

"The Riddle of this Painful Earth": Late Victorian Literature and Archaeology During the Great Agricultural Depression

Rebecca Welshman

In 1888 the Reverend Monro Gibson, writing for *The Sunday at Home*, likened the agricultural depression of the late nineteenth century to a cloud that hung over the country:

"Depression, depression, depression!" How sadly familiar the word has been for many years. It is not an unfamiliar word at any time, but lately it almost seems as if it had come, not to visit, but to stay. The depression in agriculture and commerce has been so long continued, that it is almost a weariness to speak of it. And though we may take a hopeful view of the outlook, with the expectation that the clouds may roll away, and the sun appear, there still remain burdens sufficient to weigh heavily on those who are thoughtful enough to vex themselves with "the riddle of this painful earth." (5)

An era of change and uncertainty, the agricultural depression introduced new farming methods and alternative ways of thinking about the landscape. At the same time, the rise of archaeology as a science encouraged wider recognition of the importance of the land as a preserve of past human activity. The farmland of the counties forming historical Wessex concealed archaeological evidence of Iron Age and Roman farming communities – signifying not only the emergence of civilisation in Britain, but a tradition of working the land that had been passed down through generations to the nineteenth century. The writing of Richard Jefferies and Thomas Hardy, who were both born in Wessex counties,¹ is rooted in this formative time for agriculture and archaeology; in chronicling emergent understandings of the soil both authors sought to address "the riddle of this painful earth."

There are affinities between the gradual development of nineteenth-century archaeology as a discipline and the understanding and practice of agriculture over time. These can be seen best in Hardy's and Jefferies's fiction and non-fiction. Andrew Radford has explored the relation between the experience of rural landscapes and the developing knowledge of the human past, and has discussed the imaginative significance of contemplating past human activity in agricultural landscapes. In his discussion of the work of Hardy and Jefferies, Radford concludes that the nineteenth-century imagination, dislodged by social revolution, could not be sufficiently sustained by a human past which was ultimately remote and inaccessible (55). Roger Ebbatson has considered ways in which Hardy's and Jefferies's phenomenological experiences of place might be better understood in the context of Heideggerian theory, and how both authors innovatively employ agricultural technology in their representations of landscape and nature ("Sensations of Earth; "Landscape and Machine"). other research has identified the nineteenth-century difficulty of perceiving continuity between past and present human societies due to the dissolution of "the Georgic vision of nature [. . .] [in] an era of rapid rural and agricultural change" (Parker 32). Yet despite such attempts to align the mind with the land's own past, the potential for the relation between agriculture and archaeology to yield

constructive insight into the relation between mankind and the environment has not been given due attention. Nevertheless, Hardy and Jefferies engage deeply with the imaginative implications of archaeology, and their writing suggests that the close proximity of a prehistoric human past – which Victorian archaeology revealed as rich and multifarious – gave weight to the idea of continuity in the human condition and facilitated connection rather than “rupture” (Radford 55) with traces – or “survivals” (E.B. Tylor qtd. in Radford 155) – of past human activity in the landscape.

For Hardy and Jefferies, whose work was deeply grounded in their native southwest landscapes, the presence of the human past within the agricultural settings of Dorset and Wiltshire afforded an accessible, and largely unexploited, avenue of thought. Hardy’s Wessex, an agricultural landscape rich in prehistoric archaeology, intersects with Jefferies’s Land which includes the ancient Wiltshire Downs and Ridgeway. Further consideration of the significance of the close association between the subterranean human past and the dynamic agricultural present can provide new insights into both authors’ experiences of the landscapes they wrote about. Hardy’s lifelong interest in archaeological settings and the ways in which they shape human experience in the present affords new perspectives on his perception of time. An archaeo-agricultural reading of Jefferies’s work, which is under-researched and traditionally prescribed to the genre of nature writing, reveals how he used landscape as an experimental holding ground in his search for a more meaningful present.

Both authors’ interests in agricultural labour developed alongside their knowledge of antiquities. Jefferies first gained national recognition for his letters to the *Times* on the Wiltshire labourer in 1872, and in the following year he gave a paper on the antiquities of Swindon to a meeting of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. Charles Longman, editor of *Longman’s Magazine*, commissioned articles from both Jefferies and Hardy in 1883 on the condition of agricultural labourers in their respective counties.² At this time Hardy began attending excavations in Dorset and presented a paper about Romano-British relics and skeletons found at his house, Max Gate, to the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club in 1884. These developments in both authors’ careers were consonant with the rise of archaeology as an independent discipline and its acceptance within the scientific field. This movement was identified by the antiquary and scientist Sir Daniel Wilson in 1851 who stated that archaeology had transcended the “laborious trifling” of the amateur antiquary to join “the circle of the sciences” (Wilson xii). The rise of archaeology contributed to its subsequent popularisation, and in 1882 a reviewer of *The Antiquary* magazine in the *Saturday Review* declared that “archaeology has outlived ridicule, and become fashionable” (*Saturday Review* 772-3).

Although the processes of archaeology and agriculture may not appear to have much in common – archaeologists worked to preserve the material record, while the process of farming often destroyed it – both occupations worked with, and were motivated by, the layered formations of the soil and their potential yield. The imaginative implications of the human history that lay beneath the soil, and the physical process of its disturbance through agricultural activity, contributed to the growing late-nineteenth-century awareness of the immense significance of the human past. In 1867, Jefferies wrote in a letter that his agricultural homeland was “a mine for an antiquary,” noting the numbers of unidentified earthworks and artefacts which would come to light through agricultural work. He notes having observed “traces of former habitations, and former generations, in all directions – here Roman coins here

British arrowheads – cannon balls, tumuli, camps,' and that "the country seems alive with the dead" (*Letters* 32).

