

CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, is a charity which promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England. We advocate positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside. Founded in 1926, we have more than 60,000 supporters and a branch in every county. President: Sir Max Hastings. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen.

We urgently need your help to protect the English countryside now...

There really is no time to lose. CPRE is a charity that relies on the generous support of the public. While we have many victories under our belt, there are so many other battles we could fight and win, if only we had the resources.

Please support CPRE now to help save our precious countryside. Please ring FREEPHONE 0800 163680 or visit our website www.cpre.org.uk/support-us to find out how you can help.

Thank you for your support.



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

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Making our mark

80 years of campaigning for the countryside
by Tristram Hunt



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

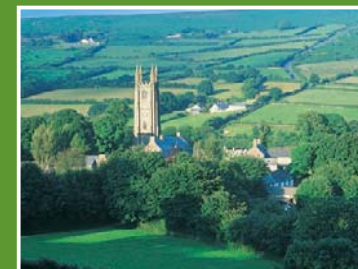


Since 1926, the Campaign to Protect Rural England has fought to protect the beauty, life and uniqueness of our countryside. Eighty years on, is the glass half full or half empty? Considering England's high population density and the huge growth in population and prosperity since our foundation, you might conclude our campaigning and behind-the-scenes influence have been highly successful. For England still has huge tracts of diverse, very beautiful countryside. The conclusion is strengthened if you look at the urban sprawl spreading rapidly across some European neighbours.

But each year about 21 square miles of English countryside is lost to concrete and asphalt. The countryside, its wildlife and natural resources as well as its sheer beauty and tranquillity, are under threat from sprawl, new road and airport infrastructure, from noise, air and light pollution. Farming, too, is under pressure to become ever more intensive and productive to meet globalised competition, yet we expect farmers to be among the leading custodians of the countryside. And climate change is coming.

Hay making near Salisbury (left) around the time of CPRE's foundation.

Today, England still has huge areas of beautiful countryside – Widdecombe-in-the-Moor, Dartmoor (right).



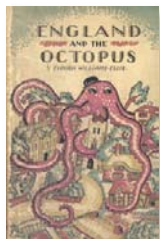
So whilst there may be plenty to celebrate, we face enormous challenges. This booklet, written by one of Britain's leading young historians, celebrates CPRE's success and influence over our first 80 years. We have a tough fight on our hands to ensure England has a real countryside left eight decades from now. And we depend entirely on your support – as a member, donor or volunteer – in order to win.

2006

Protecting the countryside: CPRE's past, present and future

by Tristram Hunt

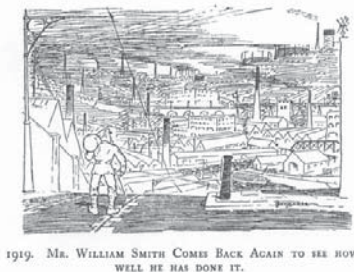
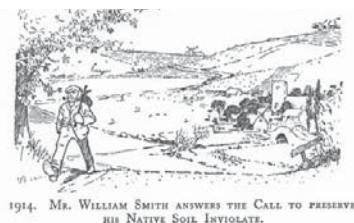
In 1933, the Bradford born author and broadcaster JB Priestley set out upon his *English Journey*. Leaving London along the Great Western Road, Priestley was transfixed by the never-ending sprawl of light industry, suburban housing, advertisement hoardings and traffic. Here was an England he had never experienced before...



England and the Octopus, 1928, (above) an anti-sprawl polemic by the architect Clough Williams-Ellis who was an influential early CPRE supporter.

Our original logo (right)

England and the Octopus included this *Punch* cartoon (top right).



'This is the England of arterial and by-pass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafes, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor-coaches ... and everything given away for cigarette coupons.' Its birthplace, he felt, must have been America. 'We might suddenly have rolled into California.'

Those who have experienced modern America can instantly sympathise with the sentiment. For a journey through today's Texas, Florida, or California is a journey through similar exurban excess: town and country merging imperceptibly into an endless conveyor belt of consumerism. It was a determination to avoid this spectre which eighty years ago led a band of planning pioneers to establish the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. And by the time of Priestley's journey, CPRE had already started to demand development codes,

National Parks, regulation of advertising and reforms to architectural design.

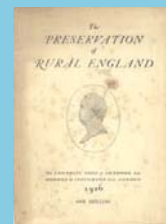
Since then, CPRE has transformed itself from an elite lobbying body to a popular pressure group with tens of thousands of supporters; it has moved from a close focus on design and aesthetics to a broader concern with the social and economic levers driving rural change;



and it has shifted from an amenity society to a more consciously environmental organisation. Yet, all the while, it has remained true to many of its founding ideals: a belief in the ecological and social importance of proper planning; an understanding of the vital inter-relationship between urban and rural; and a commitment to preserving the beauty, tranquillity and psychologically nourishing qualities of the English countryside for future generations.

