

## Reporting an Unsettled Countryside: The News Media and Rural Protests in Britain

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### Abstract

Most analyses of the role of the media in shaping and reproducing popular discourses of rurality have focused on film, television drama and literature. Comparatively little attention has been directed towards the role of the news media in framing perceptions of contemporary rural issues through reportage and commentary. This paper examines the engagement of the news media with a series of rural protests that developed in Britain between 1997 and 2007 around issues such as hunting and farm incomes. The news media had been complicit in maintaining the previous discursive construct of the countryside as a settled and almost apolitical space, but the emergence of major rural protests forced a shift in the representation of rural life. News coverage of rural issues and rural protests increased with the adoption of a new discourse of the "unsettled countryside". In adjusting to shifting news values, the news media initially bought and reproduced the frames promoted by the major rural campaign group, the Countryside Alliance, including tropes of the "countryside in crisis", the "countryside comes to town" and the "countryside speaks out for liberty". Over time, however, a more complex web of representations developed as the perspectives adopted by different media outlets diverged, informed by political ideology. As such, it is argued that the news media played a key role not only in mediating public reception of rural protests, and thus modulating their political significance, but also in framing the rural protests for participants within the rural community, and as such contributing to the mobilisation of a politicised rural identity and an active rural citizenship.

**Keywords:** News reporting, rural protest, discourse, rurality, Britain

## Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, the countryside became big news in Britain. For decades, rural news and countryside issues had occupied a marginal position – if any – in the national news media. Stories about farming and agricultural policy, hunting and field sports, or the challenges faced by rural communities, were largely the preserve of the specialist farming press, regional newspapers and field sports magazines. Only occasionally did stories of rural conflicts or politics infiltrate into the mainstream national media, usually as novelty items, positioned as curious exceptions to the prevailing discourse that the countryside was a somehow "apolitical" space (see Woods 2005). To be taken seriously, rural news stories had to transcend their rural setting, latching on to wider concerns about the environment (as in the case of anti-roads protests) or food safety (as in scares over salmonella and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)).

Things changed in the summer of 1997. That July, over 120,000 pro-hunting supporters rallied in London, and rural politics were suddenly taken seriously. Through the next decade, British "broadsheet" newspapers frequently carried news reports, feature articles and commentary pieces following the political struggles over hunting, the future of farming, and major developments such as windfarm construction, as well as other issues affecting rural communities. At the peak of the trend in 2002, the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper carried nearly 100 articles concerning rural protests or political issues.<sup>1</sup>

The most prolific coverage concerned the prospect of a ban on hunting wild mammals with hounds following the Labour election landslide in 1997. Starting with the Countryside Rally in July 1997, opponents of a ban, led by the Countryside Alliance, organised a number of high profile demonstrations over the next seven years, including two large marches in London, and a plethora of smaller protest events and campaigns around the country. These protests received substantial media coverage, with editorial space also devoted to the parliamentary debates on hunting and to tensions over the issue within the Labour government (see Woods 2008a). The passing of the Hunting Act in November 2004, and the introduction of the resulting ban in February 2005, were both heavily covered; and many newspapers have continued to periodically publish articles charting the impact of the ban and the attempts of hunts to operate within the law.

Moreover, once the concept of the "countryside in crisis" had been established, the news media began to pick up other stories that corresponded with this theme. Articles appeared on the fluctuating fortunes of farming and about localised conflicts over windfarm developments, house-building, new supermarkets and the closure of schools and post offices, all presented as further tales from an unsettled countryside.

This explosion of coverage of rural politics in part reflected the proliferation of rural protest events that occurred in Britain in the decade since 1997. The pro-

hunting Countryside Rally, Countryside March and Liberty and Livelihood March were major political events involving an unprecedented mobilisation of a traditionally conservative rural constituency. Protests by farmers at ports in December 1997 were similarly unusual, and when farmers later blockaded oil depots in September 2000 they nearly starved the country of fuel and came close to bringing down the government (Woods 2005). The Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic in 2001, meanwhile, cast a shadow far beyond the farming community as exclusion zones were established, public rights of way suspended, tourist attractions closed and events cancelled.

However, it can be argued that the news media did not simply report these events, but that they also played a significant role in creating and reproducing them. Without mainstream national news coverage, the pro-hunting protests would never have mobilised the number of participants that they did, and would not have had the significant political impact that they did. The media hence became complicit in reproducing the interpretative frames of the countryside lobby, and in so doing they helped to reshape popular and political discourses of rurality in Britain.

This paper examines the engagement of the British news media, and in particular national "broadsheet" newspapers, with the rural protest movement in Britain and investigates its role in the frame alignment of rural protest. It also identifies the subsequent emergence of frame dissonance, as the stance of different newspapers began to diverge according to ideological position and readership, and as the government struggled to assert its own alternative political construction of the rural. The paper draws on research funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, including interviews with key activists in the rural protest movement, a survey of Countryside Alliance members in four districts, and analysis of media coverage.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Construction of Rural News**

The role of the media in producing and reproducing discourses of rurality is well established in rural studies. With most people in countries such as Britain living in urban areas, information and impressions garnered from the media are influential in shaping individuals' perceptions of the countryside, its people and its problems. Even for rural residents, messages received through the media can be important in reinforcing, explaining or challenging personal experiences, thus helping to convert individual positionality into collective identity.

Television dramas and films are particularly influential, with their capacity to present stylised representations of rural life to large and diverse audiences (Bell 2006; Phillips 2008; Phillips et al. 2001). The fictionalised countryside they portray tends towards one of two polar, stylised caricatures. In some cases media discourses draw on the historic association of rurality with wilderness to present

the rural as an anti-idyll: an isolated, insular, desolate, backward and dangerous place (Bell 1997). More commonly, however, the countryside is portrayed through the prism of the "rural idyll": as a safe, comfortable, tranquil, unhurried and untroubled place, where life proceeds in harmony with nature, free from the hustle, bustle and stresses of city living. The prevalence of the rural idyll myth in media representations has had a material impact in stimulating the growth of rural tourism and counterurbanisation and informing the expectations of visitors and migrants; in disguising the existence of rural poverty and class conflict; and in promoting benign and anthropomorphic representations of animals and nature that have helped to shape public opinion on issues such as farming, animal welfare and hunting.

Whilst studies have analysed representations of rurality in the entertainment media, far less attention has been directed toward the news media. To some degree, this bias has reflected the relatively limited coverage of rural issues in the mainstream print and broadcast news media. One study in the United States, for example, found that network news programmes on the three major television networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) featured only 48 rural-themed stories in 2004, and that only 481 rural-themed stories appeared in seven national newspapers and magazines (including the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Time*) in the same year (Harper 2005). Moreover, only 3 per cent of these stories mentioned farming, and only 1 per cent directly concerned agriculture. The large majority focused on the perceived threat to rural landscapes from urban expansion, and thus presented rural America from a nostalgic perspective informed by the rural idyll (ibid.).

