

Presentation Notes

These are the notes I used to accompany the presentation slides.

They are largely notes to myself and I have not altered them here.

They may, however, provide you with a sense of the storyline I used to present an overview of the politics of the Mass Trespass in the 1930s.

They are, of course, a distillation of issues explored much more fully through the essays.

The purpose of the presentation at the WCML symposium was to set the scene for the subsequent contributions and discussions about the resonance / relevance of the politics of the Mass Trespass to the politics of land and climate justice.

1 - 6 A Gallery of Political Walking

Let's start with a bit of context:

some other walks in the inter-war years:

[Click through them]

2 General Strike

3 Depression and conditions

4 Peace and India

5. Fascism and against

6. NUWM and Hunger Marches in 1930s organised by the CP.

Eddie Frow was a NUWM organiser with Wal Hannington CP founder. Much later in his life the archives and left memorabilia which he collected with his wife Ruth were the foundational collection of the WCML

In the bottom picture, note the arrival in Hyde Park in 1932 of the Manchester and Lancashire Youth Groups Hunger Marchers with their hammer and sickle banners.

Eddie and his life-long friend Benny Rothman were disciplined members of the CPGB until it dissolved itself in 1990. whilst Eddie was organising the Hunger Marches, Benny was the Lancashire secretary of the BWSF and organised another of the famous political walks of the 1930s

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Both Benny and Eddie dedicated their entire lives to working for a better shared, collective and global future, free of injustice, inequality and oppression. To recognise those commitments, and to celebrate the BWSF's iconic day of Direct Action politics, we are going to explore the ways in which the Red, mainly urban, class warriors of the Mass Trespass were setting out on another, much longer 90-year march to make common cause with those active in today's Green politics of land justice and climate emergency.

To get that Red – Green dialogue under way, I will offer a few observations on the politics of the Mass Trespass. I aim to put the class-based communist-led politics back into our histories of the Trespass. However, the politics of class were by no means the only – or even the most important – reason for the wider political impact and resonance of the Mass Trespass. Indeed, if it were, it is unlikely that it would have had the reach and resonance it has. So a second aim is to look more generally at other aspects of the Trespass as a political intervention in the 1930s.

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To run my two aims together, I have drawn on this observation of the late Doreen Massey. She linked the two meanings of belonging: belonging in the sense of the political economy of the ownership and control of land and property; and belonging in the sense of the cultural politics of our identities with, and within, the landscapes we inhabit.

The politics of land, landscapes and belonging were not suddenly discovered in 1932 by the British Workers' Sports Federation. They emerged from a rich historical hinterland and my first task is to provide a sketch map of those hinterlands of the Trespass. It looks something like this:

[first diagram]

The North and South areas of the map are the usual terrain of class-based politics of land ownership; the two Western areas encompass the cultural politics of landscapes, nature and identities and the two Eastern areas are practical ways of engaging with the politics of land, landscapes and belonging.

I will spend a few minutes saying a bit more about each of these hinterlands before moving on to a similar map to explore particular aspects of the Mass Trespass in the 1930s. That second map looks like this:

[second diagram]

Warning:

I cannot expand on everything which appears on the following slides. Copies will be available later. The bits in boxes and bold on each slide are the key take-aways for our purposes; the rest are examples, events, images, people, quotes etc which you can follow up for yourself.

Without further ado, we move on to the first of the hinterlands: Land & Common Ownership:

[H1 slide]

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The Mass Trespass lies squarely in the common ownership tradition headed up by The Diggers

They were the Ur-Trespassers of the modern era. They trespassed on land they did not own to set up self-sufficient rural communities.

As biblical communists, they sought to return to what they saw as the egalitarian harmony of the Garden of Eden, when land was a Common Treasury before the serpent, the ruling class and the landowners messed things up. They were the extremists of the English Revolution; they saw that enclosing land, and buying and selling land as private property and a marketable commodity were the source of the injustices and inequalities they faced. Their experience and aspirations prefigured those of the Mass Trespassers, including being forcibly evicted from the land on which they trespassed and duly punished by the authorities.

A clear red line of 'common ownership' politics stretches from the Diggers to the interwar Mass Trespass

[Click / comment through]

Spence

M&E

Wallace (ecologist)

US and RS – explain later

LP (1918) and CP (1920) - common ownership and [land nationalisation in LP manifestos 1918 - 1945](#)

1931 - "Bolshevism run mad" (Snowden) following LP split

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There is a similarly continuous line from the 17th century in the land and property hinterland.