[continues on page 5 >](#)

Our story: the highlights



1926 *The Preservation of Rural England* (above) by pioneering planner Sir Patrick Abercrombie (below), one of the five key publications of the year according to the British Library's Chronology of Modern Britain, called for a national joint committee to preserve the countryside. It was formed in December 1926 as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, with Abercrombie its Honorary Secretary.



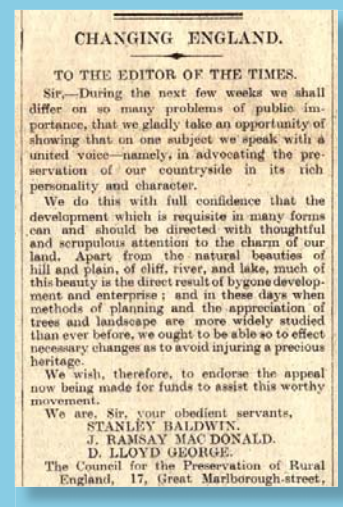
Getty Images

1927 The first task of the new Council was an all-out attack on ribbon development – new buildings beside roads spreading deep into the countryside. CPRE argued that local authorities could use powers granted by the *Public Health Act 1925* to charge street work costs to new roadside building – a major disincentive to sprawl.

1928 CPRE Architectural Advisory Panels were set up jointly with the Royal Institute of British Architects to advise local authorities and developers on good quality design for new buildings.

1929 A CPRE memorandum to the Prime Minister urged the case for National Parks. In response, the Government set up the Addison Committee of inquiry into National Parks. • During the General Election, the leaders of the three political parties (Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald and David Lloyd George) write a joint letter to *The Times*, endorsing the work of the CPRE and its appeal for funds (right).

1920s



1930 CPRE drafts Sir Edward Hilton-Young's *Rural Amenities Bill*, leading to a reference to the preservation of rural amenities in the King's Speech to Parliament – the first acknowledgement of the need for legislation to protect the countryside.

1931 The Minister of Transport appoints CPRE as official advisors to the Electricity Commissioners on the positioning of overhead electricity cables to minimise visual impact on the countryside – 40 cases are dealt with in 1931, and many more in the years to come.

1932 *The Town and Country Planning Act 1932* successfully embodied the recommendations of CPRE's *Rural Amenities Bill*, and was the first legislation to accept the desirability of universal rural planning.

1933 Raymond Unwin's proposed Green Girdle for London – which was to become Britain's first Green Belt – was endorsed by CPRE, who had proposed an 'open belt' of protected countryside around London three years earlier.

- CPRE give evidence to the Select Committee on Sky-Writing to call for the protection of the sky as a national asset.



1935 *The Restriction of Ribbon Development Act 1935* crowned CPRE's nine-year campaign against sprawl (left).

1936 A joint agreement was signed between CPRE and the Forestry Commission to prevent large scale commercial forestry plantation in the Lake District's central fells (right).

1937 The Armed Forces' demand for land escalated as war clouds gathered. CPRE accepted the need but pressed for land take to be minimised and for high standards of management.

1938 CPRE set up an individual membership scheme at a guinea a year and appealed for donations towards the £5,000 per annum needed to run the organisation.

- CPRE produce a film as part of its campaign for National Parks. *Rural England: the Case for the Defence* was shown in 925 cinemas across the country and received good reviews from *The Sunday Times* and the BBC.



1934 CPRE introduce a national scheme of Countryside Wardens to enforce a 'Code of Courtesy for the Countryside' – later adopted by the National Parks Commission as the 'Country Code'.

1930s

CPRE was formed in 1926 in response to some of the greatest land use changes to the English countryside since the enclosures of the seventeenth century. The inter-war years witnessed a seismic cultural and political retreat from the dense urban ethos of the nineteenth century. Inspired by the garden city and suburb movement, politicians and planners were unleashing the city onto the country.

The *Town Planning Act 1909* signalled the shift from urban to suburban living. It was followed by an influential polemic from architect Raymond Unwin, *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding*, which passionately made the case for low-density, green spaced garden suburbs. New homes for First World War heroes adhered to the suburban mould and were then followed up by private developers exploiting strong housing demand on the back of historically low interest rates. The result

was an avalanche of concrete across the countryside. During the 1920s and 1930s, an average of 300,000 houses were built every year with 1936 seeing a peak of 350,000. Overall, the interwar years saw 4 million new houses go up consuming some 60,000 acres of rural land a year.

