett's ideal society was based on the traditional agricultural economy. His roots were in farming and he often referred to this:

Born amongst husbandmen, bred to husbandry, delighting in its pursuits even to the minutest details, never having, in all my range of life, lost sight of the English farm-house and of those scenes in which my mind took its first spring, it is natural that I should have a strong partiality for country life, and that I should enter more in detail into the feelings of labourers in husbandry than into those of other labourers.

Political Register 5 May 1821, page 343. (Taken from *The Autobiography of William Cobbett*, ed. Reitzel, Chapter 15, page 285.)

Cobbett's interests went well beyond agriculture, of course. In 1820 he vigorously stated his principles:

My principles, then, are as follows, - I hold, that it is the duty of us all to do our utmost to uphold a government in king, lords and commons. [...] That the affairs of the nation ought to be so managed, that every sober and industrious and healthy man ought, out of his own wages, to be able to support himself, wife and family in a comfortable and decent manner. That the law of nature, as well as the law of the land, give every soul in the community *a right* to a sufficiency of food and raiment; and that, those who possess the land, are justly called upon to give good support to all, who are unable to labour, or who, being able, cannot obtain employment; and that this support is not a thing *given* but a *right* to be demanded in the name of the law.

Political Register, April 1st, 1820, column 205-206.

He also believed:

Society ought not to exist, if not for the benefit of the whole. It is and must be against the law of nature, if it exist for the benefit of the few and for the misery of the many. I say, then, distinctly, that a society, in which the common labourer, with common health and strength and with economy and sobriety and industry and good morals and good manners, cannot secure a sufficiency of food and raiment, is a society

which ought not to exist; a society contrary to the law of nature; a society, whose compact is dissolved.

Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, Letter XI to Henry Hunt, Esq, column 115, Saturday 11 September 1819

These traditional and humane principles are rooted in the agrarian economy of Cobbett's youth. But they were not able to survive the energy and brutality of the industrial revolution.

Cobbett was asked toward the end of his career why he was - to put it bluntly - so cantankerous. He replied with the fable about the Wolf and the Mastiff.

[...] the mastiff, [...] one night, when loose, rambled into a wood, met [the wolf] all gaunt and shagged, and said to him, "Why do you lead this sort of life? See how fat and sleek I am! Come home with me and live as I do; dividing your time between eating and sleeping."

The ragged friend having accepted the kind offer, they then trotted on together till they got out of the wood, when the wolf assisted by the light of the moon, the beams of which had been intercepted by the trees, spied a crease, a little mark, round the neck of the mastiff. "What is your fancy," said he, "for making that mark round your neck?" "Oh," said the other, "it is only the mark of my collar that my master ties me up with." "Ties you up!" exclaimed the wolf, stopping short at the same time; "give me my ragged hair, my gaunt belly, and my freedom!" And so saying he trotted back to the wood'.

Political Register, William Cobbett, April 10th 1830.

He preferred to be poor and free rather than be 'owned'

Cobbett was the first important investigative journalist, and his legacy goes beyond *Rural Rides* and *Hansard*. He campaigned throughout his life for the poor, the disenfranchised and the powerless, and retained a sense of outrage at how they were being treated. The fact that 8,000 people turned up to his funeral at St Andrews Church, Farnham – almost twice the total population of the town - tells its own story.

Thank you, Mr Cobbett, for all that you did and all that you tried to do.

COBBETT VERBATIM

Cobbett's perception of the frustrating experience of the woman in this story was unusual for his era. Whether he followed his own advice when it came to women is a matter on which his wife would, no doubt, have had an opinion.

Nevertheless, in some of these concerns, wives should be heard with a great deal of attention, especially in the affairs of choosing your male acquaintances and friends and associates. Women are more quick-sighted than men; they are less disposed to confide in persons upon a first acquaintance; they are more suspicious as to motives; they are less liable to be deceived by professions and protestations; they watch words with a more scrutinizing ear, and looks with a keener eye; and, making due allowance for their prejudices in particular cases, their opinions and remonstrances, with regard to matters of this sort, ought not to be set at naught without great deliberation. LOUVET, one of the Brissotins, who fled for their lives in the time of ROBESPIERRE; this LOUVET, in his narrative, entitled 'Mes Perils' and which I read, for the first time, to divert my mind from the perils of the yellow-fever, in Philadelphia, but with which I was so captivated as to have read it many times since; this writer, giving an account of his wonderful dangers and escapes, relates, that being on his way to Paris from the vicinity of Bordeaux, and having no regular passport, fell lame, but finally crept on to a miserable pot-house, in a small town in the Limosin. The landlord questioned him with regard to who and what he was and whence he came and was satisfied with his answers. But the landlady, who had looked sharply at him on his arrival, whispered a little boy, who ran away, and quickly returned with the mayor of the town. LOUVET soon discovered that there was no danger in the mayor, who could not decipher his forged passport, and who, being well plied with wine, wanted to hear no more of the matter. The landlady, perceiving this, slipped out and brought a couple of aldermen, who asked to see the passport. 'O, yes; but drink first.' Then there was a laughing story to tell over again, at the request of the half-drunken mayor; then a laughing and more drinking; the passport in LOUVET'S hand, but never opened, and, while another toast was drinking, the passport slid back quietly into the pocket; the woman looking furious all the while. At last, the mayor, the aldermen, and the landlord, all nearly drunk, shook hands with LOUVET, and wished him a good journey, swore he was a true *sans culotte*; but, he says, that the 'sharp-sighted woman, who was to be deceived by none of his stories or professions, saw him get off with deep and manifest