It fell to the young philosopher John Locke to provide a rationale for individuals to take and enclose land from the Common Treasury and own and dispose of it in perpetuity as their private property. Forty years after the Diggers, Locke was hired by seven aristocrats – oligarchs? – to provide a justification for their decision to declare the throne of the catholic King James II vacant in 1688 and to invite the protestant William and Mary from the Netherlands to occupy it.

The extracts from Locke's Second Treatise on Government sum up his 'labour theory of property'.

Some caveats ignored.

It has furnished the enduring justification for the 'natural' and exclusive rights of land and property owners to do what they will with their property. The obligation of the state to protect and preserve property rights was a key part of Locke's rationale, which has commended it to those with wealth, property and power ever since. Locke's property-based schema has underpinned capitalist political economy for the last 350 years along with its accompanying ideology of market-based competition and possessive individualism. It is still going strong at the beating heart of Neoliberalism.

[click through] note some caveats (Smith, Mill) Never quite fitted, till Marshall re-wrote it .

Also, Henry George and Georgeism . comment.

Click to H3 Direct Action

((

If there are a few moments to spare later this evening, I will explore a more whimsical link between Locke and the Mass Trespass.

One of the 7 oligarchs was the Duke of Devonshire, whose estate stretched up the Derwent Valley and included much of the Kinder moorland. In 1932, the then Duke of Devonshire's gamekeepers were amongst that phalanx of gamekeeper tasked with using their bodies and their clubs to keep the trespassers off the Kinder plateau. In 2007, the elderly grandson of that Duke turned up at the Mass Trespass Anniversary celebrations and apologised for the behaviour of his grandfather's gamekeepers. . . He did not, however, apologise for his 17th-century ancestor's decision to pay John Locke to provide a justification for the rights of landowners in a liberal capitalist social order!

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It makes sense to look briefly at the political hinterland of Direct Action next.

There are plenty of arcane political arguments about what constitutes Direct Action. I have noted a couple of definitions by Sparrow and Graeber. We may well return to them in later discussions.

There is not really a tradition of Direct Action. What I note here are the sorts of actions which shaped the Direct Action terrain on which the Mass Trespass took place.

[Click through them], *with brief word if necessary – especially on*

Mass Trespasses as local cmnty protests not urban incomers,

Syndicalism and General Strike CP and rank and file class struggle orientation. These key for MT

[H4 Cooutry and City landscapes]

12

The relationship between Country & City Landscapes is arguably the most significant of the two hinterlands of landscape belonging and identity.

It is also, alas, the most contradictory, full of complicated political cross-currents.

For our purposes I want to focus mainly on the resurgence of an ideology of ruralism from the mid-19th century onwards. I'll use Blake's poem *Jerusalem* to highlight its ramifications

When it was written in 1804, Blake's poem reflected / represented a not unrealistic vision of England as an essentially rural society, with a few urban Jerusalems. As the tables show, in 1801 the bulk of the population lived in rural landscapes and agriculture was the dominant feature of the English social economy. By the time of the 1851 census, agriculture had lost its economic pre-eminence and the urban – rural population balance was 50-50.

Fast forward another 50 years and English agriculture had collapsed and the English rural social economy was in a state of disarray. England was the most heavily urbanised society in the world (it was 1968 before Germany achieved such a level of urbanisation in its population distribution).

[click for next slide]

But . . . Somewhat paradoxically . . . what happened at a time of huge urban and industrial ascendancy was the resurgence of an all-pervasive ideological English ruralism. Far from adjusting the narratives of national landscapes and identity to reflect its urban / industrial / commercial base, English national identity was constructed overwhelmingly through a set of rural idylls.

The English countryside and rural landscapes became freighted with values and narratives of national identity and patriotism – along with all the inclusions and exclusions such an ideology entailed. It represented a rejection of urban values and identities.

Tracing the wider ramifications of this ideological ruralism is beyond the scope of this presentation. For our purposes we should note the following . . .

[Click quickly through the list – draw on following for comments, perhaps]

Preservationism and ‘radical conservatism’ which feeds into the CPRE in the inter-war years

Ruralism is a powerful influence on the cultures of walking and rambling.

*** Ruralism was not simply some sort of ruling class hegemonic onslaught. Versions of ruralism were prevalent in emerging visions of socialism. Walter Crane’s imagery of a harmonious global rural socialism was not an ironic archaism; it was the portrayal of a recovery of the sort of rural social order which the Diggers felt they had lost and which, in various ways, was articulated by figures such as Ruskin, Morris, Carpenter all sought to place an essentially rural way of life at the heart of their visions of socialism

The rural idylls re-cast the dynamics of the relationship between cities and the countryside.