With them arrived modern car culture. Between 1924 and 1936 the price of the car fell by 50% and production increased by 500%. Previous geographical limitations on the growth of cities melted away as the car followed the tube, tram and train in prising open the suburbs of suburbia. Accompanying the car were roads, filling stations, pollution and noise. As Kenneth Grahame so memorably recounted it in *The Wind in the Willows*, the stoats and weasels of modern suburbia were destroying the romanticised England of his childhood – all on the back of Toad's motor car. ➤

Horses remained the main form of traction for agriculture in the twenties and thirties (top left), but soaring car ownership brought thousands of visitors to the countryside: Combe Gibbet, Berkshire (right).



But at the same time as the urban tentacles were spreading, there arose a remarkable surge of interest in the English countryside and its meaning. This was the age of Elgar¹ and Ralph Vaughan Williams, of HV Morton and the search for England. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin could announce to universal acclamation that, 'To me England is the country and the country is England'. Meanwhile, cycling, rambling, even folk culture enjoyed an unprecedented vogue amongst the broad middle class. By the mid-1930s, some 100,000 men and women were regularly hiking across the British landscape. According to one recent history, 'Never before had the pull of nature been more popular than in the interwar years'.²

Rambling in the countryside became massively popular in the 1930s (below) whilst suburbia expanded rapidly across fields and woods (bottom right).



CPRE was a part of that naturalist turn, but at the same time managed to avoid its romanticist fringes. Certainly, many members believed that the identity of England was rooted in its natural heritage ('it reflects our national character – it has qualities of calm and quiet and intimacy.'³) but unlike the acolytes of William Morris or Robert Blatchford CPRE realised that modernity could not be reversed. Very consciously CPRE sought to differentiate itself from 'the sort of arid conservatism which tries to mummify the countryside'.⁴

By contrast, the Council's ambition was to ensure that through design, zoning and landscaping progress did not irreversibly scar the English countryside. 'The development of this country is affected by all kinds of influences, arising from post-war conditions and new forms of transport,' remarked founding CPRE President Lord Crawford. 'We have got to have new roads and bridges, new suburbs, new villages, perhaps new towns. Our desire is that they shall be comely, and shall conform to modern requirements without injuring the ancient beauty of the land.' Modernist planner and CPRE guru Patrick Abercrombie asked, 'How much is it possible, owing to skilful planning.... for the country to absorb without ceasing to be the country?'; how could it accept 'more buildings, new roads.... and yet preserve its beauty?'

Yet if CPRE spurned a nostalgic revival of merrie England, it was just as vehemently opposed to what Neville Chamberlain described as the 'spoiling of undefiled countryside by what is called the ribbon development'. The monstrous sprawl of arterial England was the primary focus of the early CPRE and their lobbying was rewarded in 1935 with the *Restriction of Ribbon Development Act*. ➤



Imperial War Museum

1939-45 CPRE's war-time aims were 'The conservation and development of our agricultural resources and the improvement of the social environment of the rural population'.
• The recommendations of a CPRE-convened conference arguing for listing of buildings of special architectural or historic importance were implemented in the *Town and Country Planning Act 1944*.

1947 *The Town and Country Planning Act 1947* achieved many of CPRE's ambitions for planning in the countryside and laid the foundations of the planning system we still use today.

1948 CPRE pressed the Government for adequate publicity for planning inquiries. The Town and Country Planning Ministry agreed to a system of examination of all appeals prior to the inquiry stage, with full publication of cases in the local press.

1949 *The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* paved the way for National Parks after CPRE was invited to give evidence-in-chief to the National Parks Committee – created at CPRE's request during a 20-year campaign. The designation of 10 National Parks followed.

A Second World War propaganda poster by Frank Newbould (above) celebrates the countryside.

Wastwater in the Lake District (above right).

1940s



1950 CPRE objected to the exemption of farm and forestry buildings from planning control.

- Prime Minister Atlee gives direct assurance to CPRE that 'proper weight will be given to the amenity aspects' of all open-cast workings.

1952 CPRE and the Standing Committee on National Parks pressed for the newly designated National Parks to be given planning and financial independence.

1955 A Government circular in response to CPRE pressure accepted the need for strongly protected Green Belts around England's largest towns and cities, and encouraged their establishment up and down the country.

1957 In its first major motorway case, CPRE campaigned for the M1 (right) to avoid the heart of Charnwood Forest. The road was eventually put in a cutting.

1958 CPRE sought a tightening of controls on advertising hoardings, condemning the proposed voluntary code as inadequate.



1950s



Herbert Griffin (above) was CPRE's long serving General Secretary from its inauguration in 1926 until 1965.

