

Country lives

Exploring the
English countryside
from 1800

The healthy countryside?

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the countryside was often thought of as a healthy place. However, this could mask the realities for those living and working there.

The health-giving properties of the countryside were often marketed for urban audiences. Stark contrasts were drawn between town and country, with fresh air, robust health and lower death rates all associated with the countryside. People visited to escape overcrowded and polluted towns and recover from illness. Spas and hydropathic institutions offered specialist water treatments catering for different audiences.

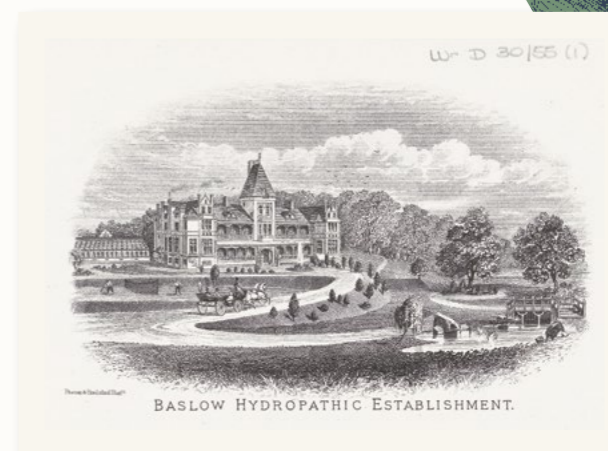
The Baslow Hydropathic Establishment, founded by Sheffield businessman Henry Pawson as a competitor for the spa towns of Matlock and Buxton, was opened in 1881. Descriptions emphasised its location, noting that Baslow was surrounded by 'natural charms' making it 'equally attractive to the tourist in search of the picturesque

and to the invalid requiring a change'. References were also made to the 'salubrious and invigorating air'. By the end of the nineteenth century, hydro breaks had become fashionable with visitors coming not only for treatment but to enjoy the food, entertainment, and facilities.

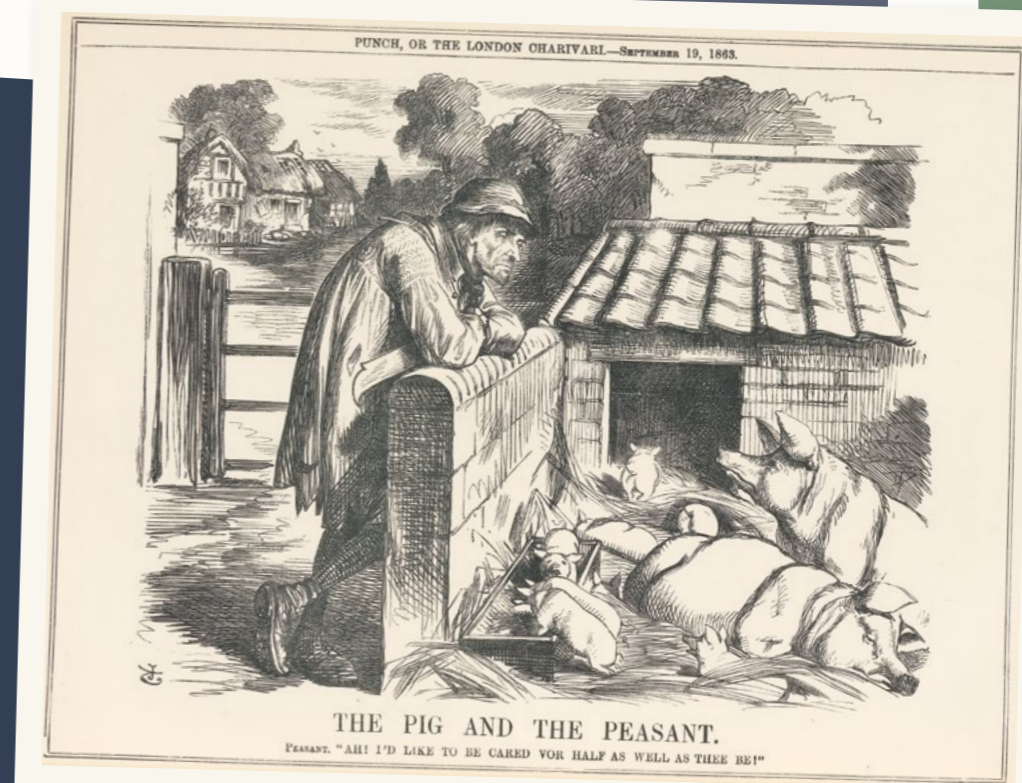
Life in the countryside was not always healthy for those living and working in it. Social investigators revealed the extent of poverty, poor housing and illness and disease. Although landowners sometimes built model cottages, many labourers lived in overcrowded, damp and poorly ventilated properties. It was even argued that the livestock were better housed than some labourers!



Detailed Drawings and Specification, Explanatory of the Design for a Labourer's Cottage by T.C. Hine (1848). University of Nottingham, Papers of Thomas Chambers Hine, MS 575/3



Above: Headed notepaper of Baslow Hydropathic Establishment, 1885. University of Nottingham, Papers of Edward M. Wrench, Wr D 30/55



Cartoon from Punch, 19 December 1863. University of Nottingham, Special Collection Periodicals



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