In his fictional sketch "A Roman Brook" (1884) Jefferies records how the remains of a Roman fort by a stream at Wanborough, near Swindon, have been revealed through the erosive action of the passing water and by agricultural activity. He writes that "all life loved the brook," noting that horses and cows wander from the fields to drink from it, and birds bathe there. Just as the water draws to it the life of flowers and grasses and all shapes and sizes of birds and animal, it also attracts different classes of people – labourers, farmers, and the lone wanderer. He states that "there is something in dipping water that is Greek – Homeric – something that carries the mind home to primitive times" (38). Yet the presence of the past in the spot is more tangibly felt by the landowner himself, described by Jefferies working an orchard by the brook:

He was busy with his spade at a strip of garden, and grumbled that the hares would not let it alone, with all that stretch of grass to feed on. Nor would the rooks; and the moor-hens ran over it, and the water-rats burrowed; the wood-pigeons would have the peas, and there was no rest from them all. [. . .] On a short branch low down the trunk there hung the weather-beaten and broken handle of an earthenware vessel; the old man said it was a jug, one of the old folks' jugs – he often dug them up. Some were cracked, some nearly perfect; lots of them had been thrown out to mend the lane. There were some chips among the heap of weeds yonder. These fragments were the remains of Anglo-Roman pottery. Coins had been found – half a gallon of them [. . .] That was all he knew of the Caesars. (39)

The processes of nature – the activities of the water rats, pigeons, and moorhens – impair the worker's efforts to produce a good yield from the site. While this natural activity above the soil impedes the process of agriculture, the very act of digging reveals a rich subterranean record of past human activity. By referring to the Roman occupants of the site as "old folks," the man infers a degree of familiarity with the past which he has gained through unearthing different types of Roman relics. Yet more than this, due to the close proximity of the orchard to the brook, the area has revealed an even more specific and surprising discovery. Where the bank has been undermined by water rats, "within a few inches of the water," is a human skeleton, which Jefferies identifies as "a sorrowful thing" lying unheeded in the presence of the "sparkle of the sunshine"; "the living water"; and the "voice of the cuckoo" (40). In his account Jefferies infers the close relation between agriculture, nature and archaeology, suggesting that the process of reworking the same area of land over time can reveal the presence of a human past that is close, tangible and accessible. This recognition of the proximity of former times reflects mid-nineteenth-century developments in prehistoric archaeology which established ancient British society as developed, and closer to the Victorian era than previously imagined, signifying a move away from simplistic early nineteenth-century accounts which identified the ancient Britons as primitive.³ Moreover, the revealed presence of the skeleton in the ground suggests that the subterranean human past has a role in shaping the character of the soil that the landowner creates his livelihood from, and as such is actively shaping the present.

The close relation between agriculture and the archaeological imagination is further illustrated by an anonymous contributor to the miscellaneous magazine *Once a*

Week (1869), in which the author depicts the imaginative implications of finding a Roman site within an agricultural landscape:

A large arable field on the Huntingdonshire side of the river Neve [. . .] is said to be the Roman Durobriva mentioned in the *Antonine Itinerary*. This was the principal Roman encampment of the midland counties, and the mass of coins, and the number of tessellated pavements discovered in it, prove how long it must have been occupied. Every now and then, the plough turns up the long-buried refuse heaps of the former kitchens. Broken pottery, shells of the whelk, bones and horns of the red deer, and of a small extinct species of ox, *Bos longifrons*, all mixed up together. (*Once a Week* 393)

The orderliness normally associated with domestic habitation – represented by the pottery, the preparation of whelks, and the presence of a refuse site—is brought into direct association with the random and indeterminate churning of the plough. As the author continues, it is “these homely things [that] shorten time, and make nearly 2000 years ago seem but as yesterday” (393). The “large arable field” becomes a conceptual holding ground for a more powerful strain of thought and feeling; a fusion between the archaeological imagination and the observation of nature within the landscape, wherein the meeting places between past and present suddenly become tangible. In light of the social and economic uncertainties and associated estrangement from nature posed by the agricultural depression, such clear and direct experiences of the natural world became all the more important. This form of engagement with the natural and human worlds, without a third party – whether a book, machine, or vehicle – provided space away from the idea of linear progress, allowing the mind to momentarily step out of time to reconnect with the environment. In a society aware of encroaching change, engagement with the natural world afforded a tangible link with past generations who had lived and worked in the same area.

Answers to the late-Victorian questions of human existence were being drawn from the earth itself – either intentionally during archaeological excavation – or accidentally, through agricultural practices such as ploughing, digging for chalk, or building. These discoveries followed those made during the construction of the railways in the 1840s. Close affinity developed between the appreciation of nature, agriculture, and archaeology not least because systematic developments in archaeology were consistent with agricultural changes during the Depression, such as the introduction of mechanisation. General Pitt-Rivers, close friend of Hardy, and the son-in-law of Sir John Lubbock, is recognised as the “father of modern excavation” (Cleere 55) for his archaeological fieldwork in Wessex during the late nineteenth century when he applied some of the first systematic techniques. As archaeologists dug the earth to learn about the origins of human societies, agriculturalists worked the land more intensively with new technical knowledge. In “Patchwork Agriculture” (1875),⁴ Jefferies documents modern farming techniques to be creating a “patchwork” effect of old and new, which is visible in the landscape. In one field an old man and a boy walk slowly beside oxen pulling a plough “unchanged since prehistoric times” (856), and in an adjacent field a steam plough travels noisily up and down. The introduction of steam traction engines, which “tore up” (856) the ground, threatened the sense of continuity in the way in which people worked and experienced the land. Moreover, the introduction of new farming practices began to alter agricultural workers’ physical contact with the prehistoric past. The operation of steam engines