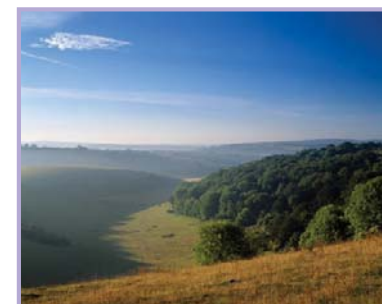
Post-war agriculture became increasingly mechanized and intensive (far left).

It took two decades for CPRE's campaign for National Parks to succeed. Pictured (right) are Semerwater in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, established in 1954, and Beacon Hill in Sussex, which will be within a new South Downs National Park.

What this campaign against 'the dull uneventfulness' of suburbia opened CPRE up to is the long-running complaint that the Council was simply the working party of the landed wealthy. And there is little doubt that during its first decade, the title-heavy CPRE was more concerned with preservation than public access and perhaps a little haughty about the material aspirations of the lower middle-class. But to suggest that natural heritage can therefore only be appreciated by the leisured classes – that it is, inherently, a wealthy foible – is to fall for one of the most reductive and philistine falsehoods. A falsehood spectacularly exposed by the supremely socialist 1945 Labour Government.

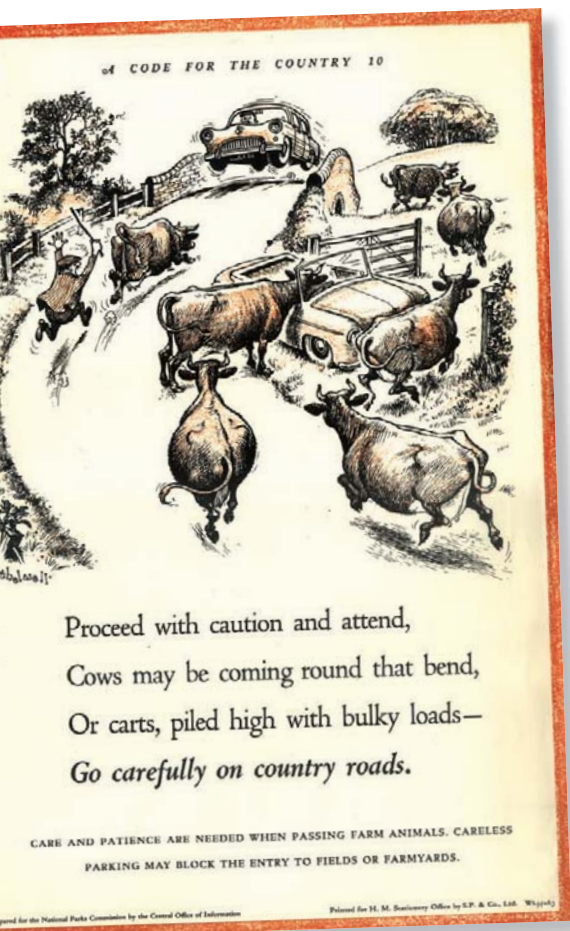
Prior to World War II, the practical successes of CPRE were in truth quite limited. The combination of wartime patriotism and a cross-party belief in the virtue of planning changed all that. During the conflict CPRE was heavily involved in policy inquiries which shifted the discourse about land management from a concentration on individual property rights to questions of collective heritage. At the same time, images of a pastoral England were central to home-front propaganda. Added to this was the personal factor that many Cabinet ministers had a background in the country pursuits culture of the 1930s. Labour Chancellor Hugh Dalton was nicknamed 'the Red Rambler' on account of his presidency of the Ramblers' Association.

The result was a welter of legislation dedicated to preserving the character of rural England and preventing the planning mistakes of the inter-war years. The pinnacle was the *Town and Country Planning Act 1947* which remains an incredible legislative monument to the work of CPRE. A statutory obligation now existed for comprehensive development plans as opposed to *laissez-faire* sprawl.



Furthermore, the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* delivered CPRE's twenty year long demand for protected National Parks along with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

But CPRE's work was by no means done. The governing ethos remained growth at any cost as government ministers combined with the free market to unpick planning restrictions. The 'Green Belt' circular of 1955 marked a bright spot amidst the Keynesian dash for motorways (such as the 1957 M1), industrial estates, and city centre demolitions conjoined with out-of-town redevelopments. Moreover, a new threat had emerged within the countryside itself. ➤



One of several Norman Thelwell illustrated posters printed to publicise *A Code for the Country* in the 1950s.

Much of the suburban growth of the inter-war years had been driven by collapsing agricultural prices and the abandonment of land due to international competition. In the post-war years the situation reversed as British agriculture started to enjoy its boom decades of subsidy and protection. A revolution in agricultural technology further spurred production and before long the mechanized, urban ethos was as much a product of the farm as the factory. Pesticides, tractors and guaranteed profits turned fields into prairies and ensured the elimination of meadows, grasslands, and hedgerows overnight. What dwindled rapidly alongside them were the farmland birds of England as well as ancient agricultural signifiers of this island's history.

