The Archaeology of Improvement in Britain, 1750–1850

SARAH TARLOW

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In this innovative study, Sarah Tarlow shows how the archaeology of this period manifests a widespread and cross-cutting ethic of Improvement, one of the most current concepts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. Theoretically informed and drawn from primary and secondary sources in a range of disciplines, the author considers agriculture and the rural environment, towns and buildings such as working-class housing and institutions of reform. From bleach baths to window glass, rubbish pits to tea wares, the material culture of the period reflects a particular set of values and aspirations. Tarlow examines the philosophical and historical background to the notion of Improvement and demonstrates how this concept is a useful lens through which to examine the material culture of later historical Britain.

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PREFACE

The writing of this book was supported by a Research Fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust and a period of study leave granted by the University of Leicester. I am most grateful to both institutions for giving me this opportunity.

The ideas expressed here have taken shape partly through discussion with sharp-minded colleagues and friends. I would particularly like to thank Dave Edwards, Terry Hopkinson, Deirdre O'Sullivan, Marilyn Palmer, Mark Pluciennik and Richard Thomas. Outside my own institution, conversations with John Robb, Andrew Fleming, Chris Cumberpatch and Eleanor Casella have been very useful. Dave Edwards and Marilyn Palmer both read and commented on the entire text at a time when they had plenty of better things to do – I owe you each a large gin. The readers for Cambridge University Press – Matthew Johnson, Peter Mandler and Mary Beaudry – provided very helpful suggestions and comments. Peter Mandler especially gave a historian's view on the text, and his recommendations have helped immeasurably. Many thanks to Simon Whitmore and Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press for being such helpful editors. Finally to Mark Pluciennik I am infinitely indebted for the moral, intellectual and logistical support without which this book would not have been written; thanks also to my two older children Rachel and Adam for their patience, and to the youngest one, Gregory, whose arrival proved a powerful enforcer of deadlines.

 The cover illustration shows a 'prone couch' for the correction of poor posture, from G. B. Childs *On the Improvement and Preservation of the Female Figure*, 1840.

ONE:

INTRODUCTION

> Yet, unless I greatly deceive myself, the general effect of this chequered narrative will be to excite thankfulness in all religious minds, and hope in the breasts of all patriots. For the history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement. Those who compare the age on which their lot has fallen with a golden age which exists only in their imagination may talk of degeneracy and decay: but no man who is correctly informed as to the past will be disposed to take a morose or desponding view of the present.
>
> T. B. Macaulay *History of England* 1849: 1

> In tracing the progress of improvement, it is not necessary to draw the line of distinction between individual, local, and national establishments. These ... have all one origin and one tendency.
>
> David Laurie 1810: xxxiv

This book is not a complete account of the history and archaeology of Britain between 1750 and 1850. The history books alone dealing with that century fill several hundred metres of shelf space in my university library and one obviously cannot distil all that information, or even the most important bits of it into one, medium-sized book. Instead I have chosen to focus on aspects of the material evidence of the period which throw light on what I consider to be an important and characteristic aspect of the period: the idea of Improvement. My (admittedly ambitious) aim here is to provide an enhanced historical and theoretical context for existing and future work; to complement and contextualise the numerous pieces of small scale and meticulous work that have been produced in industrial, post-medieval and landscape archaeology. There are a number of things that this book is not: it is not intended as a critique of past work, nor yet a summary of it, although I will be drawing heavily on the original research of other archaeologists and historians of the periods. It is not a totalising

single narrative into which all developments can be seen to fit, or which accounts for all historically and materially evidenced practices. Rather, it is a framework which I hope can be employed, adapted or rejected by others in the project of developing a theoretically sophisticated later historical archaeology in Britain.

Archaeological Scholarship of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Finding a Name

It is perhaps indicative of the fragmentary state of archaeological study of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain that there is still no consensus about what it should be called. 'Post-medieval archaeology', as adopted by the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology and used as the title of its journal, has traditionally encompassed only the early modern period. Gaimster's (1994) review of the subject, aiming 'to summarise the post-war development of an archaeological approach to the study of British post-medieval society' is typical in that the period defined is from 1450–1750, and refers almost exclusively to changes in ceramic production, exchange and use. Virtually no reference is made to wider historical questions or to the study of landscape, architecture or other aspects of the broad context. The problems with defining a start date for this period (Courtney 1997) are matched by those of defining an end. There is still no agreement on whether post-medieval archaeology is equivalent to early modern history, or includes the entire period from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.