Indeed, the relative absence of rural news not only corresponds with the rural idyll myth, but helps to reproduce it – the countryside being implicitly constructed as *a place where nothing happens*. As Bunce (2003) observes, rural news stories frequently only break through into the mainstream media when they concern events that appear to threaten or disrupt the rural idyll – disease, such as an *E.coli* outbreak (in Bunce's example), or the BSE or Foot and Mouth epidemics in Britain; the incursions of new age travellers, environmental protesters, or music festivals; or village political disputes initiated by the obduracy of urban incomers. In reporting such events as exceptions and anomalies, the news media reinforces the imagined normality of the rural idyll.

At the same time, however, elements of the media with a stronger tie to rural areas – regional newspapers and the farming press, for example – have also latched on to the rural idyll as a means of promoting a positive image of rural life (see for example, Hidle et al. 2006, on the portrayal of the rural "good life" in the Norwegian *Nationen* newspaper). Yet, changing perspectives informed by the rural idyll within the rural population, particularly those of in-migrants, have also presented a challenge to rural regional newspapers that have traditionally championed primary industries such as farming, forestry and mining. Newspapers have been forced to reflect the increasingly complex web of opinions in rural society,

but at the cost of being able to present a coherent platform of regional interests to external audiences (MacDonald 2004).

The emergence of a new "politics of the rural" as a consequence of rural restructuring, in which the major foci of conflict concern the meaning and regulation of rurality (Woods 2003), has also begun to chip away at the neglect of rural coverage in the mainstream news media. Initially picked up as novelty items, the politics of the rural has been taken more seriously when it assumed significance for national politics or for urban populations. In Lithuania, for example, coverage of rural issues fluctuated with political interests during the post-Communist transition. As Juska (2007) shows, during the 1990s the pro-reform newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas* significantly increased its coverage of rural stories, but did so in a manner that drew on urban prejudices about rural society and presented rural populations as scapegoats for the spatially uneven outcomes of liberal economic reform. However, after 2000, as Lithuania began to prepare for entry to the European Union, with the prospect of significant investment in rural development, the newspaper adopted a more positive tone, emphasizing the potential for rural entrepreneurship. As such, *Lietuvos Rytas* acted as a conduit for rural news to the urban population and thus helped to produce and reproduce the shifting discourses of rurality in Lithuanian political debate.

### **The British News Media and the Countryside**

Britain has a distinctly centralised news media, with ten London-based national titles accounting for three-quarters of all daily newspaper sales. These include both mass-circulation tabloids, with an emphasis on entertainment news and sensationalist content, and more serious "broadsheets" with more extensive political coverage (from divergent standpoints) but more limited sales (Table 1). As table 2 indicates, there are notable differences in the geographical distribution of these titles. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* have a disproportionately large readership in significantly rural regions, whilst the readership of the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Times* is more strongly urban. Tabloid newspapers, however, are the largest selling titles in both rural and urban regions.<sup>3</sup>

Reflecting these patterns, Petrie and Wainwright (2008) observe that, "in very recent times, the *Guardian* was something of a rarity in many parts of the English countryside. A copy or two in the village store would be overshadowed by a pile of the shires' apparently preferred choice of reading, the *Daily Telegraph*" (vii). Petrie and Wainwright go on to note that the circulation of the *Guardian* has broadened with the recomposition of the rural population, but their initial observation continues to hold true for rural residents engaged in traditional pursuits such as farming, hunting and shooting, who have formed the bedrock of the countryside protest movement. Our survey of Countryside Alliance members in four districts of England and Wales found that half read the *Daily Telegraph*. Only one per cent apiece read the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, and only three per cent

read one of the mass-circulation tabloids (Table 3). Specialist farming, hunting and field sports publications were also widely read within this community, with two-fifths of survey respondents reading *Horse and Hound* magazine, and a third *The Field* magazine (Table 4). As such, activists in the rural protest movement largely received news from a fairly narrow section of the print media which broadly shared common conservative values.

Yet, at the time of the start of the rural protest movement in the late 1990s, the rural-urban differences in newspaper readership were not prominently reflected in the coverage of rural issues by the national titles. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Times* may have carried more rural stories than the *Guardian* or the *Independent*, but they generally shared the same idyllic perception of the countryside as an essentially apolitical space, as was reflected in their news-gathering structures. The *Daily Telegraph* employed an "agricultural editor", but its coverage of rural issues as the protests gained momentum was led by its "environment editor". Reports on rural issues and protests in the *Guardian* and the *Independent* similarly have tended to be covered by either environment reporters or regionally-based reporters. Only the *Times* has a formally designated "countryside editor", a position created following the mobilisation of the rural protest movement, and combined by its first incumbent with the post of consumer editor.

Similarly, whilst all the "broadsheet" newspapers have carried regular "countryside" features, such as the *Guardian's* long-running "country diary", these have tended to focus on nature, landscape, rural property and recreation, and have only rarely acknowledged social and political concerns. Thus, the positioning and presentation of "countryside" features and articles in the British national press has conventionally reinforced the rural idyll discourse. A recent anthology of articles on the countryside from the *Guardian* records examples of the newspaper reporting political stories from an anti-corn-law meeting in 1843, through mass trespasses on private land in the 1930s, to farmers' protests in the 1970s, but these are a minority alongside articles on country walks, wildlife, rural customs, angling, agricultural shows, and landscape conservation, as well as occasional reports on social and economic changes in agriculture (Petrie and Wainwright 2008). Only in the selected articles from the last twenty years does coverage of a politicised countryside become more apparent.

## **Framing Rural Protests**

The stimulus for the mobilisation of the contemporary rural protest movement in Britain was the Labour election victory in 1997. The hunting of foxes and deer with hounds had been a controversial issue for over a century, with repeated unsuccessful attempts to introduce a ban. The anti-hunting majority in the new parliament signalled a clear opportunity for animal rights campaigners to finally achieve this ambition (Woods 2008a). With hunting popularly perceived as an



out-dated, elitist and arguably cruel sport, hunting supporters realised that they risked being isolated and overwhelmed in a debate. To have any chance of resisting a ban, hunting supporters needed to turn public opinion, and to turn public opinion they needed to capture the attention of the news media.

The media, however, had shown little interest in promoting the pro-hunting case during previous attempts at legislation. The most recent attempt, in 1995, had prompted debates on television and comment pieces in newspapers, as well as some coverage of regional rallies in support of hunting. Yet, as George (1999) observed, “there had been no visible presence in London while the Bill was being debated, and although the Rallies had attracted considerable local press and some fair coverage in the nationals, the cheering antis outside the House and the anti-hunting barge on the Thames dominated Friday night’s television news” (81).