Better late than never, CPRE launched its Hedgerow Campaign in 1970 to chart their destruction and demand a system of preservation orders. In doing so, the Council (now renamed the Council for the *Protection* of Rural England) surfed the back of the environmental movement launched by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. While the original Council had boasted some of the leading botanists and naturalists of the day, questions of design and aesthetics had often overridden environmental arguments. All that changed as CPRE battled the Manchester Water Order threatening the ecology of Ullswater and Windermere in the Lake District. ➤

1960s



1960 CPRE fought and won a case against 5,000 acres of ironstone workings in Oxfordshire.

1961 The Government asked local authorities to survey remaining unspoilt coastline as requested by CPRE. • CPRE help secure an agreement between landowners and the Forestry Commission to control afforestation in National Parks.

1963 CPRE won its battle to save the Berkshire Downs from desecration by the proposed M4.

1964 A CPRE critique of the South East Study urged stronger inducements for growth in other regions and attacked the weakening of Green Belt policies.

1965 The Inquiry into the Manchester Water Order affecting Ullswater (above right) and Windermere in the Lake District modified the plans to cause less damage, as urged by CPRE.



1968 CPRE criticised standardised road signs in the countryside. The Ministry of Transport introduced a more flexible approach. • The Government passes *The Countryside Act* to cover rural areas beyond National Parks. CPRE successfully moved an amendment to ensure that conservation, rather than the encouragement of recreation was the main focus of the Act and the new Countryside Commission.

1969 CPRE's name was changed to the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

New towns sprung up on open countryside – Peterlee, Durham (above left).



1970 CPRE's hedgerow campaign began. A CPRE working party investigating the rate of hedgerow loss and damage (above) recommended the conservation of historic hedges and hedgerow preservation orders.



1971 CPRE opposed Lee Moor (Devon) china clay proposals for the biggest hole in Britain. The plan was approved but tipping space and the life of the workings was limited (above right).

1974 The Government agreed to increased public participation in decisions on commercial forestry plantations, but rejected CPRE's request for planning control over new planting.

- CPRE help found the European Environmental Bureau to enable further environmental representations to the EEC, and immediately press for funds to be made available for landscape conservation schemes.

1972 CPRE organised direct representations to the European Economic Community and defeated proposals to increase lorry weight limits – the first such campaign by a British amenity society.

1977 CPRE brought the problem of ploughing of Exmoor's wildlife-rich, characteristic moorlands to national notice. Lord Porchester's official study vindicated CPRE's arguments.

1978 CPRE helped defeat Southern Water Authority's drainage scheme for Amberley Wild Brooks in West Sussex, demonstrating serious defects in the cost-benefit analysis used to justify a grant from the Ministry of Agriculture to drain this wetland.

1970s

Rapidly growing traffic clogged up country town roads (left). The solution for congestion was ever-more road building, leading to highly damaging schemes such as the M3 Winchester by-pass at Twyford Down in the 1990s (right).

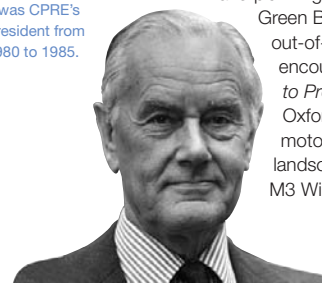


The environmental agenda only accelerated during the 1970s as the Council helped defeat Southern Water Authority's highly damaging drainage scheme for Amberley Wild Brooks in West Sussex as well as the attempt to convert Halvergate Marshes in the Norfolk Broads to arable production. In doing so, CPRE marked its transformation from an establishment lobbying body reliant upon friends in high places to a more publicity-driven environmental pressure group.

But while the public were listening, the politicians were not. The 1980s marked a shift back towards some of the worst *laissez-faire* planning policies of the 1930s.

Green Belt rules were relaxed, out-of-town shopping centres encouraged, and so-called *Roads to Prosperity* scythed through the Oxfordshire countryside (the M40 motorway extension) and historic landscape of Twyford Down (the M3 Winchester bypass). Between

Sir Colin Buchanan, civil servant, planner and author of the Government's seminal report *Traffic in Towns* – published in 1963 – was CPRE's President from 1980 to 1985.



1980 and 2000 more open land vanished under development as a percentage of the whole than at any time in the 20th century. The world of Priestley had returned with a new generation of superstores, by-passes, and out-of-town mega-plexes. Valiantly, CPRE led a guerilla campaign against deregulation ideologues and won some notable victories on road routes, electricity and water privatisation, and the introduction of the long fought for Environmental Impact Assessments for major proposed developments.