disappointment and chagrin.' I have thought of this many times since, when I have had occasion to witness the quick-sightedness and penetration of women. The same quality that makes them, as they notoriously are, more quick in discovering expedients in cases of difficulty, makes them more apt to penetrate into motives and character.

William Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men: And (Incidentally) to Young Women in the Middle and Higher Ranks of Life. In a Series of Letters, Addressed to a Youth, a Bachelor, a Lover, a Husband, a Father, a Citizen, or a Subject*, London, 1830, para. 190.

MINUTES OF THE AGM OF THE WILLIAM COBBETT SOCIETY 2022

Minutes of the AGM held via Zoom on Sunday 5th June 2022

The 2022 meeting was held via Zoom. This was not anticipated when we first agreed a date but proved to be successful, though again it was disappointing not to meet members in person.

Just before the 11.00am start, the Chairman welcomed members to the meeting which, as in 2021, had the advantage of being able to welcome people who are not generally able to come to Farnham. These included Elayne Gardstein in America, Brendan Whyte in Australia, Jorgen Kragh in Denmark and Daniel Rafferty in South Uist.

The Chairman reminded members of the agenda for the meeting and ensured that there were no matters arising from the previous report, published in the New Register of 2021.

Chairman's Report, June 2022.

Dear Cobbett Society Members,

We really did not think, over a year ago, that our lives would still be influenced by the ramifications of COVID-19. The latest variant is still around, and although apparently less infectious, has curtailed the activities of many people - particularly those with underlying health problems.

The last report had to announce the cancellation of the 2020 Rural Ride and Annual Lecture, but noted our determination to hold a Town Walk around Farnham. This took place on 27th June 2021. Although the weather was, to say the least, indifferent, we had guided walks in three groups around some Cobbett highlights. These included the Bush Hotel, the

William Cobbett pub, the Cobbett statue, and the St Andrews churchyard to see Cobbett's grave and, inside, the plaque erected to Cobbett by John Fielden, his fellow Oldham MP. An additional visit to Farnham Castle and its garden was abandoned because of the rain. We assembled at the Bush Hotel and returned after our walk for tea. We were also able to show the first version of the Royal Holloway College, Citizens Project video. The discussion which followed made a number of valuable points about how it might be improved and made less politically correct - i.e., that it should reflect 19th-century values rather than 21st-century concerns. Stewart Edge will comment further later on.

We were able, as promised, to hold the Annual Memorial Lecture at the Maltings on 8th October 2021. It was entitled 'The Making of *Rural Rides*' and was a joint presentation by Professor John Stevenson and Dr James Grande. Both gave short presentations followed by a longer than usual question and answer session. This worked well for two main reasons: firstly, the questions were thoughtful ones which built on the presentations; secondly John and James are both so steeped in Cobbett lore that they were able to give full and insightful answers to (and comments on) the questions. As the Chairman said at the end: 'It certainly does help if your speakers really know their subject'. More than one person said afterwards that it was the best Annual Lecture for several years.

The most significant output of the year was the publication of the annual *New Political Register*. This was again edited by Katharine Stearn and contained contributions from several of our stalwarts including Katharine herself as well as John Stevenson, David Chun and Elayne Gardstein from Adelphi University in New York who contributed two papers. We are immensely grateful for all these contributions and to Katharine who will, we are pleased to report, continue as editor of the Register.

This year, 2022, will also unfortunately be less productive than we would like. This AGM is missing some of its regulars and the Rural Ride will be downgraded. We will not be doing a tour through a number of obscure villages and breathing in sharply as our driver navigates country lanes which have not been widened since Cobbett rode down them in the 1820s. But we *will* gather at the Gilbert White Museum and Gardens, Selborne, on Wednesday 13th July for an informal celebration of Cobbett's work. (More information about the arrangements and plans for the day below.)