In the traditional chronology of British archaeology, 'Post-medieval archaeology' is followed by 'industrial archaeology' (see reviews such as Hunter and Ralston 1999; Vyner 1994; and the regional research frameworks produced by English Heritage), but the problems with this designation are even greater than with 'Post-medieval archaeology'. It is variously used to denote a theme, a period and/or an approach to data. The work of industrial archaeologists has traditionally orientated itself towards (as its name indicates) a research agenda limited to the remains of industry, although a case has been made that the term should be understood to include the archaeology of the industrial age, including its buildings, landscapes and artefacts (Palmer 1990). It must be noted, however, that despite the efforts of some industrial archaeologists to expand their discipline, it remains predominantly focused on the technology and isolated from other developments in later historical archaeology. The context-free chapter on industrial archaeology (Cranstone 2001) contributed to Newman's *Historical Archaeology of Britain* (2001), for example, sits oddly in a book otherwise dedicated to the integration of different forms of evidence in addressing social historical questions.

Recent Repositioning

We are now close to the point where it is no longer necessary to lament the rudimentary state of archaeology of later historical periods in Britain. The past few years have seen a flurry of publications dealing with the (long) post-medieval period. There are new books, conferences and academic posts (in November 2003, a search of staff websites of British archaeology departments showed seventeen people in academic positions who mentioned a research interest in this period; in addition there are scores of archaeologists in commercial, heritage and local government employment who contribute to the development of later historical archaeology), so it would no longer be correct to say that the period is neglected. The ambition of later historical archaeology has also grown, and institutional changes recognise this expansion. The Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology, formerly very conservative in its remit and interests, has dropped the 'end-date' of 1750 and now considers all archaeology from the sixteenth century onwards. Its association with the Society for Medieval Archaeology has given rise to a series of conferences and books which examine critically some of the issues affecting the medieval/post medieval transition (Gaimster and Stamper 1997; Gaimster and Gilchrist 2003; Barker and Cranstone 2004; Green and Leech 2006). Crossley's textbook *Post-Medieval Archaeology* (1990), which was limited to the early modern period, has been effectively superseded by Newman (2001), an excellent though confessedly atheoretical survey of the archaeology of Britain from the Reformation to the twentieth century. Other authored volumes (e.g. Johnson 1993, 1996; Tarlow 1999; Finch 2000; Dalglish 2003) and edited volumes (e.g. Tarlow and West 1999; Buchli and Lucas 2001) have raised the profile of later historical archaeology and related material studies (including archaeological studies of landscape and architecture). An increase in the number of PhD students and a new academic forum (the annual conference on Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory, established in 2003) have also re-invigorated the subject. British later historical archaeology has never been more exciting or even, in a limited archaeological way, fashionable.

In America, South Africa and Australia, the archaeological study of the period from European contact to the present is known as 'historical archaeology' and some recent occurrences (e.g. the British conference initiated in 2003 on Contemporary and Historical Archaeology and Theory) suggest the term is now being used in Europe to refer to the archaeology of the last 500 years, despite reservations. Partly these reservations are practical arising from confusion between the 'American' meaning of historical archaeology (the last 500 years or so) and the Euro-Asian meaning of the term (the last several thousand years), giving rise to ambiguity and misunderstanding in our discussions. Partly they are political and philosophical; 'historical archaeology' is not really acceptable as a global term (contra Orser 1996). In Europe, where 'historical archaeology' is used in place of

a more temporally specific term, it generally refers to all periods which have produced decipherable textual evidence (Andrén 1998), and where the relationship between text and material needs to be considered. Thus historical archaeology in most of Europe covers a period four times as long as in North America; and in parts of Asia, historical archaeology is far longer than in Europe. Cranstone has made a convincing case that the use of the term 'historical archaeology' to refer to the period after 1492 in Europe is unacceptably Ameri-centric (Cranstone 2004). Ironically, 'historical archaeology' is Orser's preferred term (1996: vii) for 'the post-1492 world'. Exasperatingly, he goes on to describe much of the endeavour of historical archaeologists as 'Eurocentric' – another term which is a more forceful criticism outside Europe – and which seems to imply that European perspectives dominate global historical archaeology rather than those of white Americans.