from a seat, several feet off the ground, with the noise of its operation deterring wildlife, entailed less contact between the worker and the natural environment. Traditional methods, however, with the worker walking quietly alongside the oxen or horse, would have encouraged workers to notice coins or objects on the surface of the soil and to engage with the sights and sounds of their surroundings. In "History of Swindon," originally published in the *North Wilts Herald* (1867), Jefferies mentions the presence of coins in fields near Avebury: "Ancient coins, supposed to be British, are said to be frequently picked up by the plough-boys in the adjacent fields, especially after the heavy rains have washed away the soil." (*Jefferies' Land* 179).

Such rapid changes displaced customs and traditions which had been consistent features of the agricultural world for centuries, and consequently threatened the personal and social identities of the agricultural working classes. Alterations in how the land was managed and worked upset relationships between farmers and workers, leading to disputes about the costs of rent and wages and the working conditions of agricultural labourers. *Hodge and His Masters*, first serialised in *The Standard* between 1878-1879, was intended by Jefferies to "remedy [. . .] the ills of the depression years of the 1870s" (vi), which were a result of bad harvests, falling crop prices, and increase in foreign imports. In his account of labouring conditions and the history of farming, Jefferies writes in the knowledge that agriculturalists had – as a partial consequence of the popularisation of archaeology – a general level of awareness of the types, variation and locations of archaeological finds. As he points out in *Hodge and his Masters* the traditional farmer, represented by the character "Harry," has worked the same tract of land all his life, and "knew enough of archaeology to be able to tell any enthusiastic student who chanced to come along where to find the tumuli and earthworks on the Downs" (65). Harry owned Roman coins, found on his farm, which were "produced to visitors with pride" (65). Writing in his own new vein of agricultural journalism, which depended upon direct observation and time spent in the company of farmers and labourers, Jefferies achieves a form of synthesis between the scientific and rural imagination. His observation that "Harry really did possess a wide fund of solid, if quiet, knowledge" (65) illustrates how Jefferies sought to represent the spectrum of life as it really was and not only imagined to be. Such portrayals reveal that awareness and knowledge of archaeology was not limited to the middle classes, but rather could be acquired over time through familiarity with the land; something that Hardy similarly explored through his fiction.

The idea of an agricultural worker knowing a landscape, and the implications of being drawn away from it during an era of social change, is a theme of Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), serialised in *Belgravia* in the same year as Jefferies's *Hodge*. Through the drama of Dorset-born Clym Yeobright's return to Wessex to become a furze cutter, Hardy draws upon the rich archaeological heritage of the area to deepen the characters,' and the reader's, engagement with the landscape. In the opening pages of the novel Hardy presents Egdon Heath as essentially unchanging and unaffected by human activity. The prehistoric Rainbarrow is "almost crystallised to a natural product" by time and "everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead" gives "ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New" (14). "Prehistoric Times" was the title of the seminal book published by Lubbock, later known as Lord Avebury, in 1865. The book was a major contribution to the new science of prehistoric archaeology, and Hardy's use of its title reflects his awareness and interest in the unfolding anthropological and archaeological debates of the time. In his description

of the Rainbarrow – a Bronze Age bowl barrow – Hardy presents the monument as testament to a once thriving human society, which, having fallen subject to cultural change, is now as lifeless and still as the heath itself. Human impact on the landscape is minimal, and almost superfluous. Moreover, the remoteness of the barrow lends it protection from encroaching agricultural change: “not a plough had ever disturbed a grain of that stubborn soil,” and as such it remains accessible and attractive to the archaeologist: “In the heath's barrenness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian” (22). The heath's immunity from agricultural disturbance means that there lies an intact and yet unknown subterranean world beneath the soil. Hardy's use of the word “fertility” suggests that this darkness harbours a potential yield that will be of interest or even profit to the archaeologist. Hardy may be referring here to the trend of “barrow digging” which peaked during the mid-Victorian era, and which resulted in the plundering of thousands of prehistoric burial sites across the UK. During an era of agricultural upheaval, which threatened disconnection from the past, such latent potential – which for Radford “impact[s] in potentially surprising ways upon the modern moment” (Radford 37) – afforded imaginative and stabilising links with former human activity in the landscape, thus securing the late-Victorian mind, described by Hardy as “adrift on change” (*Return* 14).