The scale of the challenge was brought home to the individual recruited by the British Field Sports Society (BFSS) to coordinate the pro-hunting campaign, Simon Clarke, at an anti-gun-control rally in London in February 1997. As Hart-Davis (1997) reports, Clarke was enthused by the atmosphere of demonstration, attended by 22,000 protesters, yet “he was dismayed to find that the demonstration received minimal press coverage: tiny, single-column reports in the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, and a little bit more in the *Daily Mail*” (4).

The response of the pro-hunting lobby was two-fold. On the one hand, the lobby moved to increase its organisational capacity. The BFSS recruited additional staff with campaigning and logistical expertise, and joined with two smaller organisations in a new coalition, the Countryside Alliance. Volunteers were also engaged in helping to organise two major demonstrations in London, the Countryside Rally in July 1997 (attended by 127,000 people) and the Countryside March in March 1998 (attended by 250,000), as well as a plethora of supporting initiatives such as long-distance marches and beacons. Central to this organisational strategy was the strengthening of its media work. Shortly after the failed 1995 Hunting Bill, the BFSS expanded and professionalised its press team. Among the initiatives of the new Chief Press Officer, Janet George, was establishing contacts with the tabloid and left-leaning broadsheet press, which had not existed previously (George 1999). Relations with the media were used to refute anti-hunting claims, promote positive pro-hunting stories, and build the interest of the news media in the Countryside Alliance’s planned protests. The success of this strategy is demonstrated in George’s own account of the Countryside Rally:

The day of the Rally was fine and the day started with the usual dash around the studios, before I headed up to Hyde Park for a live interview with Michael Foster MP [sponsor of the anti-hunting legislation]. Then it was back to the VIP area where press (and VIPs) were queuing for their passes. We had to grab extra hands to cope with the numbers and eventually ran out of passes and press packs when more than 500 journalists had been dealt with. While staff in the press area juggled interviews, found “celebs” for journalists (and journalists for celebs) Alison Hawes spent most of the day doing the studio circuit. When the media report arrived, it was clear that staff and volunteers had participated in more than 300 radio and television inter-

views in the UK on the day – with dozens more for overseas radio and television crews and a multitude of journalists. (George 1999: 125)

At the same time, these organisational developments were entwined with and reliant on a parallel discursive strategy, aimed at re-framing the hunting debate and shifting media, public and political perceptions of the contemporary countryside. In the language of social movement theory, the discursive strategy enabled the emergent rural protest movement to achieve "frame alignment" (della Porta and Diani 2006; Snow et al. 1986) – bringing into line the interpretative frames of the protest organisers, the potential participants and the media to promote the protagonists' interests. As Snow et al. (1986) describe, frame alignment can take different forms, three of which are evident in the case of the rural protest movement.

Firstly, the discursive strategy aimed to re-frame the hunting debate away from the question of animal welfare by connecting the fate of hunting with the wider fate of the countryside as a whole. This was an example of "frame extension", in which the specific interests or goals of a social movement organisation are linked to much broader concerns in order to make the campaign relevant for a larger number of potential participants (Snow et al. 1986). This strategy was reflected in the adoption of the name "Countryside Alliance" for the coalition organising the initial pro-hunting protests, the branding of the first two mass demonstrations as the "Countryside Rally" and the "Countryside March", and the positioning of both events (and other related activities) as being protests not just about hunting, but also about other rural concerns including farm incomes, housing development, property rights and the closure of village services. At the same time, hunting was presented as being central to rural life, thus suggesting that a ban on hunting would affect the whole social and economic structure of the countryside.

Secondly, in order to maximise the mobilisation of rural participations, the strategy appealed to their core values, beliefs and identity in a process of "frame amplification" (Snow et al. 1986). Emotive language was used to describe the meaning of hunting to rural communities and the desperation of people who felt that their way of life was under threat. A sense of rural identity was invigorated by constructing the notion of an urban-rural divide in which opposition to hunting, disregard for the problems of agriculture, and other perceived threats to rural interests all stemmed from urban "ignorance" and "intolerance". Moreover, the rural lobby also tapped into values of tradition and patriotism by presenting the proposed hunting ban as a modish act of unnecessary modernisation and as being "unBritish". Crucially, in evoking these representations, the rural lobby connected with the core values of the conservative newspapers that were mostly widely read by their target rural constituency, which consequently became enrolled as vehicles for achieving frame amplification.

Thirdly, to be successful in blocking the proposed hunting ban, the pro-hunting lobby needed not only to mobilise sympathisers in protest activity, but also to change public and political opinion. This meant converting erstwhile opponents of



hunting, including more liberal elements of the news media. To pursue this objective, the pro-hunting lobby attempted a process of "frame bridging" (Snow et al. 1986), connecting hunting to conventional liberal causes, particularly civil liberties. Supporters of a ban on hunting were presented as being "illiberal" and "intolerant", whilst opponents of the ban were presented as the defenders of liberty. This message was reinforced in the branding of the third mass demonstration in London, the "Liberty and Livelihood March" in 2002, as well as in speeches, articles and publicity materials that positioned the countryside protests in the tradition of libertarian protest and evoked Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

The achievement of frame alignment involved the repetition of certain key tropes, including ideas of the "countryside in crisis", the "countryside comes to town" and the "countryside speaks out for liberty", explored further below. These tropes were articulated in the publicity materials and press releases produced by the Countryside Alliance, as well as in speeches and articles by hunting supporters. However, they also came to be independently reproduced by the news media, as the interpretative frame promoted by the Countryside Alliance was implicitly adopted by newspapers and news programmes in the reporting of rural politics and in columns and feature articles.

### **The Countryside in Crisis**

The notion of the "countryside in crisis" was an important trope in the reporting of the early rural protests, both endowing the protests with a sense of urgency, and hence newsworthiness, and offering the media an explanation for the sudden emergence of protests from a countryside that they had conventionally represented as tranquil and "apolitical". By referring, implicitly or directly, to a present or predicted "crisis", the news media constructed the mobilisation of rural people in protest events as an emotional responses, rather than as an act of political calculation. Coverage of beacons lit around the country in February 1998 before the Countryside March, for example, carried headlines of "The countryside burns with anger" in the *Daily Telegraph* (27 February 1998) and "Flames of rural anger stoked" in the *Guardian* (27 February 1998). Whilst the *Telegraph's* coverage was more prominent and extensive than the *Guardian's*, both reports emphasised the emotion of the protests:

Across Britain last night 5,000 beacons lit up the skies signalling the anger of country people at Government policies on farming, foxhunting and public access to private land (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 1998: 9)

The countryside is under attack. The town is out to get us and a way of life is being threatened, from the BSE crisis to the banning of beef on the bone (Beacon organizer, quoted in the *Guardian*, 27 February 1998: 9)

The trope of the countryside in crisis also contributed to the process of frame extension, connecting the threat of a hunting ban with other rural concerns. This was articulated in part in reporting on the motivations expressed by protest partici-

pants, as in a *Guardian* article on long-distance marchers from Wales to London ahead of the Countryside Rally in July 1997, which quoted one marcher explaining that,

The hunting thing is just part of the problem. We're treated like nothing. They've closed our hospitals, cut back on our services, everything is more expensive for us. The countryside is becoming a sink for the poor. They are pushing us further and further (Countryside marcher quoted in the *Guardian*, 5 July 97: 3).