To adopt the terms used by historians – early modern and modern – would seem sensible, and 'early modern archaeology' is pretty satisfactory, but 'modern archaeology' is ambiguous and could easily be confused with contemporary material culture studies, or could be alluding to present-day archaeological practice. Recently (1999), Susie West and I suggested the term 'later historical archaeology', but at the time of writing, no clear convention has been adopted.

Does it Matter?

Absence of consensus on nomenclature reflects the lack of agreement about research questions, or even what are the main processes, themes and questions in this period to which archaeologists might usefully contribute. Squabbles about inclusion and exclusion, however, represent more than academic turf wars; they signal real differences in view about what are the most interesting and valuable directions of research to pursue. Some archaeologists of historical periods have criticised their fellows for the modesty of their ambitions, for being, in Moreland's evocative phrase 'bottom dwellers' in historical interpretation, seeking out 'text-free zones' where the historian cannot go (Moreland 2001).

In the case of later historical archaeology in Britain, the search for 'text-free zones' where the study of material culture can genuinely offer new facts that are not known or knowable from documentary sources has directed researchers to study aspects of the technology of manufacture itself, and to concentrate on the earlier post-medieval period where there are more gaps in written sources. The understanding of archaeology that underlies this approach is the one that sees material culture as interesting only if it can give us new facts about the past, and archaeology as a second-rate substitute for historical research. Thus, the kind of facts it gives us, though fascinating to some, do not often engage

with the analysis of big historical questions. Many – perhaps most – archaeologists of this period working in Britain do not contextualise their work beyond questions of local technological and economic development, or the narrow histories of one kind of material. Much of the time archaeologists work to no agenda at all for this period, merely recording information generated as by-products of palliative field work, or because post-medieval material is in the way of the *really* interesting earlier deposits. There is little sense that arguments are being made, or that there is much real engagement with historical issues. The pages of *Post-Medieval Archaeology* continue to be dominated by accounts of particular excavations or descriptions of certain bodies of material, and one rarely encounters synthetic analysis or work that attempts to draw out major paradigms. The 'big questions' of history such as the development of capitalism, formation of class identity, the nature of modernity, the creation of an industrial society (rather than industrial machinery), the variety and nature of personal and group identities, colonial and post-colonial relations and economics and the development of modern consumerism have had a limited impact on most field and artefact-centred research. Ongoing endeavours by English Heritage to specify regional research agendas are certainly a welcome development, but with the reduction in funding for their production, it is unclear whether these will eventually be easily available for all areas (currently only a small number of regional framework documents are well advanced). Moreover, the regional research frameworks themselves are intended to be used as planning and management tools and are therefore academically informed, but not highly interpretive, being mainly concerned with identifying priorities in the collection of data.

Later historical archaeology can and should be far more ambitious than this, but it will involve a major change in the way we think about the value and orientation of the subject. Material culture is a central aspect of human expression; it can be just as complex, misleading, ambiguous, rich and insightful as text or art. Nobody would think of asking why we should study the literature or sculpture of the nineteenth century, since we know about the course of historical change in that period from other sources. But other kinds of material culture – pottery, gravestones, field boundaries and even window glass – are just as interesting as art or poetry, not because they give us new facts about what happened, except for some fairly trivial details of manufacture and exchange, but because they enrich our understanding of an exciting and complex period and our appreciation of the meaning and context of superficially mundane and familiar things is itself worth enhancing.

Building a New Later Historical Archaeology

In the absence of a well-developed theoretical framework Palmer and Neaverson have suggested that a naïve progressivism underlies much industrial

archaeology: 'The necessity of locating the earliest example of a particular process, or the most complete surviving site for the purposes of listing and scheduling . . . has inevitably led to an approach which concentrates on the positive aspects of human progress' (Palmer and Neaverson 1998: 4).

They go on to say that, in view of the striking evidence of social upheaval and class redefinition over the last 200–300 years, a Marxist theoretical framework may be more appropriate than this implicit Whiggishness. In other areas of later historical archaeology a neo-Marxist perspective has indeed come to dominate the theoretical horizon, as we shall see.