Despite these sporadic successes, there were more powerful social and economic forces at work. The last third of the twentieth century saw the beginnings of the great counter-urbanisation of Britain. Hundreds of thousands fled Britain's cities as the end of industry and Empire gutted their commercial base. They fled to suburbia, exurbia and the edge cities spilling into the countryside suitably distant from the deserted inner cities. The Handsworth and Toxteth riots of the mid-1980s were only the most visible responses to an urban culture in crisis.

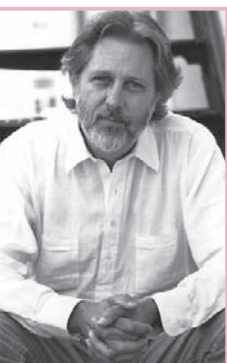
To its credit, CPRE had by the early 1990s positioned itself at the forefront of these urban debates. Declining, sprawling, cities with no sense of civic pride or municipal cohesion were a dangerous enemy of the countryside. The Council's important pamphlet on *Urban Footprints* made the ecological case for sensitive civic regeneration. Its support for New Urbanist thinking and assault upon the car culture helped to provide the political context for the Government's 1995 retreat on out-of-town shopping centres as well as more recent guidance on higher density design for new housing and the landmark PPG3 planning policy promoting brownfield, mixed-use development. ➤

Constraining the building of new homes in the countryside remained a CPRE preoccupation through the post war years.



But just as the depredations of *laissez-faire* planning seemed to be coming under control, CPRE (since 2003 a *Campaign* rather than Council) found itself battling the old enemy of unsustainable statist planning. Current schemes for a massive expansion of airports and house-building, particularly in the greater South East of England, have rightly been questioned by CPRE. The Treasury-commissioned 2004 Barker Report demanded a 'step change' in house-building with the rate of land release for new homes predicated upon the local level of house prices. By contrast, CPRE stressed the need for affordable homes for local people and the necessity of developers providing proper community services rather than dumped-down market houses in commuter-belt sprawl. At the close of 2005 the Government declared it wanted housebuilding rates in England to rise to 200,000 new homes a year – a level last sustained a quarter century ago – but at least it rejected the Barker mechanism of linking local land release to house prices.

As well as questioning the arithmetic of Barker's analysis – notably the claim that there had been a long-term undersupply of new homes for sale – CPRE also opposed the Review because of the cumulative consequences of rampant housebuilding on the rural environment. As such, this reflected a shift towards campaigning over more intangible, 'quality of life' issues. The effects of noise, visual clutter and above all light pollution were progressively destroying the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England. A rash of road signage, the hum of by-passes and motorways, and the blinding of the night sky by careless, often needless outdoor lighting were undermining the distinctive qualities of country life. CPRE further developed this approach by working with the National Trust to stress the importance of power of place within local communities: the need to preserve those signifiers of land, history and culture within the urban and rural environment which help people to understand their heritage and identity in an ever-more transient and clone town Britain. ➤



Leading film producer David Puttnam was CPRE's President from 1985 to 1992.

1980 CPRE led the campaign to improve the new Government's *Wildlife and Countryside Bill*.

1981 CPRE campaigned against a grant-aid scheme to convert Halvergate Marshes in the Norfolk Broads to arable production – it became a *cause celebre* and led directly to the establishment of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme which subsidised wildlife and landscape-friendly farming.

1982 CPRE objected to the proposed M40 motorway extension between Oxford and Birmingham (below), highlighting the threat to unspoilt countryside while presenting detailed and realistic alternatives.

1983 CPRE demonstrated more cost-effective ways of meeting the nation's electricity needs without damaging the countryside in evidence to the Sizewell B nuclear power station inquiry (top right).



1984 CPRE's national Green Belt campaign resulted in the Government withdrawing two damaging draft circulars on *Green Belts* and *Land for Housing*.

1985 In a campaign to reform the EC's Agricultural Structures Directive, CPRE stopped funding for many damaging agricultural activities and secured the first 'green' farm payments. The designation of the North Pennines as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty fulfilled CPRE work initiated in 1927 (the Pennines, right).

1986 CPRE won a major public inquiry into proposals for a new settlement at Tillingham Hall, in the Essex Green Belt, abating the threat of a spate of such schemes.

1987 CPRE obtained a decisive legal Opinion showing how the Government's proposals for water privatisation were inconsistent with EC policy. This resulted in the withdrawal and reframing of the Government's plans, and the establishment of the National Rivers Authority.