. . . And in 1916, Hubert Parry set Jerusalem to music – setting it on the road to its current status as a sort of alternative national anthem celebrating England’s identity as a Green and Pleasant Land – fiercely defended against all those woke musicians who want to change the choreography of the last night of the proms.

In all fairness, the pacifist-leaning Parry did his best to prevent this outcome. He sought to avoid the risk of ruralist patriotism in 1916 by assigning the full performing rights to the NUWSS. Initially, therefore, Jerusalem was a suffrage song. And when the NUWSS dissolved itself in 1928 (job done) the performing rights – along with Elgar’s orchestration – were passed on to that bastion of inter-war rural feminism, the Women’s Institute. . .

[Click for Walking, Landscape and Nature]

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The other related cultural hinterland is the rich tradition of writing about the relationships between walking, landscapes and nature. They express notions of belonging in and identity and cultural affinity with natural landscapes achieved and experienced through the activity of walking. Three early examples.

Rousseau – ‘the founder of romanticism’ – was an obsessive solitary walker. Strenuous walking became a way of finding within himself a sense of the primordial state of nature – unsullied nature pre-enlightenment, pre-civilisation, pre-agriculture, pre-property, he strongly repudiated Locke. Clear echoes of his famous utterance: “Mankind is born free, but is everywhere in chains” can be heard in the refrain of Ewan McColl's Manchester Rambler.

I am obliged to mention the walker and poet William Wordsworth. His lake district inspired landscape romanticism became the template for a major strand of the cultures of walking in English landscapes Mind you, Wordsworth sought to restrict the experience of landscape romanticism. He opposed the railway's arrival at Windermere; it would bring the wrong sort of walker to the Lake District. As his sister Dorothy noted somewhat primly in her journal: *a green field with buttercups would answer all the purposes of the Lancashire operatives.*

Not for them an emotional affinity with Helm Crag, the Langdale Pikes or indeed, the awesome dangers of Broad Stand, the tricky 30-foot cliff-face between Scafell and Scafell Pike where Coleridge, romantic poet and an early fell-walker, almost killed himself.

The poetry of the landless labourer John Clare expresses his intense personal affinity with the natural world – along with a no less intense feeling of alienation and dislocation because enclosure prevented him from walking and belonging in the natural landscapes where he grew up.

All very fascinating, but a couple of questions arise:

What happened when some of the literary appreciation of walking, nature and landscape filtered down into the more general cultures of rambling?

Did any of this resonate with the Lancashire operatives when their unions finally gained them a bit of leisure time in the late-19th century to make their way to the countryside for a spot of rambling?

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Rambling was located squarely at the respectability and self-improvement end of approved Victorian leisure-time pursuits. Those values, cultures and dispositions permeated by the organisations which emerged at that time to educate the working class in the right and proper ways to access and appreciate the countryside:

For the most part, pre-WW1 rambling clubs and federations (London) reflected this late-Victorian, moralistic ideology of walking and belonging within rural landscapes.

NT

The CHA & HF (see notes later)

Not surprisingly, early working class ramblers found themselves assailed by a barrage of do's and don'ts as they ventured out to discover whether they belonged in the open countryside.

Some sorts of popular walking were definitely not part of the rambling repertoire

CHA

Quite deliberately aimed to provide a walking experience which critiqued urbanism and industrialisation – and holidays at seaside resorts. It did not engage with issues of land ownership and access. It offered all-comers week-long holidays built round a range of activities which provided a sustained engagement with the countryside. The holidays were in basic accommodation, they ate wholesome fare, with everyone undertaking catering on a communal basis. Things were a bit spartan and there were dress codes to ensure that no-one appeared too fancy or over-dressed. During the day everyone engaged in mandatory, graded walks in the surrounding countryside. In the evening they had a series of lectures and discussions facilitated by tutors from National Home Reading Union (an early version of the WEA at the same as the University Extension movement was getting under way.) They considered local history, natural history, relevant literature and made the connections with their experience of the countryside through the programme of daily walks.

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There was a strong 'outdoor socialism' strand within the array of cultural activities which flourished under the Clarion Banner. Walking and cycling were pleasant and potentially liberating activities to be undertaken in the company of like-minded people and a way of nurturing a socialist consciousness. They were more fun and pleasurable – leisure and countryside as play – than joining and working for one of the pre-WW1 left political parties

The founder editor of The Clarion, Robert Blatchford was a highly idiosyncratic [Tory] socialist who had joined and left most of parties. His approach to the development of a de-industrialised, highly ruralist socialist society was – I quote – “To grow more socialists”.
Merrie England / Nunquam

Dorking (nice place) and Oldham (nasty place) Box Hill or Saddleworth Moors

Clarion split during WW1 but its re-emergence was one of the inputs into on the left's approach to the countryside generally in the inter-war years.