A neo-Marxist perspective is attractive to historical archaeologists for a number of reasons: first it opens up a really inclusive kind of past which foregrounds the experience of subaltern groups; next, it provides a socio-political context for the understanding of material conditions; third, it is relational, that is, Marxist archaeologies analyse society or culture rather than the individual or interior experience; finally, it informs, and indeed requires, a critical and reflexive archaeological practice in the present.

Neo-Marxist archaeologies have been developed in Britain and elsewhere with reference to the prehistoric past (e.g. McGuire (1992); Spriggs (1984); Shanks and Tilley (1987a, 1987b)), but the rise of Marxist-orientated historical archaeology owes a great debt to the American east-coast archaeologist, Mark Leone. Leone took Deetz's (1977) well-known and highly influential identification of the 'Georgian order' (something Deetz, in turn, had taken from the architectural historian Henry Glassie) and interpreted it as the expression of an essentially capitalist mind-set according to which discipline (e.g. bodily discipline, time discipline) and order are actively promoted as ideological strategies to legitimise capitalism, which he defines as:

> A social system in which the people who own and control the fields, factories, machines, tools and money do not assume the brunt of the work. Other men and women, who must sell their labor as if it were a commodity, perform the work. Nonetheless, the owner of the means and money – the capitalist – reaps most of the benefits from the labor of the workers. This way of seeing capitalism pushes its economic character to the front, without denying the totalizing efforts of capitalism. (Leone 1999: 13)

Leone believes that historical archaeology is necessarily an archaeology of capitalism which, for him, has two related aspects: the first is the delineation of how, historically, inequalities in terms of class, gender, race and so on, came to exist. This includes analysis of how the ideologies that permitted or promoted these inequalities were expressed in society. The second aspect is what could be called 'consciousness-raising'. This means acknowledging that these historical

inequalities continue to structure social and political relationships today and, through active dialogue with many groups in contemporary society, exposing the strategies through which those relationships have been naturalised or otherwise legitimised. Together these add up to a kind of mission statement for the historical archaeologist:

> Our job, therefore, as historical archaeologists is, first, to help identify the workings of capitalism, such as capital extraction, alienation, and supply and demand. Second, we need to see how these penetrate communities and change culture. Third, we can create an understanding of the social and economic implications of activities that make up daily life, such as looking at a clock, eating with a fork on a creamware plate, and going shopping. (Leone 1999: 19)

Leone's Marxist characterisation of the period emphasises the development of a certain set of relations of production, based on class (Leone 1995). The relationship between the owners of the means of production and the emerging 'working class' (and, by extension, other subaltern groups such as women, blacks and foreigners) is fundamentally unequal and exploitative. This inequality may be legitimated by ideological strategies which naturalise or mask it. Relations of power and inequality permeate all social relationships of the period, and the mediation of the tensions thus engendered ('contradictions') allows the expression not only of strategies of ideological domination, but also of resistance. Thus, houses and the material components of daily life have been studied for their role in the definition of individual identity which is then used strategically in the promulgation of, or in resistance to, particular legitimatory ideologies. Relations of dominance on slave plantations and in industrial towns have been studied alike through architecture and material culture, where a dominant elite attempts to control the daily life of a subordinate slave population or working class; resistance by these groups is studied in their rejection of middle/upper-class ways of life and their connected rejection of concepts of the individual and of the legitimacy of the master-slave or capitalist-worker relationship. Leone's treatment of the development of capitalist social and economic relations has been further elaborated by Martin Hall. Like Leone and his students at Annapolis, Hall's work in Cape Town focuses on the creation of and resistance to a colonial, capitalist society, and on its presentation and meaning in a post-colonial world. Hall's view of capitalism incorporates a recognition of the significance of discourse in material practice, i.e. that material culture, and the ways it is deployed, have an active, expressive and communicative role. Whilst Hall does not claim that the processes of capitalism worked out everywhere the same, he is interested in 'similarities of form' generated by colonial discourse, itself a product of global capitalism (Hall 2000: 18).