However, the media also drew these connections in banding together coverage of various rural issues and protests, especially once militant farmers started to mount pickets and blockades during the winter of 1997/8 in protest at falling farm incomes, in parallel with on-going hunting protests. As discussed further below, this approach helped to legitimise and attract media coverage for smaller rural protests, organised without the professional resources available to the Countryside Alliance. The trope was arguably pushed to its extreme by the Welsh regional daily newspaper, the *Western Mail*, which published an issue with multiple tagged with the strapline "Rural Wales in Crisis", which included not only stories about farming and school closures, but also a rumoured threat to axe the long-running rural-set BBC radio series, *The Archers*.

### **The Countryside Comes to Town**

A key component of the Countryside Alliance's strategy was that pro-hunting demonstrations needed to be held in London if they were to attract media coverage and be taken seriously. This spatial dislocation, however, also assumed a symbolic significance in the trope of the "countryside comes to town", which featured in newspaper headlines for the Countryside Rally ("The country comes to town", *Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 1) and the Countryside March ("Hunters carry torch to London", *Guardian*, 28 February 1998; "The day the city became a shire", *Guardian*, 2 March 1998: 1). The trope intrinsically reproduced the conceit of an urban-rural divide, enabling issues around hunting, farming and access to private land for recreation to be presented a clash of cultures. Thus, the *Daily Telegraph* stated in its front-page report on the Countryside Rally that:

This crowd wanted nothing banned, repealed, subsidised or paid for. But the gradual encroachment of city authority into country life, epitomised by the proposed ban on foxhunting, had gone far enough. A line had to be drawn and it was. (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 1).

The left-leaning *Guardian*, less instinctively sympathetic to the rural protesters than the *Telegraph*, nonetheless reported the articulation of the urban-rural divide in its coverage of the early countryside protests, one article for example carrying the sub-heading, "John Vidal listens to the lament of rural marchers who see their way of life threatened by 'arrogant metropolitans'" (*Guardian*, 5 July 1997: 3).

The trope of "the countryside comes to town" not only constructed a binary divide between city and country, but also exaggerated the homogeneity of the two elements. As such, its use in reports on the Countryside Rally and the Countryside

March implicitly suggested that rural communities had come en masse to London for the demonstrations. Most newspapers carried maps showing the number of participants in the Countryside March expected from different regions of Britain – based on coach charters registered with the organisers, and giving the impression of a nationwide movement. Similarly, the *Daily Telegraph* reported in its front-page coverage of the Countryside Rally that,

In their tens of thousands they had come, from farms, moors and fells, emptying villages and leaving nature to its own devices for a day in order to let the urban majority know that the rural minority wishes to be left alone. (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 1)

Moreover, in representing the countryside as a homogenous entity, the trope of the "countryside comes to town" suggested that the protesters were representative of the rural population. Whilst the *Guardian* and the *Independent* carried articles critiquing this notion, it was explicitly reproduced in the coverage of conservative newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*. The *Telegraph* coverage of the Countryside Rally, for example, included an article headlined "Pack instinct cuts across class barriers to preserve way of life" (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 4), featuring examples of a landowner, a hunt servant and a gardener who had participated in the rally; whilst its coverage of the Countryside March included a report on "socialist hunt stalwarts" from the former mining communities of South Wales.

Similarly, in accepting the construct of an urban-rural binary, the media coverage exaggerated the *naïveté* of countryside protesters. In spite of an opinion poll finding that fifteen per cent of participants in the Countryside March lived in towns or cities (reported in the *Guardian*, 3 March 1998), several newspapers found individuals for whom it was their first visit to London. Unfamiliarity with the big city was further associated with political inexperience (perhaps accurately as our survey of Countryside Alliance members found that 90 per cent had not participated in a political protest before 1997), which in turn allowed the demonstrations to be represented as being *different* to previous political protests. As the *Daily Telegraph* again reported for the Countryside Rally:

There has certainly never been a cleaner multitude in [Hyde Park]. These were country people and, even here in the heart of the baffling metropolis, they applied the country code rigidly. Clapham Common may have required days of rubbish gathering after Saturday's Gay Pride march but just an hour after yesterday's rally, litter was scarce and Hyde Park's grass looked its normal self. (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 1)

### **The Countryside Speaks Out for Liberty**

The tropes of the "countryside in crisis" and the "countryside comes to town" contributed to frame extension and frame amplification respectively. The third trope, "the countryside speaks out for liberty", sought to advance both frame amplification and frame bridging. It did this by presenting the countryside protests as

patriotic acts in defence of traditional British values of freedom. There has historically been a strong association of the countryside with British national identity and in invoking this tradition the trope appealed to the conservative values of hunting supporters and reassured them that their actions were respectable and mainstream. The patriotism of the countryside protests was articulated in their dramaturgy, with the use of flags and other national symbols, the singing of jingoistic songs and the plotting of routes and venues around iconic national landscapes. It was also reproduced in the coverage of the protests by conservative newspapers. A week before the Countryside March, the *Daily Telegraph* published a comment piece by the Conservative Party leader, William Hague, which appeared with the headline "Marching for Freedom" beneath a cartoon that showed a harmonious crowd of tweed-suited country folk and farm animals bellowing at Big Ben under a banner reading "Wake up Westminster". In the article Hague claims that,

If you believe that the particular British ability to change gradually and peacefully contributes to the quality of our life; if you believe that institutions should grow organically and not be imposed according to the latest blueprint, however "cool"; most of all, if you believe that your life is your responsibility, and not that of a minister or civil servant, then you should know that the Countryside Marchers are marching for you as well. (Hague 1998).

The message was reinforced following the march in comment piece by the *Telegraph* editor, Charles Moore. Suggesting that, "We have grown so used to rent-a-mob that we have forgotten what a genuine mass demonstration is like" (Moore 1998: 20), Moore asserted that, "I was not marching with sadists yesterday, but with tens of thousands of good true British people" (ibid.). Developing the theme, he drew together the threads of patriotism, liberty and solidarity, observing that, "We are dealing with an aspect of the British character which is common to all classes. This is a phenomenon which has led our country to win wars. It is summed up in the phrase 'Leave us alone'" (ibid.).

In a swipe at attempts by the Labour government to re-brand the image of Britain, Moore concluded his article with the reflection that,

I was struck even more forcibly than before with the utter absurdity of Cool Britannia. Among the 280,000 or so smiling faces, with caps above them and tweed below, I could see not one single person who answered the Mandelson depiction of our nation. Warm, yes; cool, no. (Moore 1998: 20).