For Diggory Venn, the reddleman who travels the land to provide dye for sheep farmers, the barrow on Egdon Hill is an imaginative point of contact between himself and the ancient inhabitants of the site. Hardy points out that reddlemen are “one of a class rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex,” and as such Venn is “a curious, interesting and nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail” (*Return* 16). In his description of Venn's view of the heath Hardy makes a distinction between the solid form of the prehistoric Rainbarrow on Egdon Heath – which he terms “the pole and axis of this heathery world” (19) – and the ambiguous space of the sky above. The image of a “celestial globe” (19) connects the limited topographical knowledge of the mind of man with the larger unknown space of the sky; similarly linking the grounded experience of the agricultural worker, lodged in the present, with the ambiguous activities of his Celtic predecessors. Hardy describes the barrow as occupying the “loftiest ground of the loneliest height that the heath contained” (19), suggesting that, for the individual mind seeking to secure itself, this height afforded greater potential for imaginative insight than the lower lying heathland. This distinction between low and high ground was something widely appreciated by prehistoric societies, who engineered earthworks of great heights as a means of protection from attack, but also, as in the case of Hardy's Rainbarrow, for prominence – the visibility of a barrow in a landscape keeping alive the memory of the ancestor interred within it. As Venn watches, a chain of agricultural workers make a pile of furze faggots on “the crown of the tumulus” and set it alight. The event of the fire brings life to the still barrow, and alters the meaning of ordinary time:

It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with this spot. The ashes of the original British pyre which blazed from that summit lay fresh and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread. The flames from funeral piles long ago kindled there had shone down upon the lowlands as these were shining now. Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground and duly had their day. (23)

The innate impulse to light fires in the landscape transcends cultural change to connect the agricultural workers with their environment and with the activities of their prehistoric ancestors. In imagining back, to "prehistoric times," the past becomes fluid – enough to "dive into." The accumulated soil strata, which contain ashes from the similar practices of ancient communities, strengthen the physical "height" and presence of the monument and imbue it with symbolic significance. Just as fire, as a source of light and warmth, was a connective force within prehistoric communities, and was important in some prehistoric burial traditions, so it continues to facilitate human interaction in late-nineteenth-century agricultural society. The reddleman's observations from his comfortable resting place, which connect him with the great tradition of human activity in the area, implicitly suggest that it is only his cultural status – his class and occupation – which are becoming eclipsed by social and agricultural change, whereas the inclination to continue certain rituals in the landscape remains. Allison Adler Kroll suggests that these funereal monuments in Hardy's landscapes "collectively shape and are shaped by the human activities that take place around them" (342), a process which facilitates continued cultural engagement with the land over time. Perhaps more than this, Hardy's observation of how the barrow is used by farming communities over time suggests that the human mind has the ability to transcend the linear boundaries of distance and time and connect with the past consciousness of the prehistoric people who shaped the landscape. In doing so, Hardy implicitly suggests that this connection with the past affords partial consolation for the rapid changes which were causing crises in personal, social and cultural identities.

In the novel Hardy considers the significance of the routes which thread the Wessex landscape and which were carved and used by prehistoric farming communities. He describes the road near the Rainbarrow as intermittently "over[laying]" ancient tracks which "branched from the great Western road of the Romans, the Via Iceniana, or Icknield Street" (20). In nineteenth-century archaeology many of what were termed "ancient British track-ways" were "discovered and laid down in maps" (*New Monthly Magazine* 237) by Sir Richard Colt Hoare in his *Ancient History of North and South Wiltshire* (1812-1819), and his contributions to the eleven volumes of the *History of Modern Wiltshire* (1822-1844). In the above passage Hardy imbues the road with a "clear" durability, highlighting its importance as a means of travel and communication in the otherwise "confuse[d]" and otherworldly heath. At the time Hardy was writing, ancient trackways were still travelled by foot, and were frequently used by labouring classes, with wealthier people making use of stagecoaches and the new-built steam railways. Hardy knew the ancient routes of Dorset, noting that for the first time in human history, since the introduction of new farming techniques, industrialisation, and more sophisticated means of communication, some prehistoric paths were ceasing to be used (*Jude* 15).

The prehistoric road, known as the Ridgeway, connects Jefferies's Land with Hardy's North Wessex, and was once a cornerstone of the prehistoric world. In *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the spot where the ancient Roman Road (the Icknield Way) crosses the Ridgeway on the way to Oxford is imbued with imaginative significance for the young aspiring Jude: "At the very top it was crossed at right angles by a green "ridgeway" – the Icknield Street and original Roman road through the district [. . .] now neglected and overgrown" (15). The location of Jude's family in Lewton Bassett near "Alfredston" (Wantage) – near the ancient Ridgeway – appears to have been carefully chosen by Hardy as the setting for his most controversial novel. At the crossroads, in the midst of the agricultural landscape, stands the Brown House, "a weather-beaten old barn" (15) which becomes a metaphorical crossing point in

various stages of Jude's development: as a boy, first glimpsing Oxford through the mist, then as an adolescent courting the flirtatious Arabella, and finally, on his broken-hearted return from his failed union with Sue Bridehead. Each event in Jude's life that facilitates his encounter with the spot denotes a further development in his own journey. The ancient route, once an integral part of agricultural life, is "neglected" and its barren associations are linked with Jude's disastrous marriage to Sue. Hardy repeatedly uses distances, landmarks, and local villages to locate the "Brown House," which itself features in varying moods and circumstances associated with Jude's female relationships.