A number of academics working in this period have made a case that it is the rise of capitalism that is the key defining process of the period or even that historical archaeology is identical with the archaeology of capitalism (Leone and Potter 1988b: 19; Paynter 1988: 415; Wurst 1999). Orser (1996: 71–2) cites several recent authors to demonstrate that the archaeology of the modern world is inseparable from the archaeology of capitalism. Other attempts to find a single major process by which the period can be described are dismissed by Wurst (1999):

> Many historical archaeologists recognize that our field is explicitly defined by capitalist social relations (Handsman 1983; Orser 1987; Leone and Potter 1988a; Little 1994; Leone 1995). Others have defined historical archaeology in terms of modernity or colonialism (Schuyler 1970; Deetz 1991; Deagan 1991; Orser 1996). These terms do not deny connections to capitalism, although they effectively mask them. (Wurst 1999: 7)

For Wurst, approaches which fail to foreground capitalism are politically suspect. Only the centrality of capitalism is acceptable in the analysis and explanation of historical archaeology. Obviously, whether or not we accept this premise depends not only on how you define 'historical archaeology', but also on how one defines capitalism.

Most of the historical archaeologists of capitalism argue that capitalism is not just an economic system, but a structuring ideology, a mindset, that permeates all material practices and social relations. Every detail of life, from the layout of streets to the composition of a meal, from the landscape of a garden to the choice of ceramics, is in some way a response to capitalism. Even those practices which seem to ignore, subvert or circumvent the expectations of capitalist relations are produced by capitalism, in the sense of being 'acts of resistance' (e.g. Leone 1999; Purser 1999; contributors to the *International Journal of Archaeology* 3.1 and 3.2 (1999)).

Leone's openly radical agenda, also a feature of Hall's recuperative and emancipatory project, is an attractive one for historical archaeologists of the left, giving their work relevance and urgency in a contemporary context. Particularly in Britain, where material has been analysed in a very narrow social context, an interpretive framework foregrounding capitalism provides an attractive alternative model for the creation of a critical and contextual later historical archaeology. The most sophisticated, and most 'social' theoretical approach to the growth of the modern world in Britain is probably the 'archaeology of capitalism' pioneered in this country by Matthew Johnson (1993, 1996). Johnson (1996) feels that 'the work of American historical archaeologists has shown in practical terms the way forward for Old World

medieval and post-medieval archaeology more than any other school of thought'. (1996: 14)

Matthew Johnson, who is less concerned with the 'consciousness-raising' aspect of Marxist archaeology than Leone, although he is clearly influenced by the approach and themes of the Annapolis school, nevertheless put 'capitalism' at the centre of his analysis of the archaeology of early modern England. He uses the term 'capitalism' as 'a necessary shorthand for the changing practices and transitions that have shaped aspects of modern life' (1996: 3), but recognises that those practices will vary from place to place (1996: 7). Reviewing Johnson (1996), Schuyler points out that Johnson's definition of capitalism may be 'overly fluid'. Johnson's capitalism 'embraces lifeways, conceptions of the self and the individual, table manners, music and bodily discipline' (Schuyler 1996: 226) which, as Johnson himself concedes, means that it becomes difficult to define the core and specific features of the system.

'Marxism' and its Limits in Later Historical Archaeology

The aim of this book is not to subvert or attack a broadly Marxist position to which I am sympathetic. However, it does address some perceived weaknesses of the Anglo-American 'Historical Archaeology' of capitalism. Notably it considers motivation, and confronts phenomena that do not sit comfortably in Marxist explanatory frameworks: philanthropy, aspiration and collective activity. All these three could, of course, be explained as manifestations of 'false consciousness', or as ideological strategies for masking the 'bottom line', but I argue here that such analysis necessitates subscription to a very cynical understanding of human culture, and some contortions of analysis. In re-assessing our approach to the archaeology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we must consider the central issues of power, inequality, capitalism and class in a British context. Nevertheless, it is also clear that relying on them as the *sole* foci of study prejudges and limits our understanding of recent British society.

The problem is that neo-Marxist historical archaeologies risk becoming simply another kind of reductionism, this time reducing the complexities of human actions, practices and thoughts to the strategic negotiation of power relationships, often through the assertion of identity. Marxist historical archaeologies prejudge the meaning of the material past by supposing that all human practices are 'really' about the exercise, legitimation, manipulation or rejection of power relationships of inequality. Thus, the historical particularity of a context is in some ways diminished to the identification of (usually) two groups between whom power negotiations are taking place, and the choice from a repertoire of strategies (e.g. naturalisation, masking, resistance through alternative discourses or the assertion of other identities) by which this negotiation was accomplished. In this way, material 'discourse' as discussed by Hall for