The *Times*, however, in its editorial on the day before the March reached out to the "one nation" vision of Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair in a further act of frame bridging:

An England where the pink [hunting] coat vanishes from the village green, the landowner is shorn of rights and thus neglectful of obligations, and the din of the city shuts out the countryside's cries may be moving with the times. But it is less "one nation" than a nation needs to be. The marchers who meet in London this weekend are treading, in the proper sense, a traditional pathway. And their voices, if not all their demands, should be heard. (The *Times*, 27 February 1998).

The patriotism played less well with the left-leaning press. An article in the *Guardian* reviewing the limited-licence radio station, March FM, broadcast during the Countryside March, ridiculed the selection of rousing patriotic music: Land of Hope and Glory, Souza's Dambusters theme, Rule Britannia, I Vow to Thee My Country. The playlist, the article commented, seemed "to suggest that you can only be truly British if you live in the countryside and like to kill animals" (*Guardian*, 2 March 1998: 5).

Yet, shorn of patriotism, the theme of liberty was considered by Countryside Alliance officials to be a mechanism that could resonate with liberal opinion. They claimed to detect a moderating in the position of newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Independent* during the months of the first countryside protests. It was in a comment piece in the *Guardian* that the then Countryside Alliance chair, John Jackson, articulated a case for supporting hunting supporters who engaged in civil disobedience by ignoring a hunting ban that they considered to be unjust (Jackson 2002: 20). Countryside Alliance officials credit this strategy with changing the position of liberal newspapers:

If one thinks about the left-wing commentators they realise that... this hostility to rural interest has not been for well-founded and intellectual reasons, that it's not soundly based. That's why the commentators in the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Observer*, or whatever, have not been persuaded by left wing parliamentarians of people of the left in parliament who have taken a view on this particular piece of legislation. (Countryside Alliance Deputy Chief Executive, interview)

Now it's a situation where, say, papers like the *Independent* and the *Guardian* may not be pro-[hunting], but they are opposed to the [Hunting] Act on libertarian grounds. (Countryside Alliance Regional Director, interview)

## **The Frame Splinters? From the Countryside March to the Liberty and Livelihood March**

The voluminous press coverage of the Countryside Rally and the Countryside March marked a clear departure from the previously limited coverage of rural politics in the British news media. The shift did not occur organically, or as a news-values-driven decision, but rather was orchestrated by the Countryside Alliance and its press department. The strategy was aimed at using the sympathetic conservative press to energise and mobilise instinctive supporters in rural communities, whilst at the same time reaching out to liberal opinion through the left-leaning media. Initially, at least, it appeared to be successful in both respects.

That the Countryside Rally and Countryside March should have received sympathetic coverage in the conservative press is not surprising, but the scale of the coverage was unprecedented. The *Daily Mail* published a seven-page special section entitled "Save our Countryside" two days before the Countryside March (the cover of which was used as a placard by numerous protesters), followed up by a four-page souvenir supplement with a colour poster. The *Daily Telegraph* simi-

larly produced an eight-page souvenir supplement two days after the march, in addition to three pages of news coverage, an editorial and a comment article on the day after the march. As such, the conservative press moved beyond simply functioning as a conduit for the publicity put out by the Countryside Alliance, to being active agents in the production and reproduction of the new media discourse of an unsettled countryside. In particular, by the scale of their coverage and the production of souvenir supplements, the *Mail* and *Telegraph* discursively positioned the Countryside March as an historic event, not just another political protest.

Equally notable was the extent of coverage in the tabloid and liberal broadsheet press. The *Guardian*, for example, ran nearly three pages of news coverage of the Countryside March the next day, plus an editorial. The tabloid *Daily Star*, *Mirror* and *Sun* all carried illustrated reports of the march, with the *Sun* evoking the discourse of an urban-rural divide in its headline, "Townie Blair gives in to country marchers" (*Sun*, 2 March 1998). Reports on the Countryside March in all newspapers tended to reflect the key tropes of the countryside in crisis, the country comes to town, and the countryside speaking up for liberty. However, this was balanced in the liberal broadsheets by more critical perspectives. The *Guardian*'s report on the beacons lit around the country by Countryside Alliance supporters in the week before the march, for example, included a comment from a spokesperson for the little-known "Countryside Protection Group" which claimed that the march did not reflect the interests of the rural majority (*Guardian*, 27 February 1998); whilst its coverage the day before the march highlighted a critical quote from the Ramblers' Association suggesting that participants had been manipulated by landowners, alongside a quote from the National Farmers' Union declaring agriculture to be in crisis (*Guardian*, 28 February 1998). Columnists and letter-writers in the *Guardian* and the *Independent* also presented more critical perspectives, including David Aaronovitch who caricatured the discourse of a rural-urban divide in the *Independent*:

[In this discourse]... the city is degenerate, addicted to fashion, a sink of vice, a destroyer of health and corrupter of morals; it makes men effete and women adulterous. Removed from any connection with a "natural" world that it cannot understand, it nevertheless reaches out tentacles of pollution and development to destroy the peace and happiness of Arcadia (Aaronovitch 1998: 21)

These critical interventions advanced an alternative representation of rural Britain, which did not contest the notion of the countryside being unsettled and mutinous, but questioned the attribution of blame. Rather than representing rural people as a minority oppressed by urban interference, it portrayed a countryside still dominated by a privileged elite that had exploited and manipulated the working classes. The *Guardian* and the *Independent* both carried stories suggesting that the Countryside March had been "hijacked" by hunting interests (*Guardian*, 28 February 1998), or by the Conservative Party (*Independent*, 27 February 1998), and reported that landowners were forcing tenants and employees to participate in the



march ("Yeomen get marching orders", *Guardian*, 21 February 1998). This alternative representation was further reinforced by a cartoon in the *Guardian*, which showed a peer with crown and ermine robes being pulled along in a range rover with the slogan "The Countryside March – Be there or be sacked" painted on the side, by a "country bumpkin" figure wearing a sweatshirt reading "Preserve the Forelock" (*Guardian*, 27 February 1998).

### **The Unsettled Countryside**

Coverage of the countryside protests replaced the previously dominant perception of the countryside as a harmonious and "apolitical" place, with a new representation of the unsettled countryside seething with discontent. This new discourse positioned rural protests as newsworthy events, ensuring continuing coverage not only for the hunting debate and the Countryside Alliance campaign, but also for other protests and conflicts that reinforced the impression of the countryside in crisis. In doing so, it altered news values and facilitated news coverage for protest groups that lacked the professional resources of the Countryside Alliance.