The Annual Lecture will take place in October and is currently 'under development'. This is the 200th year of the publication of Cobbett's

influential *Cottage Economy* and we hope to celebrate this in some suitable way; possibly by organising a return fixture by John Stevenson and James Grande. We will, of course, keep everyone informed when details have been arranged. We hope to hold the lecture in mid-October — this is not entirely straightforward as we and the Maltings are keen to avoid one of their more lively Comedy Nights.

There have been two developments recently which confirm that the Cobbett name still resonates in unexpected places:

i) A producer, Anne Khazam, from the BBC World Service has emailed Stewart saying she would like some help preparing a programme about Cobbett. We have no idea what has triggered this interest but we replied saying that, of course, we will help in any way we can. She has since spoken to me (Richard Thomas), Katharine, Stewart and James Grande.

ii) In a similar vein we have been in touch with Brendan Whyte, an academic at the National Library of Australia in Canberra. Not only is he with us today, he has also produced two fascinating articles with maps which focus on the actual journeys of Cobbett's rural rides. Both pieces are quite long and technical. We are considering how we might get them published; possibly as an A4 document. We plan to put a 'taster' in the Register. Note: please see Elayne Gardstein's article above for details.

Finally, the ongoing nature of the lockdown has made it more than usually difficult to keep the Cobbett flag flying. We need more than ever to get members working to ensure the future of the Society by helping with the committee, writing papers (short or long) for the Register and, of course, by paying their subscriptions.

We hope to see many of you in person at the modified Rural Ride and at the Annual Lecture in October. Thank you.'

Richard Thomas, Chairman.

New mapping of the Rural Rides by Brendan Whyte:

The Chairman asked Brendan to say a bit more about his papers. Brendan explained that they had been published in A4 format in Australia and that he was pleased that we were keen to get them republished in the UK. David Chun has been sent two copies of the Australian version and will place one in the Hampshire Records Office. The Society will work out how best to ensure these two papers are made more widely available.

Hon. Treasurers Report (and Membership Issues). Stewart Edge.

Stewart pointed out that the financial situation had hardly changed - income had been less but so had expenditure. We were, in fact, just over £100 better off than in 2021, membership subscription income more or less covering ongoing expenditure. As we have a £5000 balance, we would be in a position to contribute towards a good project if one were to arise. The accounts were adopted.

The membership numbers were similarly static. Nine new people had joined but eleven had not (yet) renewed their membership giving a total of 103 members. An earlier suggestion (from last year's AGM) that people gave membership to a friend or relation does not seem to have materialised.

Election of Committee.

There were no formal resignations from, or offers to join, the committee so it was agreed that the existing committee be re-elected as a group. This was agreed nem. con. David Chun agreed to accept the title of Adjunct Committee Member. He has always been an active member of the Society and has helped Katharine with recent *Registers*. He will be giving the talk after this formal AGM.

The New Political Register 2022.

Katharine summarised the situation with the forthcoming *Register*. She indicated that she had several papers already and when she gets the report of this AGM she will have enough material. There was a short discussion about Brendan Whyte's Rural Rides papers and whether we should publish them in the Register or separately.

Rural Ride 2022.

Robert Sykes was not at the meeting but had left some notes which explained that, after a number of false starts, it had been decided to visit Gilbert White's house in Selborne on Wed 13th of July. We will not go by coach but will arrive in our own cars. There will be coffee and lunch, plenty of appropriate Cobbett readings in the 16th-century barn, and private tours of the house and gardens. Since the entrance fee is quite high the Society will subsidise the event.

Annual Memorial Lecture 2022.

The key points are in the Chairman's Report above. The Committee and John Stevenson are keen to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Cottage Economy*.

Other Issues

- i) **The Citizens/Museum Project:** Stewart informed us that the video (which we saw at last year's Town Walk) has still not been set up for display in the Farnham Museum. This is disappointing, as the reasons given for the delay seem inadequate. Pam Taylor (Chair of the Farnham and District Museum Society), who was with us, agreed. She explained that the leadership of the Museum was undergoing change and that the current curator who is leaving might be replaced by a manager. Her concern was that this may further reinforce the focus of the Museum on craft and design-related activities rather than improve its operations as a museum (including displays on Cobbett).
- ii) **Website:** Stewart summarised the current situation, apologising for the failure to find the 'gremlins' that some had noticed when using the site. Katharine had started to create an alternative site from scratch and it was intended to complete this over coming weeks and months. Various suggestions for improving the site were made.
- iii) **BBC World Service 'Forum' Programme** (usually chaired by Bridget Kendall). The key points are in the Chairman's Report above. In addition, Anne Khazam told us she is also trying to link up with Professor Gilmartin, an academic in the US (known to John Stevenson). She has stated that she would like to have Katharine and Richard Thomas on the programme. Unfortunately, James Grande will be away on holiday when the programme is being recorded.

Any other Business.