Sheffield autodidact Bert Ward was a key figure in Dark Peak Walking during the Pre-WW1 and inter-war years. He was the founder of the large and hugely influential SCR. Moon and Ward Rambler and Law 1911 – included a section on how to trespass. Keen tramper and trespasser who introduced many to the [Dark Peak](#) moors. Photo – possibly a trespass Kinder Gates

Note, however, Ward's socialist rambling was more earnest than Blatchford's. Popular landscape romanticism. It also differed from the ethical socialism of his near neighbour Edward Carpenter.

Lived very near Edward Carpenter, but a very different socialism. Ward was an urban LRC man, not a passionate ILP ruralist aspiring to new ways of living a simpler, outdoor, sandal-wearing, vegetarian and sexually liberated life. Ward worked in Sheffield. He loved the Peak District but also respected and contributed to the civic life of the industrial Sheffield

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Specificity of Dark Peak - Landscape, Tramping, Gritstone climbing

Does not fit in to essentially southern ruralist ideology.

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Hazlitt remained the norm through to 1914. Absolutely nothing without access

What is remarkable about the pre-WW1 'access movement' is just how limited and fragmented it was. In the first place there was very little agreement even about the basic terms of engagement – rights of way, commons, open spaces, open access and so forth. In the second place, there was little sense of a common movement or coalition; just a range of fairly limited options being pursued by a somewhat disparate bunch of organisations and groups.

Negotiation – and probably most access was secured in this way – so little pooling of experience. *Intensely localist, which worked against the generation of any common ground in the access arena.*

Preservationism (and ruralism) - conservatism and radicalism

- a) Long history of footpaths and rights of way – but not political rights – preservationist route
- b) Commons (Mill) - but not political 'access open to everyone'

Legislative route Bryce – but no agreement amongst the mountaineering community – it made more sense than footpaths for upland moors

Some public ownership – indeed, where the main focus of land reform lay in urban areas from 1880s onwards. Urban land question (Brett Christophers)

Rambling clubs provided some grass-roots 'self-activity', but they tended to be respectable and self-improvement driven. 1900 saw SRC emerge as an umbrella body for local groups and pressure on East side of Dark Peak; 1905 saw London Federation of Rambling Clubs but there was no more general sense of an outdoor movement beyond the Clarion straws in the wind.

Note – all of this directed towards the reforming end of the liberalism – either the Liberal Party or Lib-Lab. Struggle over leisure-time access to countryside was not part of a wider political or TU movement.

Or

Trespass – quite common

Footnote on land reform politics

Also NB Urban land reform dominance cf Ireland and peasant proprietorship.

Ruralism and eugenicism / fighting men / land colonies to deal with the urban poor – as part of urban welfare system etc etc 3 acres and a cow rural self-sufficiency

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This completed map of the political and cultural hinterlands of the Mass Trespass is basically my case for a recognition of the wider political reach, significance and resonance of the Mass Trespass. The trespassers were not just indulging in a one-off day of direct action in the access arena, with a bit of leftie common ownership thrown in. They were making a much more far-reaching intervention across the whole gamut of issues associated with the politics and cultures of land, landscapes and belonging.

The terrain sketched out here was suspended in 1914. When the contested politics and cultures of land, landscape and belonging resumed in the early-1920s, they did so in very changed and changing circumstances.

My next sketch map looks more closely at how this played out for the Mass Trespass for the 1930s.

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Start in the north east corner of this map and work my way round, anti-clockwise.

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Mass Activity of rambling - or Hiking (a nasty americanism which annoyed the old guard ramblers and walkers). A range of cultural tensions emerged:

Old Guard picked up where they had left off with little recognition of changing demographics, political contexts and values

Ramblers Fedns and RA (grass-roots + coalescing; internal cross-currents and tensions

Preservationists PNFS, COSFPS etc carried on as before

New = Youth (YHA) - as per slide

CPRE Heads up the Rural Preservationist movement, but modernist not archaic - town planning, conferences, suburbs, green belts; 'conservation' - **Georgeist agenda**

Ramblers rallies - grass-roots campaigning - SCR and MRF

Focus is Thompson quote + two examples of shift.

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Significance of Box - socialism and land nationalisation not liberalism.

But not really noticed till 1929 election of Labour-led government

CP and LP orientations - Parliamentary road and Class Action roads to socialism - much overlap till 1928. But some formal convergence of ends

Wholly new terrain for all the old outdoor and access movement groups and organisations

Set this alongside the left activity reflected in early slides - a politically volatile and exciting period.