When militant farmers in North Wales spontaneously decided to picket Holyhead docks in protest against cheap beef imports from Ireland, they did not have a media strategy. Yet, as the picket was repeated night after night and spread to other ports, the protests were picked up by the national media as evidence of a new front in rural politics (Woods 2005). Individual farm activists developed contacts with journalists that were later used in planning further protest actions. Local campaigns against new supermarket or windfarm developments, or the closure of rural schools and post offices, also received publicity as evidence of the unsettled countryside; with e-mail and mobile phones enabling campaigners with limited resources to gain access to journalists who were already attuned to the newsworthiness of their cause. Whilst such local conflicts were primarily reported through the local and regional media, occasional examples penetrated the national press, especially where individual journalists had been successfully courted.

At the same time, however, the newsworthiness of rural protests rested in part on their perceived novelty, and news coverage hence decreased with repetition. This presented a particular challenge to the Countryside Alliance, which needed to maintain its level of media coverage in order both to sustain pressure on politicians and to meet the expectations of its supporters:

One of the dangers ... was that anything not on the front page of the *Telegraph* was perceived as a failure from then on. And that's quite a challenge ... that's how it was measured by our supporters. If they went to Parliament Square and held up a placard and it was on page 17, it was a failure. (Countryside Alliance activist, interview)

In response, the Countryside Alliance varied its protest methods, with regional rallies, pickets at party conferences, and long distance marches, as well as softer campaigns such as "countryside in the town" information stalls. Nonetheless, frustration at the decreasing media coverage of these activities led some hunting activ-

ists to form more militant breakaway groups committed to direct action. One of these, the Real CA, in particular, effectively harnessed the power of the media with limited numbers, but significant financial backing and good media contacts. Its use of publicity stunts such as placing a giant papier-mâché hunter on the ancient "White Horse of Uffingham" chalk figure, and hanging a banner reading "Love Hunting" from the Angel of the North sculpture on Valentine's Day, achieved a series of news articles, which commonly quoted anonymous sources warning of more disruptive actions such as attacking electricity pylons and reservoirs to generate a sense of menace that exceeded their actual capacity to act (see for example, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 2002; *Times*, 28 May 2002; *Northern Echo*, 6 June 2002; *Guardian*, 22 July 2002; *Times*, 28 August 2002; *Guardian*, 30 August 2002; *Daily Telegraph*, 17 November 2002).

Farm protesters similarly found that the newsworthiness of their demonstrations dwindled with repetition, and as with pro-hunting supporters, frustration at the lack of media coverage prompted a change to more militant tactics, notably the blockade of oil depots in September 2000 (Woods 2005). The impact of the blockade in disrupting oil supplies, prompting panic buying and provoking a national political crisis, secured print and broadcast news headlines for the protests for several days, but the fuel blockades also marked a threshold in the coverage of rural politics. Whilst the campaign to reduce fuel prices was vociferously supported in populist newspapers, other newspapers adopted a less sympathetic representation of a small minority holding the country to ransom.

The outbreak of a Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic in February 2001 also became a key event in the evolving news discourse about rural Britain. The spread of the epidemic to over 2,000 farms, the severity of control measures including the closure of all rural footpaths and many tourist attractions, the imposition of exclusion zones and a precautionary cull of livestock, the seven months taken to eradicate the disease and the total cost of £2 billion to public funds (Woods 2005), all made the outbreak the major news item of the year, with over 19,000 articles in the national press.<sup>4</sup> Superficially, at least, coverage of the epidemic and its impact revived and reinforced the discourse of the "countryside in crisis", articulated through headlines such as "Farms: yet another crisis" (*Guardian*, 22 February 2001), "The Killing Fields" (*Mail on Sunday*, 25 February 2001), "Funeral Pyre for British Farming" (*Sun*, 26 February 2001), "Flames fan the fears of traumatised community" (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 2001), "Rural Fear and Loathing" (*Guardian*, 28 February, 2001), "The day they closed the countryside" (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 February, 2001), and "The land where spring went up in flames" (*Times*, 25 April 2001).

Beneath these headlines, however, a more complex set of representations developed. Protests by individual farmers and communities against the cull of healthy livestock or against disposal pyres and pits were widely reported, but they lacked the clear anti-urban narrative of the earlier countryside protests. The *Ob-*

*server* (a liberal Sunday newspaper published by the *Guardian*), reported calls by militant farmers' leaders for resistance to the cull by observing that "Once more the countryside is in revolt" (18 March 2001: 9), but also noted that the National Farmers' Union had backed the plan. In different articles farmers were presented as both victims and villains in the crisis. The *Observer* again reported news of the economic impact on rural tourism of the precautionary measures with the headline, "Now our tourism industry faces ruin. All because of farming" (11 March 2001: 1); whilst columns, letters and leaders in several newspapers blamed farmers for the outbreak (*Daily Mail*, 28 February 2001; *Express*, 28 February 2001; *Independent*, 28 February 2001), or argued that the epidemic presented an opportunity for reforming agriculture and rural policy (*Guardian*, 29 March and 4 April 2001). An erroneous over-payment of compensation to farmers was reported by the *Times* with the headline, "Government to blame on payout" (7 August 2001), but more provocatively in the *Observer* as "The millionaire farmers who made a killing" (5 August 2001).

Over time, therefore, reporting of the "unsettled countryside" in the news media became increasingly nuanced, with diverging perspectives on the workings of power and politics in rural Britain. These tensions, which broadly reflected the ideological leanings of different newspapers, came to frame coverage of the Countryside Alliance's Liberty and Livelihood March in 2002, and the final stages of the hunting debate.

### **The Liberty and Livelihood March**

In September 2002, the Countryside Alliance held its last, and largest, mass demonstration in London. Timed to respond to a renewed determination by hunting opponents in parliament to push for legislation introducing a ban, publicity for the rally nonetheless again drew on themes of the countryside in crisis and the countryside comes to town to embrace other rural concerns. However, in explicitly branding the demonstration as the "Liberty and Livelihood March", the Countryside Alliance prioritised frame bridging and the goal of reaching out to liberal opinion ahead of the anticipated new hunting bill. The different name and format of the march, and the targeted higher number of participants, were also aimed at maintaining media interest.

In both of these respects, the Liberty and Livelihood March was only partially successful. As table 5 indicates, coverage in national newspapers was significantly more uneven than for the earlier Countryside March. Whilst the *Telegraph* carried 53 articles about the march during the fortnight before and after, the *Daily Mail* printed only seven articles (in sharp contrast to its special sections on the 1998 Countryside March). The *Sun* mentioned the march in two articles, one of which was in characteristic style a "page 3" semi-nude photograph of three models it claimed had been on the march. Its Sunday stablemate, the *News of the World*,

mentioned the march only in passing in coverage of an anti-war demonstration the following week.