Elayne Gardstein told us that there is a street on Long Island called Cobbett Lane. It is not near where he lived and the local authorities have no idea how the street came to be given that name. It seems to have been named in the first part of the 20th century if not earlier.

There being no other business the meeting closed at a few minutes to 12.00 midday.

After a short break, David Chun gave a talk about Cobbett and his (and the nation's) finances.

Most Cobbett enthusiasts know that Cobbett railed against Britain's departure from the Gold Standard by issuing paper money (in *Paper Against Gold*, 1815) and was even more vitriolic against the Government for the rapidly rising national debt which was needed to pay for the Napoleonic Wars. In *Advice to Young Men*, he also warned against using credit personally. However, it is less well known that Cobbett funded his own lifestyle and sometimes foolish investments with some very dodgy financial instruments. He was constantly using his friends and contacts to borrow money using an 'accommodation bill or note'. This was a questionable method of raising credit and when he could raise no more, he went bankrupt to the tune (in current terms) of £2.4 million.

The state of the nation was not much better. Today, even including the impact of COVID, the UK national debt is approximately 102% of GDP. During Cobbett's time (after the Napoleonic Wars) the national debt was 160% of GDP. Cobbett was right to be concerned but was not, himself, good at managing his own finances.

After a brief discussion of this fascinating talk the meeting closed at 12.55pm

BOOKS FOR SALE

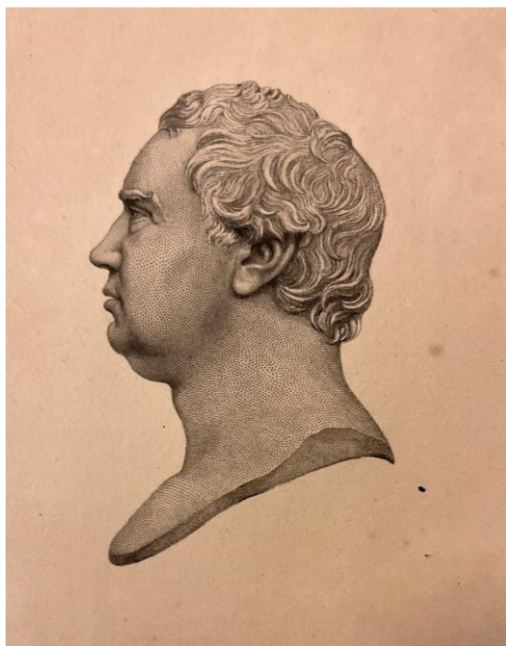
1. ***William Cobbett in America 1794-1835: This Happy Land*** by Molly Townsend. This book documents Cobbett's thoughts about America and his attitude towards the Americans. £15.00, £10.00 to members + £3.00 p&p
2. ***The Life of William Cobbett by Himself: Intended as an encouraging example to all young men of humble fortune; being a proof of what can be effected by steady application and honest efforts.*** Written by Cobbett when he was living in America, this is a faithful reproduction of Cobbett's 1809 edition by member Trevor Purnell. £4.50 + £1.50 p&p
3. ***The Jolly Farmer? William Cobbett in Hampshire 1804-1820*** by Barbara Biddell. *Hampshire Paper No 15*, published in 1999 by the Hampshire Record Office. A detailed study of Cobbett's life in Hampshire and of his own farming practices, tree planting and relationship with his labourers and with the poor in the parishes. £3.00 + £1.50 p&p
4. ***Account of the Family*** by Anne Cobbett. Anne, Cobbett's eldest daughter, provides a fascinating account of the financial hardship and difficulties which the family endured. £3.00 + £1.50 p&p
5. ***William Cobbett 1763 - 1835: A Celebration: Writer, Radical. Reformer, The Greatest Journalist of his Age.*** Stewart Edge, Katharine Stearn, Charles Stuart and Richard Thomas. £2.50 + £1.50 p&p
6. ***The Opinions of William Cobbett.*** James Grande, John Stevenson and Richard Thomas. Ashgate, 2013. Commentary on the main themes of his life with extended extracts from his writing. £15 + £2.50 p&p
7. ***William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment.*** Edited by James Grande and John Stevenson. Routledge.com/9781848935426.
20% discount to members – use the code WCS15 at checkout.
8. ***The Cobbett Club*** by Penny Young. Benjamin Tilly served Cobbett as secretary and factotum, and was instrumental in founding the Cobbett Club in 1838. This newly discovered record of the Club's objectives and rules, as well as its published letters and articles, meticulously preserved by Tilly, is examined in this short pamphlet. £2.00 + £1.25 p&p

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Back Cover: Portrait of William Cobbett by Peter Rouw. Frontispiece to the 1853 edition of *Rural Rides*. William Cobbett Collection, University Archives and Special Collections, Adelphi University Libraries, Garden City, NY.



For further information on the William Cobbett Society:
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