1988 As urged by CPRE and others, the Chancellor of the Exchequer scrapped tax incentives favouring blanket conifer plantations in scenic areas. New policies ruled out fresh conifer planting in most of the English uplands – one of CPRE's earliest campaign goals.

1989 The Government announced a straw and stubble burning ban from 1992, following a CPRE campaign which had started in 1983.



1980s

1990 The Government's first-ever Environment White Paper accepted the case for statutory hedgerow protection – 20 years after CPRE's campaign was launched.

1991 *The Planning and Compensation Act 1991* accepted CPRE's view that more weight should be given to agreed local planning policies; and required country-wide coverage of county structure and district-wide local plans – ending the Government's threat to abolish county structure plans.



1992 Official Planning Guidance incorporated the principle of sustainable development for the first time, in line with CPRE submissions. • Following the 1989 *Roads White Paper* proposing record road-building, CPRE's transport campaign gained wide support.

1994 In landmark new planning guidance, the Government endorsed the role of the planning system in helping reduce car dependence and the need to travel. • CPRE's *Urban Footprints* campaign highlighted the crucial relationship between town and country and the benefits to be won for both from sensitive urban regeneration.

1995 Legislation to protect hedgerows and give independence to National Parks – both longstanding CPRE campaigns – was



passed in *The Environment Act 1995*. • CPRE published pioneering *Tranquillity Maps* (above) showing how tranquil areas where people could 'get away from it all' had been shattered by new development and increased traffic in just thirty years.

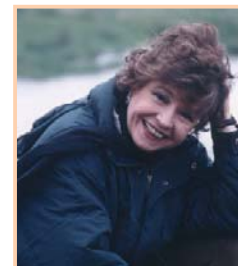
1996 New planning guidance curbs the spread of out-of-town shopping development (below) and encourages town centre development. • CPRE launched its campaign against the rising tide of clutter in rural areas – from telecommunications masts to burgeoning roadside tourist signs.



1998 Government responds to years of CPRE campaigning with stricter planning controls on opencast coal mining. • CPRE steps up its campaigning for an urban renaissance with a leaflet on the benefits of city living – *Going to Town* – and a landmark report on the mass movement of people out of our largest towns and cities – *Urban Exodus*.

1999 CPRE launches its website • Lord Rogers' Government-appointed Urban Task Force, which had substantial CPRE input, publishes its influential report on achieving an urban renaissance – which would help protect the countryside. • Government announces two new National Parks for the South Downs and the New Forest.

1990s



Actress Prunella Scales (above) was CPRE's President from 1997 to 2002. She was preceded by the broadcaster and author Jonathan Dimbleby, 1992 to 1997 (far right).

Whose icon is it, anyway? Stonehenge, Wiltshire, (top right) heavily compromised by busy roads. How people identify with the countryside is becoming increasingly important for CPRE.

Extending that sense of distinctiveness to economic activity in rural areas remained an equal priority. Through out the 1980s and 1990s, CPRE kept up the pressure on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to build in biodiversity and sustainable farming into its subsidy structure. Today, the future of farming goes right to the heart of debates about the countryside. The CAP Single Farm Payments system and Environmental Stewardship scheme has finally recognised the ecological case for countryside management.

But more fundamental issues about the viability of UK farming within a global trade system and the significance of food production relative to the leisure and landscape values of the countryside (seen to such dramatic effect during the foot and mouth crisis) require deeper analysis. And in an era of climate change, big questions will need to be asked once more about the importance of long-term, national food security – and what that implies for farmland. Thus far CPRE has rightly stressed the importance of niche agriculture production – environmentally-sensitive, regional, value-added – but whether that constitutes a credible future for the sector as a whole remains uncertain.

This discussion points to more fundamental questions for today's CPRE. In a modern multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Britain, it is no longer instinctively the case that the country is England and England is the country. People's identities are more diffuse, layered and often trans-global. Reaching out to a predominantly urban generation more familiar with the beaches of Ibiza than the water meadows of



the Wye Valley is a difficult challenge when it comes to nurturing a constituency for conservation. At the same time, England's rolling countryside and market towns offer an ever more attractive destination for a wealthy middle class let down by urban schools and seduced by the pastiche rural life on offer in Sunday supplements and 'Escape to the Country' TV shows. All of this racks up rural house prices, puts development pressure on greenfields and leads to new socio-economic stresses within the countryside.

As such, CPRE faces new strategic challenges. It needs confidently to champion its rural base, but for influence's sake cannot afford to be regarded by Government Ministers as the cultural kin of the Countryside Alliance. With an area the size of Southampton disappearing under concrete each and every year, CPRE should be proud on occasion to be counted as a NIMBY. But it would be betraying its founding mission and making a strategic blunder by being labelled a BANANA – Build Absolutely Nothing ANYwhere At all. >





Military historian and Fleet Street editor Sir Max Hastings (top), CPRE's President from 2002.