Much of the coverage of the Liberty and Livelihood March reprised the same tropes as employed for the earlier protests (see also Anderson 2006). The *Sun*, for example, stated that “everyone from farm labourers to lords of the manors are furious at the destruction of country life, the loss of rural post offices and shops, the foot-and-mouth disease fiasco, the collapse in farm incomes and the loss of jobs if hunting is banned” (*Sun*, 20 September 2002). The *Times* and the *Telegraph* similarly echoed earlier coverage with headlines including, “Townies prepare to host their country cousins” and “How townies turned me into a troublemaker” (*Times*, 21 September 2002), “Heart of the capital beats with undying spirit of the country” (*Daily Telegraph*, 23 September 2002) and “Something must be done. Rural life is eroding away” (*Daily Telegraph*, 17 September 2002).

The *Telegraph* also faithfully reproduced the trope of the countryside speaking out for liberty, arguing in one article that “everyone who believes in liberty should march. Those who stay at home on Sunday because they oppose hunting are missing the point” (19 September 2002: 28), and described the march as “the biggest civil liberties protest in British history” (23 September 2002: 1). Moreover, the *Telegraph* actively promoted the march through editorials, features and news articles. In the weeks preceding the march it carried several stories featuring individuals explaining why they would be joining the march, including celebrities, prominent rural campaigners, farmers and both rural and urban residents. A week after the march, its leader column declared simply, “The March Worked”, noting a poll showing that public opinion on hunting was evenly divided (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 2002). The coverage cemented the newspaper’s position as a key actor in the rural movement in its own right, as signalled earlier in the year when the editor had told the *UK Press Gazette* that he was “determined to ‘ginger up’ countryside organisations to be tougher with the Government” (*Press Gazette* online, 30 May 2002).

In contrast, coverage in the *Guardian* and the *Independent* was distinctly more negative than for the earlier Countryside March. Both newspapers questioned the march’s objectives in leader articles and carried stories featuring rural residents opposed to the march (*Guardian*, 21 September 2002; *Independent*, 21 and 23 September 2002). In another report, the *Independent* described the march as “the rural revolt that began with dinner at a top London restaurant” (21 September 2002: 3). Through these articles, the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, together with the *Guardian*’s stablemate the *Observer*, consolidated an alternative representation of rural Britain that had started to emerge in earlier coverage – with the countryside presented as a society beset with problems, but the Countryside Alliance protests portrayed as sectional actions focused on the wrong issues and not representing real rural interests.

The respective articulation of these representations became itself a focus of argument between sections of the media. *Telegraph* columnist Tom Utley attacked a "nasty" cartoon in the *Guardian*, that he claimed portrayed all march participants as ridiculous, ugly, arrogant and stupid (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 2002: 24), whilst *Independent* columnist David Aaronovitch criticised the partisanship of right-wing columnists (*Independent*, 1 October 2002). Both interventions were framed by controversy over a *Guardian* column written by Rod Liddle, editor of the flagship BBC Radio morning news programme *Today*, in which he had suggested that glimpses of "the forces supporting the Countryside Alliance" reminded him why he voted Labour (Liddle 2002: 5). Liddle was subsequently forced to resign as the editor of *Today* by a *Telegraph*-led campaign that claimed his expressed views on the march compromised the political neutrality of the programme.

Indeed, the *Telegraph* had already repeatedly criticised the BBC's coverage of the countryside protests. It had pointed out that the Countryside Rally in 1997 had been only the third item on the BBC evening television news, and that the Countryside March in 1998 had received only five minutes of coverage (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 2002). Following the Liberty and Livelihood March, it reported criticism of the amount of coverage by the BBC, and the broadcaster's equivocal statement that the march "has been described as one of the biggest demonstrations in Britain in modern times" (*Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2002: 4).

Although presented as evidence of BBC pro-government bias, the BBC's coverage was little different to that of other broadcasters and reflected the difficulty of broadcast news in reporting the countryside protests whilst maintaining political balance. The apparent solution was a third representation, in which the sense of change in rural Britain was reported but largely depoliticised. This representation was reproduced not only in news reports, but also on non-news programmes such as the BBC's weekly rural magazine programme, *Countryfile*, and its farming-based radio soap opera, *The Archers*. Similarly, whilst the new frame of the unsettled countryside was reproduced in a number of documentaries – including "The Hunt" (BBC2 1998) "Beastly Business" (BBC2 2001), "Countryside at War" (BBC1 2002), "Countryside: Death of a way of life" (BBC2 2002), "A Very English Village" (BBC4 2005), "The Hunt" (BBC2 Wales 2006), "The Last Tally Ho?" (BBC1 2006) "The Lie of the Land" (More4 2007) and "Power to the People" (BBC2 2007) – these programmes tended to present themselves as social history records of inevitable rural change, divorced from political context, or to portray rural campaigners as bumbling amateurs ("Blood on the Carpet", BBC2 1999; "The Big Day", BBC Wales 2000) in a manner that drew implicitly on established rural stereotypes.

## Conclusions

The volume of news media coverage of rural politics in Britain increased sharply in the late 1990s, as issues such as hunting, the future of farming and access to rural services gained prominence on the political agenda, and as various protest movements were mobilised around these issues. The change in media coverage was not just quantitative, but also qualitative. Prior to 1997, the predominant representation of the British countryside in the media was of an idyllic, untroubled and largely "apolitical" society. National news coverage of rural political issues was limited, and when the occasional local conflict was reported, it was generally presented as an anomalous intrusion of urban-style politics into the rural idyll (Woods 2005). After 1997, the media performed an apparent about-turn, representing the countryside as an unsettled place, seething with discontent, yet this new discourse also evolved, becoming more complex over time.

Initially, during the period from 1997 to 2000, the news media's framing of the "unsettled countryside" continued to be informed by the tradition of the rural idyll, as well as by the perspectives spun by the rural lobby. Accordingly, reports and commentary generally accepted the underlying frame of an urban-rural divide, and suggested that conventionally uncomplaining rural folk had been compelled to protest by a growing countryside crisis that was the result of urban ignorance and interference. Only a few articles in the more liberal press dissented from this representation. From late 2000 onwards, however, the perspectives advanced by different sections of the news media began to diverge more markedly. Although the discourse of the unsettled countryside continued to be widely reproduced, opinions differed on the causes and solutions. Whilst newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph* became more entrenched in their representation of a beleaguered rural population fighting against urban intolerance, others such as the *Guardian* and the *Independent* increasingly presented the Countryside Alliance as a sectional movement that failed to represent the real interests and problems of rural Britain.

Neither was the growth of news media coverage of rural issues a purely reactive and news values driven response to independent events. Rather, the mobilisation of the rural movement and the shifting media representation of rural Britain were co-constructed and mutually dependent. The Countryside Alliance's demonstrations would never have achieved the scale that they did, or had the political impact that they did, without the support of the media. Equally, the media were amenable to being enrolled into the Countryside Alliance's frame alignment strategy because their existing frames did not allow them to interpret the new phenomenon of rural protests, and because the Countryside Alliance was offering explanations that corresponded with their own wider values.