Adler Kroll, citing the work of archaeologist Christopher Tilley, notes that:

Because the pasts of locales and landscapes are "crucially constitutive of their presents," the paths which traverse such spaces accrue meaning as well; "a journey along a path" in fact constitutes "a paradigmatic cultural act, since it is following in the steps inscribed by others whose steps have worn a conduit for movement which becomes the correct or "best way to go." (347)

Kroll recognises that ways in which Hardy uses paths aligns his "archaeological vision" with Tilley's – "the Roman road and the ancient highway in *The Return of the Native*, the road which encircles Casterbridge in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the path through Little Hintock in *The Woodlanders*, the way into Blackmoor Vale in *Tess*, the road to Marygreen in *Jude* – all of these paths make and remake local history in their respective narratives" (347). In *Jude*, the story of the acrimonious parting of his parents at the Brown House, where the Ridgeway crosses the modern road – imparted to him by his grandmother – becomes a memory of his own, reinforced by repeatedly passing the spot as he walks to work, and becomes internalized print by Sue as an ill-omen to their impending marriage. In response to the changing social and cultural conditions of the late nineteenth century, they forge a new route to happiness, through unknown territories and irrespective of the warnings of the past. Although they ultimately fall victim to its strangeness the brave move forward anticipates what D.H. Lawrence was later to term "heaving into uncreated space" (Lawrence 431). The Lawrentian search for new psychic terrain is tentatively attempted by Sue – the "modern woman" (Schaffer 230) – through a shared psycho-physical experience of a landscape imbued with memories of past generations. However, the couple's attempt to disregard the experiences of their predecessors is marred by the persistent "living hand," as Hardy puts it in *A Laodicean* (1881) (205-6), of the past that sculpts the present.

Similar route crossings of the Wiltshire Ridgeway are observed by Jefferies in *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879), but are perceived as conduits to a more holistic experience of the landscape than in Hardy's work. Jefferies describes the Ridgeway as "a broad green track" which is itself crossed by waggon tracks and "is distinct from the hard roads of modern construction which also at wide intervals cross its course, dusty and glaringly white in the sunshine" (52). In contrast to Hardy's depiction of the same area in *Jude* – in which the modern road is crossed intermittently by ancient "ridgeways" – Jefferies, writing from the perspective of the natural historian travelling on foot, identifies the Ridgeway itself as the most direct route across the Wiltshire Downs, bearing its own "course," and being "entirely independent of the roads of modern days" (53). He goes on to recount the history of the track through different archaeological epochs:

The origin of the track goes back into the dimmest antiquity; there is evidence that it was a military road when the fierce Dane carried fire and slaughter inland, leaving his 'nailed bark' in the creeks of the rivers, and before that when the Saxons pushed up from the sea. The eagles of old Rome, perhaps, were borne along it, and yet earlier the chariots of the Britons may have used it - traces of all have been found; so that for fifteen centuries this track of the primitive peoples has maintained its existence through the strange changes of the times, till now in the season the cumbrous steam-ploughing engines jolt and strain and pant over the uneven turf. (Jefferies, *Wild Life* 53)

The Ridgeway, which has endured the "strange changes of the times," is not only a route to travel on foot, but also a metaphysical route which encourages the thinker to consider the prehistoric significance of the landscape, and the implications of this for the modern mind. Jefferies refers to the "great earthwork," Liddington Castle, the spot where he would go to think, and where he began composing his spiritual autobiography, *The Story of My Heart* (1883). Surrounding the earthwork is an archaeological landscape which has grown into and around the natural world; akin to Hardy's barrows "almost crystallised to natural products by long continuance" in *The Return of the Native* (15).

The "chain of forts," which are "all connected by the same green track" (Jefferies *Wild Life* 53) denotes the uniformity of prehistoric organisation, and contrasts with the ground that "sinks," and the "bending" and "swaying" crops. Beside the track, which conceals hares in the long grass at its edges, steam engines appear as incongruous animals which "jolt and strain and pant over the uneven turf" (53), representing a new form of labour which has diverted away from the course of prehistoric tradition. The place where the old track "happens to answer the purposes of modern civilisation" (57) is a sudden, accidental occurrence; much as, for rural populations in Wiltshire, traditional ways of farming continued until they were forcibly eclipsed by modern techniques. As the ancient Ridgeway continued to connect sites which were thousands of years old – despite the unpredictable threats of modern change – the archaeological imagination afforded a stable avenue for the late-Victorian thinker; one that tangibly connected past and contemporary ways of living through the landscape.

Roger Ebbatson notes that for Jefferies, "Nature represents a kind of exit from the historical process," and that Hardy offers a quite different interpretation of history (*Heidegger's Bicycle*, 69). Hardy's work was more closely guided by scientific works of the period, and in *The Woodlanders* (1887) he draws upon the work of Charles Lyell to explore how agricultural workers adapted to their changing environment. When Marty's father, the agricultural worker Mr. South, is struck down by an irrational fear of the elm tree growing by the house and is too ill to work, Marty sits up all night creating his thatching spars. By the fireside in the dark little cottage, her activity recalls the manufacturing methods of her prehistoric ancestors:

On her left hand lay a bundle of the straight smooth hazel rods called spargads – the raw material of her manufacture: on her right a heap of chips and ends – the refuse – with which the fire was maintained: in front a pile of the finished articles. To produce them she took up each gad, looked critically at it from end to end, cut it to length, split it into four, and sharpened each of

the quarters with dexterous blows which brought it to a triangular point precisely resembling that of a bayonet. (10)

The crafting of thatching spars was a cottage industry which, unlike other agricultural practices, such as mowing and threshing, was not likely to be eclipsed by the arrival of the machine. During the 1870s and 1880s archaeologists and anthropologists around the world were conducting further studies to try and shed light on the manufacturing practices of prehistoric societies (Jones Jnr, "Primitive Manufacture of Spear and Arrow Points"; "Centres of Primitive Manufacture in Georgia"). These studies were largely guided by Charles Lyell's accounts in *The Antiquity of Man* (1863), which clearly stated the case for ancient flint weapons being the handiwork of prehistoric man, and confuted theological evidence concerning the history of humanity. In his book Lyell discusses flint implements found in the Somme Valley, which he dates to the Pleistocene era. C. Evans had previously written in *Archaeologia* that the flints possessed "a uniformity of shape, a correctness of outline, and a sharpness about the cutting edges and points, which cannot be due to anything but design" (Evans 288). Lyell's description of flint weapons excavated from a pit at Abbeville gives one of the first accounts of prehistoric manufacturing practices:

It has often been asked, how, without the use of metallic hammers, how so many of these oval and spear-headed tools could have been wrought into so uniform a shape. Mr. Evans, in order experimentally to illustrate the process, constructed a stone hammer, by mounting a pebble in a wooden handle, and with this tool struck off flakes from the edge on both sides of a Chalk flint, till it acquired precisely the same shape as the oval tool. (Lyell 118)

In both Lyell's and Hardy's accounts the raw material is shaped by repeated heavy blows to create a spear-headed tool. Marty's cutting and splitting of the hazel poles and sharpening "each of the quarters with dexterous blows [. . .] to a triangular point," recalls Evans' reconstruction of a flint arrowhead, in which he seeks to create a "spear-headed tool" of a "uniform shape" by striking "flakes from the edge on both sides of a Chalk flint, till it acquired precisely the same shape as the oval tool." Hardy's description of Marty working the spars by the fireside therefore resembles the process of crafting prehistoric weapons. Marty has "the raw material of her manufacture" on one side, and "a heap of chips and ends" on the other, which Hardy terms "the refuse." At the time Hardy was writing, archaeologists were recognising the value of refuse heaps in determining the motivations, lifestyles and practices of prehistoric peoples. The word "refuse" had become increasingly associated with prehistory – not only through the work of Lyell, but also John Lubbock who published a paper on Danish Shell-Mounds, or "Kitchen Middens" – known as refuse heaps – in the *Natural History Review* in 1861 (497). Moreover, nineteenth-century excavations had established prehistoric weapon manufacture as methodical; flints were chipped into arrowheads and knives with clear areas for refuse on one side, and flint cores on the other.⁵ Hardy's use of the term "bayonet" thus draws implicit parallels between nineteenth-century and prehistoric weaponry. Through this comparison Hardy could well be suggesting that cottage traditions such as spar-making might be in danger of becoming extinct through the arrival of modern ways of living. Yet further, he is observing the long continuance of humans' ability to create tools from natural materials to aid their survival, and, perhaps more importantly, the

method of this process remains relatively unchanged since prehistoric times. For Marty, the working of the spars is her last defence against the encroaching threat of poverty and homelessness which result once her father passes away.

Later in the novel Hardy explains the deep connection between Marty and her fellow agricultural worker, Giles Winterborne, which points towards the redundancy of scientific knowledge in a rural setting (326-7). Giles and Marty have a "clear gaze" that sees beyond the "casual glimpses" of the "ordinary" observer into the character of the woodland itself. This form of instinctive, primitive engagement with nature is not savage or rudimentary but is achieved through sustained "intelligent intercourse" with the sights and sounds of the woods. Throughout the novel Hardy presents Marty South as alone, without family, purpose or future, but his revelation at the very end of the story of her "counterpart" role seems to suggest a redefining of his attitude to Darwinian ideas of individuality. Rather than being a lonely product of biologically determined processes,⁶ it is Marty's individuality – that she "alone, of all the women in Hintock and the world" could have known and understood Giles – that threatens Giles's lover Grace, who had mistakenly thought herself to be his equal. Marty's individuality arises not from nature or culture, but from an instinctive way of being "inherited from her Teutonic forefathers," which, through its joint expression with Giles, allows her to experience a sense of community with the natural world, and causes her social isolation to seem less important. Hardy writes that their environment has its own language; the wind has a voice that "murmurs" and the trees communicate their health by the "state" of their branches. These "remoter signs and symbols" of "runic obscurity" make sense when Giles and Marty collect them to "form an alphabet"; a unique language of the woodland environment. Agricultural work, using traditional methods, thus becomes a process of discovery of instinctive inner knowledge, passed down through generations, which aligns the mind with the subtle character of the landscape.

By contrast, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), the incongruity between new mechanised farming methods and the well-being of agricultural workers is symbolic of a post-Romantic loss of balance between the mind and the land. Moreover, this loss is identified to have partly arisen through adherence to outdated ancestral social structures which could no longer meet the needs of families who had worked the land for centuries. In a letter to Rider Haggard in March 1902, Hardy expressed concern that his own experience of agricultural life was "too exclusively on the domestic side to be of much use" (Purdy and Millgate 9). Similar doubts were cast concerning Hardy's knowledge of archaeology when a critic in *The Antiquary* (1908) perhaps unfairly labelled Hardy's account in the *Times* concerning the excavation of Maumbury Ring as "non-archaeological" (402). Yet despite Hardy's not being considered an expert in either agriculture or archaeology, his knowledge of both subjects added depth and dramatic intensity to some of the most memorable scenes in his novels. When Tess, bereft of her child and pursued by her tormentor, Alec D'Urberville, is working the steam-threshing machine she is "shaken bodily by its spinning" and "thrown [. . .] into a stupefied reverie, in which her arms worked on independently of her consciousness." The threshed straw forms a "yellow river" which unnaturally "runs uphill" (Hardy, *Tess* 322-3); the antithesis to her "whimsical fancy" that "would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story" (91). Tess's alienation from the machine symbolises her social predicament as an unmarried mother and "fallen woman." As a product of her family's misplaced adherence to a faulty aristocratic system, Tess loses her independence and eventually her life. Kingsbere, the ancestral seat of the