CPRE's *Night blight!* campaign (above) used dramatic maps to demonstrate the rapid spread of light pollution across the land, blotting out our view of the stars.

Windfarms (top right) can reduce emissions of climate-changing greenhouse gases, but they can also have a major impact on rural landscapes.

CPRE has been campaigning for Quiet Lanes, designed to pay special attention to the needs of walkers, cyclists and horse riders (right).



planning policy. Yet some technologies which, according to their proponents, are strongly associated with sustainable development can in themselves pose challenges to a body trying to conserve the countryside – onshore wind farms are perhaps the most obvious example.

But more fundamentally, CPRE has the chance to channel the growing public appetite for history and heritage into their campaign to promote and protect rural England. The collapse of so many traditional social identifiers in modern Britain – class, religion, cohesive labour markets – has led to ever greater numbers bereft of a sense of belonging in time and place. Increasingly, people have turned to genealogical and local historical research to fill that void. Internet chat-rooms and county record offices are full of such history hunters. Coupled with this is a growing popular interest in design, locality and the quality of place. But one of the most compelling elements of our heritage is the countryside: its landscapes, landmarks, artefacts, wildlife and wilderness which all connect to deeper rhythms within our history. ➤

2000s



2000 After years of CPRE campaigning, new official planning policies on housing mark a radical shift away from low density sprawl and towards using previously developed 'brownfield' land for new homes before greenfield sites are built over. • The Government relents on proposals to relax controls over rural advertising hoardings after strong CPRE protest.

2001 CPRE develops its campaigning for local foods (top right) stressing the advantages of local, speciality foods to farmers, consumers and the countryside. • Our critique of the Government's *Ten Year Plan for Transport* finds £60 billion of planned roads expenditure (bottom right) will bring little or no reduction in journey times and congestion because of traffic growth.

2002 CPRE opens a major campaign against a massive proposed expansion in airports across England. • We launch another against a Government proposal for planning system reform

which would end the right to question, at public inquiry, the need for major infrastructure projects. When *The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill* is published this proposal is dropped.

2003 CPRE's name changes to the Campaign to Protect Rural England. • We step up our campaigning to save dark, star-filled night skies by publishing pioneering maps showing how light pollution is spreading rapidly across England. • CPRE also publishes its *Guide to Quiet Lanes*, helping campaigners save country roads from fast-growing traffic. • The Government ignores massed environmental campaigning and supports rapid expansion of airports and flying.

2004 A CPRE survey of more than 100 small rural towns finds many are suffering from low-quality development, traffic congestion and declining high streets. • After strong

campaigning by CPRE and others, the Government drops plans to turn the A303 into a dual carriageway road through the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Somerset. • *The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act* abolishes county structure plans, but retains a statutory role for county councils in strategic planning.

2005 CPRE campaigns, with some success, to ensure the countryside and environment are protected in the face of intense Government pressure for a very large increase in building of homes for sale. • We launch *Your Countryside, Your Choice* – a polemic warning of the shape of things to come if current damaging trends are not tackled; it receives massive media coverage.



• Our major campaign for Green Belts 50 years on from them becoming Government policy, points out they are still working, still backed by the public – but also under threat from a new tide of development. • CPRE now has over 57,000 individual supporters. And more than 3,000 parish councils and local groups are also CPRE members, together representing thousands more people who care for their countryside.



It was that idea of natural and human heritage combined which first inspired the founders of CPRE some 80 years ago. Today, that modern connection to a past constitutes a decisive calling-card for CPRE. For as the assault on the English countryside continues – with urban sprawl replacing ribbon development; advertising hoardings reappearing alongside motorways; Green Belts under threat; and an inter-war style avalanche of house-building looming – the mission and mandate of those pioneering, progressive preservationists remains more compelling than ever.

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Endnotes

1. The composer was a Vice President of CPRE Herefordshire from its inauguration in 1931 until his death in 1934.
2. Frank Trentmann, *Civilization and Its Discontents: English Neo-Romanticism and the Transformation of Anti-Modernism in Twentieth-Century Western Culture*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 29, No. 4, October 1994
3. Lord Crawford's BBC Broadcast Appeal, 5 August 1928
4. Anthony Bertram, *Design*, Penguin, 1938, p. 93
5. Neville Chamberlain was Minister of Health in 1926 and his portfolio covered housing, local government and planning. He spoke warmly in favour of CPRE's aims at the organisation's inaugural meeting in December, 1926 and remained a member for the rest of his life.

The North Tyne flowing through the Northumberland National Park.
Simon Fraser / Northumberland National Park Authority

