

Country lives

Exploring the
English countryside
from 1800

A rural idyll?

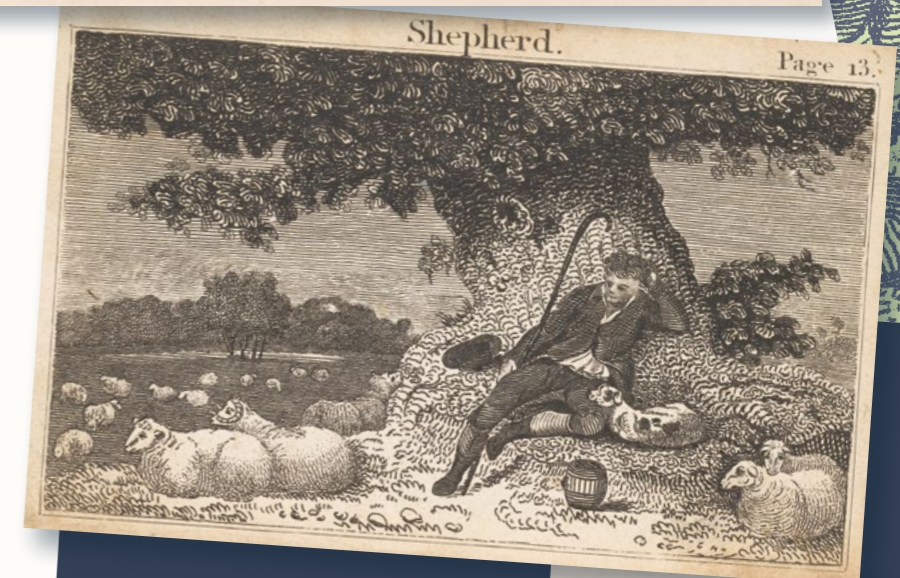
The English countryside has long been part of the cultural imagination, with many artists and writers inspired by rural scenes.

Although England was becoming increasingly urbanised and industrialised, the idea of Englishness remained rural. The rural idyll, which romanticised the countryside and focused on idealised features, was a cultural response to problems in urban society. Qualities such as beauty, stability and morality were attached to the countryside. Community, country cottages, children playing, animals and landed estates were frequently shown. The changing seasons were also a popular theme. Such imagery often appealed to an urban audience regardless of whether it was real or imagined.

Representations of the countryside reflected changes in society and the preoccupations of those creating them. Images were often a mixture of reality and imagination. They reflected the complex relationship people had with the countryside. This was a time of unrest, poverty and hard work, with some artists and writers depicting the harsher realities of rural life. However, even rural poverty could be romanticised.



Above: Image from Thomas Miller, *The Country Year Book. Spring and Summer* (1847). University of Nottingham, Briggs Collection LT210.S /M4



From top: 'Cumber Park' from F.O. Morris (ed), *A series of picturesque views of the noblemen and gentlemen of Great Britain and Ireland*, volume 2 (1866-1880). University of Nottingham, Special Collection Oversize DA 660.S4

Image from Mary Elliott, *Rural employments, or, A peep into village concerns* (1820). University of Nottingham, Briggs Collection LT210.S /E5

Right: Image from album of original sketches and proofs from Kate Greenaway (1933). University of Nottingham, Special Collection Over.X NC242.G7



Watercolour painting of 'The Stick Gatherer'. University of Nottingham, D.H. Lawrence Collection, La Ac 1/2/2



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