Thus, as in the case of Lithuania described by Juska (2007), the shifting representation of the countryside in the British news media must be understood in terms of the media's own political and commercial interests, and the wider politi-



cal context. The Countryside Rally in 1997 was the first significant act of opposition to the Labour government elected earlier that year (Woods 2008b). For the conservative press, coverage and promotion of the rural protests became a way of putting pressure on the new government, not just over hunting and farming, but also on its wider modernisation agenda, its attempts to rebrand British identity, and its priorities. For Labour-supporting newspapers, the rural protests were similarly newsworthy as a test for the government, but more emphasis was placed on the government's response. Some individual journalists on the left bought the framing of hunting as a libertarian issue and opposed a ban as part of a wider concern about the erosion of civil liberties. More significantly, however, exposing the sectional interests of the Countryside Alliance became a way for the liberal press to attack the Conservative opposition as elitist and old-fashioned at a time when the government's popularity was beginning to slip.

Moreover, by 2002 the prospect of war in Iraq had replaced rural discontent as the media's preferred focal point for opposition to the government, and the volume of coverage of rural issues accordingly decreased, tailing off to close to pre-1997 levels after the eventual introduction of the hunting ban in 2005. The one exception was the *Daily Telegraph*, the newspaper with the strongest readership among Countryside Alliance supporters, for whom continuing to promote the "countryside" cause made good commercial sense.

There is little doubt that the intensity of news media coverage of the early countryside protests amplified their political impact, causing the government to prevaricate on its support for a hunting ban and to work on articulating its own political construction of the countryside (Woods 2008b). There is evidence too, of some impact on public opinion, with polls showing an increase in support for hunting, although the protests ultimately failed in their objective of defeating a hunting ban. More broadly, however, the effect on popular perceptions of rurality in Britain is questionable. The notion of an "unsettled countryside" has now become embedded in news media discourse, and will most probably be resurrected as appropriate issues arise in future; yet, it is unlikely that the adoption of more nuanced perspectives on the changing British countryside in the news media will have done much to dent the overwhelming influence of the rural idyll reproduced through the entertainment media.

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## Notes

- 1 Data obtained from analysis of Lexis/Nexis online newspaper archive.
- 2 "Grassroots rural protest and political activity in contemporary Britain", funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-23-1317), 2006-7. The investigators on the project were Michael Woods and Jon Anderson, with Steven Guilbert and Suzie Watkin as research assistants.
- 3 Percentage figures are approximate due to overlap between some television regions. Regions with a mixed rural-urban population (Central (Midlands); Tyne Tees (North East England); and Yorkshire) are excluded from Table 1 for clarity. The data is published by television region as it is primarily made available for marketing purposes.
- 4 Between 1 January and 31 December 2001. Data from Lexis/Nexis online newspaper archive.

## Tables

Title	Classification	Base	Politics	Average daily sales (July-Dec 2007)
The Sun	Tabloid	London	Conservative	3,117,679
Daily Mail	Mid market	London	Conservative	2,349,782
The Mirror	Tabloid	London	Labour	1,545,245
Daily Telegraph	Broadsheet	London	Conservative	884,601
Daily Express	Mid market	London	Conservative	790,198
Daily Star	Tabloid	London	Right-leaning	782,790
The Times	Broadsheet	London	Right-leaning	637,776
Financial Times	Broadsheet	London	Pro-business	439,710
Daily Record	Tabloid	Glasgow	Left-leaning	402,757
The Guardian	Broadsheet	London	Left-leaning	360,263
The Independent	Broadsheet	London	Left-leaning	239,244
Regional evening newspapers (15 titles)	Generally mid market	Various regional centres	Varies	2,629,193
Regional morning newspapers (72 titles)	Generally mid market	Various regional centres	Varies	656,243

*Table 1: Daily newspapers in Britain. (Sales figures from the Audi Bureau of Circulations)*

<b>Region</b>	<b>The Daily Telegraph</b>	<b>The Daily Mail</b>	<b>The Guardian</b>	<b>The Independent</b>	<b>The Times</b>	<b>The Mirror</b>	<b>The Sun</b>
Anglia (Eastern England)	302	581	101	56	230	313	802
Border (Cumbria & S Scotland)	11	56	7	4	12	59	145
Wales & West Grampian	127	450	85	45	131	456	551
(Northern Scotland)	24	87	14	12	28	21	216
Meridian (South East England)	380	780	106	98	285	305	908
West Country (South West England)	69	219	27	30	53	125	225
<b>Significantly rural regions –total</b>	<b>913 (48%)</b>	<b>1983 (41%)</b>	<b>340 (30%)</b>	<b>245 (36%)</b>	<b>686 (38%)</b>	<b>1279 (36%)</b>	<b>2847 (36%)</b>
Granada (North West England)	204	571	117	59	176	593	541
Central Scotland	32	237	46	15	56	92	791
London	616	1279	514	324	754	930	2393
<b>Predominantly urban regions – total</b>	<b>852 (45%)</b>	<b>2087 (43%)</b>	<b>677 (59%)</b>	<b>398 (58%)</b>	<b>956 (54%)</b>	<b>1615 (45%)</b>	<b>3725 (46%)</b>
<b>Total national readership</b>	<b>1898</b>	<b>4853</b>	<b>1147</b>	<b>688</b>	<b>1812</b>	<b>3529</b>	<b>7956</b>

*Table 2: Estimated readers (thousands) of British national daily newspapers by selected television regions, 2009.*

*Source: National Readership Survey and [www.nmauk.co.uk](http://www.nmauk.co.uk).*

The Daily Telegraph	50.3%
The Times	16.5%
The Daily Mail	15.6%
Financial Times	3.4%
Daily Express	3.0%
Racing Post	1.9%
The Sun	1.7%
The Guardian	1.0%
The Independent	1.0%
The Mirror	0.9%

*Table 3: Newspapers read by surveyed Countryside Alliance members (n=1207)*

Horse and Hound	39.4%
The Field	32.5%
Farmers' Weekly	21.6%
Country Life	21.4%
The Shooting Times	19.9%
Farmers' Guardian	15.6%
Countryman's Weekly	6.0%
The Countryman	3.6%

*Table 4: Rural, farming and field sports publications read by surveyed Countryside Alliance members (n=1207)*

Newspaper	Number of articles and letters			Total
	Positive	Negative	Neutral or minor reference	
Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph	49	0	4	53
The Times and Sunday Times	15	0	2	17
The Express	14	0	1	15
The Independent	0	9	1	10
The Independent on Sunday	4	5	1	10
The Guardian	2	6	2	10
The Observer	4	4	1	9
Daily Mail	5	1	1	7
Mail on Sunday	2	0	1	3
The Mirror	1	2	0	3
The Sun	2	0	0	2
The News of the World	0	0	1	1

*Table 5: Articles and letters mentioning the Liberty and Livelihood March, published between 8<sup>th</sup> September and 8<sup>th</sup> October 2002 in British national newspapers. (Source: Lexis/Nexis)*

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