D'Urbervilles is a "half-dead townlet [. . .] where lay those ancestors of whom her father had spoken and sung to painfulness" (348). Hardy's implicit suggestion that ancestral social structures were an outdated product of civilisation was a view already in debate during the 1850s. An article in the *Manchester Times* (1851) discusses how "we are acknowledged to be the most aristocratic people on earth" with "various grades of nobility"; this characteristic of the nineteenth century had been absent from prehistoric societies – the "democratic character" of which had "preserved [. . .] the original spirit of the race, the spirit of individual independence." The land was farmed and managed under this hierarchical structure until the agricultural revolution brought new types of squires who had connections in the city, and sometimes overseas, and who did not necessarily have an ancestral seat in the area.⁷ For Tess's husband Angel Clare, farming abroad in the Colonies promises "independence without the sacrifice of [. . .] intellectual liberty" (121).

Tess's inability to feel "at home" in the world is finally, yet only temporarily, resolved when she and Angel flee from the police to Stonehenge, the largest megalithic monument in Europe. When she lies upon the altar stone she states: "One of my mother's people was a shepherd hereabout, now I think of it. And you used to say at Talbothays that I was a heathen. So now I am at home" (379). In the ancient enclosure and burial ground, where prehistoric societies once celebrated death, Tess makes the greatest sacrifice of all – not that of her own life – but her letting go of her husband so that he might be free to live on without her and marry her sister Liza-Lu. The altar stone symbolises freedom from the laws and expectations of nobility; a liberty associated with the Neolithic people who constructed it. Despite the myths surrounding its purpose and construction, nineteenth-century accounts identified the monument as a centre of religious and economic importance for Britain's earliest farmers. Angel's identification of the "lofty stone set away [. . .] in the direction of the sun" (380) infers his knowledge of these former times when the land had been managed in accordance with solar and lunar cycles. Within the complex "web" (340) of Victorian class and social structure this form of fertile and meaningful engagement with the natural world – which Tess had glimpsed as a "Pagan fantasy of [her] remote forefathers" (109) – is no longer possible. With the loss of these centuries-old traditions, the ancestral system – represented by the mouldering D'Urberville tombs – offers only a "half-dead" and barren psychic ground without light or potential. Thus, Tess perceives her ancestors as "useless" and "she almost hated them for the dance they had led her" (108). Tess's condition as a fallen woman and murderess has no place in the present, yet finds a 'home' in the lawlessness of the prehistoric setting, where former "sacrifice [. . .] to the sun" (380) celebrated the relationship between life and death. Hardy thus hints that connections between past and present people, which for the most part exist on a subterranean unconscious level, can be illuminated through dramatic moments in the landscape where the human past suddenly becomes tangible.

Despite latent differences in their imaginative interpretation of archaeology during the great agricultural depression, Jefferies's and Hardy's comparisons of modern and ancient farming practices, gained through the increasing availability of knowledge of how ancient societies lived and died, allowed greater insights into the relation between humans and the landscape over time, and forged new connections between Victorians and their ancestors. Placing agricultural change in the broader perspective of past human life revealed the consistent importance of farming to communities over time, and through observing contemporary human activity in the landscape it became possible to understand ways in which the past continued to exist.

Consonant with this process were new ways of thinking and feeling about the relation of the individual to both wider and prehistoric society, and suggested what Hardy termed the "continuance" (*Woodlanders* 327) of the prehistoric state in the psyche, rather than it being a separate or dysfunctional past. Paths in the landscape and mindscape could still be followed, despite the lapse of time since their original construction. These "Ridgeways" of thought and feeling, which continued to be traversed over centuries, offered a means of experiencing the landscape in ways similar to ancient communities who inhabited and farmed the same area. That some of these tracks were observed to have been "neglected" during the nineteenth century points to the late-Victorian awareness of the loss of traditional ways of living and a weakening connection with the past. However, the repetition of certain customs and rites in the landscape expressed the human impulse to reconnect with the environment, and were perceived to transcend social and cultural change, thus placing the individual – coming to terms with the implications of the Agricultural revolution – in a grander sequence of life, which remained essentially unchanged since prehistoric times.

Notes

1. Jefferies was born in Wiltshire and Hardy in Dorset.
2. Thomas Hardy's article, "The Dorsetshire Labourer" appeared in *Longman's* in July 1883, and Jefferies's "The Wiltshire Labourer" was published four months later in November 1883.
3. See, for example, an account of an excursion by the Cardiff Naturalists Society in 1874 that visited cromlechs on the Duffryn Estate. In an address delivered while standing on top of one of the cromlechs the president of the society hints towards a more sympathetic understanding of past peoples: "Here were deposited, in a remote period of history, the remains of British chieftains, of parents whose burial may have caused many a scene of sorrow – deep and touching as the scenes so frequently witnessed in our modern cemeteries." ("Cardiff Naturalist's Society" 6).
4. The discovery of this previously unknown essay in *The Examiner* establishes that Jefferies wrote on agricultural subjects for the magazine; a weekly review of politics, literature, science, and art published in London.
5. The association between the crafting of weapons and refuse heaps had been established through excavation. See, for example, Auguste Demmin. *Weapons of War: being a history of arms and armour from the earliest period to the present time*. Trans. Charles Christopher Black. London: Bell and Daldy, 1870, p. 80, who in his discussion of polished flint weapons alludes to 'alluvial soils in which great quantities of these beautiful weapons have been found (in the so-called Kiokkenmoedinge or kitchen-refuse heaps)'.
6. For readings which suggest that Hardy incorporates biological determinism into his novels see Jane Mattison, *Knowledge and Survival in the novels of Thomas Hardy* (2002) Chapter 4, and Richardson in Wilson 54-69. Readings that closely affiliate Hardy with Darwin might exercise more caution in the use of terms such as "staunch humanist" and "evolutionary meliorist" to describe him (see, for example, Mallikarjun 37), and pay more attention to Hardy's ambivalence towards Darwin.
7. For further reference see "Old Squires and New." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 126. 770 (1879): 723-739.