Depression and split in Labour Party - preceded by Mosley.

National Labour 1931 - 1934

Locke - by inter-war still Locke - no significant land reform. Lloyd George ended WW1 subsidies: CLA and NUAAW see Bonar Law in 1923 - who re-asserts no more subsidies; agriculture just another business and must make its way as any other private enterprise.

CAC

Less focus on left unity and greater emphasis on building separate, CP-led class-based activity..

Gave rise to an increased intensity of CP political, cultural and intellectual activism.

Class Development to wean W/C from leadership of LP and TUs.

Also cultural arm; takes ideas, literature, theatre, leisure as arenas of political expression / conflict – highly exciting - intellectuals in CP (and on Mass Trespass);

WTM and BWSF as cultural interventions.

Replaced later in 1930s by the Popular Front line.

Bits for BWSF slide:

A revival of Clarion-style outdoor socialism, with a more systematic aim of enabling working class to engage in elite-dominated sports. Internationalist emphasis: *Peace through Sport, Footballs not Canon Balls* – participation in the alternative Socialist Olympiads

YCL sought admission to Red Sports International and campaigned against all forms of nationalistic / capitalist sport – opposed scouting, employer-based sports clubs, commercial sport generally (even football!)

Regular walking and camping trips to the Derbyshire moorlands. The LP, TUC and Clarion Cycling Club withdrew from the BWSF.

cf SWP in ANL or RAR in late 1970s.

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Classic images - note the incorrect apostrophe. Organising pre-internet. Four weeks

Benny inciting a riotous assembly

Tona Gillett (Cambridge in mid-1930s) and Michael Tippett - the intellectual fellow travellers /

Class conflict in the countryside!??

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Read objectives of the day - comment on each - cafes, pacifism, cheap fares, petty restrictions e.g. singing

Deconstruct first few lines:

Young

Workers

Sport

Manchester (City dwellers - go from city to countryside and return to city - like most hikers!)

Hike

This is a new era of rambling; rambling as a mass leisure-time activity; rambling which is informed by politics.

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Standard reactions

Note Barnes of CPRE and, in relation to hiking generally across all landscapes, Joad's comments - and his version of nationalisation of land

Not trespass they objected to - but Mass Action.

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Comment on each

Last Trespasses - not a movement, not disappeared (even though that was subsequent case)

BWSF and CP had other political priorities - Benny Rothman, member of Jewish community in Cheetham Hill, turned his attention to halting the BUF; then unionising the workforce in Manchester, Fighting against fascism in Spain . . . and by late-1930s, Popular Front line adopted.

RA - internal arguments and organisational tensions (Mcr / Fedns -v- London) and the emergence of Stephenson and LP MPs as political focus for Bryce and wider politics:

Summarise Stephenson -v- Rothman later. Wholly different political formations and orientation . . . + if had carried on, we would have real access by now (1980) Dilemmas of National Parks and Post WW2 access

Creech-Jones debacle - latest Bryce Bill emerged from parliament as a Landowners Charter, with trespass being made a potentially criminal offence!!

Edwin Royce's reactions . . .

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Few other observations about late 1930s

1. Agric decline through depression and emerging far-reaching shifts in social economy of the countryside – suburbs, cars, rural tourism, day trippers,

incomers and commuters further changing rural lived environment;

white collar workers; rail / transport workers; office workers

land as development asset

rural amenities – roads, cafes, B&B, petrol stations, hoardings

Locke - by inter-war still Locke - no significant land reform. Lloyd George ended WW1 subsidies: CLA and NUAAW see Bonar Law in 1923 - who re-asserts no more subsidies; agriculture just another business and must make its way as any other private enterprise.

2. Socialism / LP / TUs – bit never touched on by MT

3. CPRE: B & Beast Ruralism, preservationism, planning, green belts and notion of National Parks (tho, not necessarily as landscapes for walking / hiking).

AG Street and dilemmas

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bottom bits JB setting it out in CAC terms - there was a remarkably powerful drama and imagination and narrative running through the Mass Trespass - as is always the case with the really successful forms of direct action - almost instinctive!!*

cf SWP in ANL or RAR in late 1970s

- a vanguard action by the urban working class to storm of the landowners' Winter Palace
- seizing the commanding heights of the countryside recreational economy
- exposing the collaborationists of the middle class Manchester Ramblers' Federation

Imagination

Drama - elemental / mythological / heroic

Encompasses the entire basis of landscape belonging in Massey's terms

30 & 31

Open up discussion / provocations . . .