Works Cited

- "The Antiquary." *Saturday Review* 53.1390 (1882): 772-4.
- "Cardiff Naturalist's Society: Field Meeting at St. Donat's Castle." *Western Mail* 1 Aug. 1874: 6.
- Demmin, Auguste. *Weapons of War: Being a History of Arms and Armour from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*. Trans. Charles Christopher Black. London: Bell and Daldy, 1870.
- Carter, Ian. *Railways and Culture in Britain: the Epitome of Modernity*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001.
- Cleere, Henry. *Approaches to the Archaeological Heritage: a Comparative Study of World Cultural Resource Management Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Colt Hoare, Richard. *Ancient History of North and South Wiltshire*. London: Royal Folio Society, 1812-1819.
- . *History of Modern Wiltshire: Old and New Sarum, or Salisbury*. London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1843.
- Ebbatson, Roger. "Landscape and Machine: Hardy, Jefferies and the Question of Technology." *Writing Technologies* 2.2 (2009): 35-54.
- . "Sensations of Earth: Thomas Hardy and Richard Jefferies." *Heidegger's Bicycle: Interfering with Victorian Texts*. Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2006: 63-80.
- Evans, C. "On the Occurrence of Flint Implements in Undisturbed Beds of Gravel, Sand and Clay." *Archaeologia* 38 (1860): 280-307.
- Gibson, Monro. "A New Year's Word of Cheer." *The Sunday at home: a Family Magazine for Sabbath reading* 1758 (1888): 5-7.
- Hardy, Thomas. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.
- . *The Woodlanders*, Ed. Dale Kramer. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.
- . *A Laodicean*, Ed. Jane Gatewood. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991.
- . *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Ed. Simon Gatrell and Juliet Grindle. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.
- . *Jude the Obscure*. Ed. Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.
- . *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* Vol. 3. Ed. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982.
- . *The Return of the Native*. New York: Signet Classic, 1959.
- . "The Dorsetshire Labourer." *Longman's Magazine* 2. 9 (1883): 252-269.
- Jefferies, Richard. *Letters to Aunt Ellen*. Oxon: Petton Books, 2011.
- . *Wild Life in a Southern County*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.
- . "A Roman Brook." *Life of the Fields*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010: 36-40.
- . *Hodge and his Masters*. Ed. Andrew Rossabi. London: Quartet Books, 1979.
- . *The Story of My Heart*. Ed. Thomas B. Mosher. Portland: ME, 1905.
- . *Jefferies' Land*. Ed. Grace Toplis. London: Simpkin, Marshal, Hamilton, Kent, 1896.
- . "The Wiltshire Labourer." *Longman's Magazine* 3. 13 (1883): 52-65.
- . "Patchwork Agriculture." *The Examiner* 3522 (1875): 855-856.
- . "The Size of Farms." *New Quarterly Magazine* 3 (1874): 187-202.
- Jones, Charles C. Jnr. "Primitive Manufacture of Spear and Arrow Points along the Line of the Savannah River." *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution* (1879): 376-382.

- . "Centres of Primitive Manufacture in Georgia." *Magazine of American History with Notes and Queries* 5 (1880): 347-350.
- Kroll, Allison Adler. "Hardy's Wessex and the Archaeology of Rural England." *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 31.4 (2009): 335-352.
- Lawrence, David Herbert. *Phoenix: the Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*. New York: Viking Press, 1972.
- Lyell, Charles. *On the Antiquity of Man*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1863.
- Lubbock, John. *Prehistoric Times: as Illustrated by Ancient Remains and Manners and Customs of Modern Savages*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1869.
- "Kitchen Middens." *Natural History Review* (1861): 497.
- Mallikarjun, Patil. *Thomas Hardy's Poetry and Existentialism*. Florida: Atlantic Publishing, 1999.
- "Manners and Customs of our Ancestors." *Manchester Times* 18 Oct. 1851.
- Mattison, Jane. *Knowledge and Survival in the novels of Thomas Hardy*. Lund University, 2002.
- New Monthly Magazine* (1865): 237.
- "Notes of the Month." *Antiquary* 44 (1908): 402.
- "Old Squires and New." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 126 (1879): 723-739.
- Parker, Christopher. *Gender Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Literature*. Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995.
- Radford, Andrew. *Mapping the Wessex Novel: Landscape, History and the Parochial in British Literature, 1870-1940*. London: Continuum, 2010.
- The Reliquary* 24 (1884): 256.
- Richardson, Angelique. "Thomas Hardy and the Place of Culture." *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Ed. Keith Wilson. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009: 54-69.
- Schaffer, Talia. *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England*. Virginia: U of Virginia P, 2000.
- Wilson, Daniel. *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*. Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1851.
- "The Woods in April." *Once a Week* 3.72 (1869): 393.