example, is a 'performance of power' directed at an audience of 'others' who may reject, subvert or subscribe to the set of relations enacted (Hall 2000). The archaeology of capitalism always asks the same question: what does this or that aspect of the material past tell us about relationships of power between social groups? This is an interesting question with important political implications in the present, but it is not the only question worth asking. Material practices are about belief, culture, aspiration and ways of understanding the world, as well as about social control. Cultural action can be about the creation of horizontal relationships, and individual relationships as well as hierarchical ones and relationships between groups. As Williamson (1995) has suggested when writing about the creation of parks and gardens by the gentry in eighteenth century England, the response of the poor, or other marginalised groups might be irrelevant where the main social motivation was the consolidation of convivial relationships within the upper middle classes. Material action also has cultural specificity and involves the pursuit or enaction of cultural values.

I hope that this book can be read alongside archaeologies of capitalism, and that it might throw some light on the conceptual factors that made the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries different and specific, and affected the particular course of capitalist expansion through the period, without reducing complex and varied phenomena to contests between hapless peasants and villainous landowners.

The Idea of Improvement

One of the outstanding tasks for British historical archaeologists, then, is to draw out what is distinctive about later historical periods. Given capitalism's early origins, it is not capitalism per se that makes the later eighteenth century and the nineteenth century different to what went before, although the scale of capitalist economies and the pervasiveness of capitalist ideologies were unprecedented. However, systems of social and economic relations are informed also by habits of mind and ways of constituting the subject, which are variable through time. The historical specificity of the post-Enlightenment individual is sometimes hard to see, precisely because we do share it, but this book attempts to draw out one of the central, but historically particular, values of modernity, and use it to understand the material remains of the period.

As Susie West and I argued (1999), the proximity of later historical archaeology to our own times, and the superficial 'familiarity' of the period often masks what is historically distinctive about the modern age. The permeation and currency of the ethic of improvement is a case in point: it might be the very ubiquity of improvement that has led to its historical invisibility. Improvement, a very popular theme in the eighteenth century, is a sufficiently

popular genre today to have its own section in even the smallest bookshop, and numerous websites, television programmes, magazines and courses exist to tell us how to improve our health, homes, gardens, food, relationships, mental and emotional equilibrium, spirituality, professional success, child bearing and rearing, looks, taste and dress sense. On a larger scale, other publications and pundits have schemes for improving the economy, the education of our children, transport and communications and the future of the planet. Although we might argue about whether this or that particular change is really an improvement, the notion that things can be and should be made better through human agency is so very normal to us that the attempt to historicise it is rarely made. Improvement remains an implicit value underpinning contemporary political and social philosophy.

In the face of this pervasive discourse of improvement, it is easy to imagine that the drive to improve ourselves and our world is an eternal and invariable part of human nature. But this is not so. Improvement is a characteristic of modernity and the sorts of improvement with which this book is concerned were not preoccupations of medieval or even earlier modern people.

In the late medieval period, moral imperatives related almost exclusively to the self and the divine, and not to society as a whole (in fact, as we shall see, the concept of society as a set of groups of people and individuals in mechanistic relationships to one another, framed by a physical environment, is itself a characteristically modern idea). Life was pretty rough and there was little one could do to change it. God might give you fortitude to endure your troubles, even though it might have been Him who chose to test you in the first place. Efforts at improvement in the middle ages were directed inwardly to the soul of the individual. Long-term visions of the future were not concerned with this world at all, but the heavenly one, and personal improvement would be directed towards preparing for divine judgement. Secular good works (hospitals and other charitable undertakings) would serve the purposes of the individual soul, by ameliorating the suffering of others. However, they were different in character to the charitable institutions of the early nineteenth century which were often envisaged as being part of a broader project to reshape society and ultimately end poverty altogether; medieval charity had primarily a spiritual aim and a far more limited earthly one. Similarly, although there is some evidence that the building of cathedrals, churches and so on had some relation to civic pride, these projects were to the glory of God and the benefit of the souls of their constructors and in furtherance of the political ambitions of particular individuals, families or factions, but not to bring closer some utopian city or to better the conditions of most of their inhabitants. Agricultural reform of the period, such as the innovations produced by Cistercian monks, would facilitate the independence of the brothers, but increasing the productivity of the land was not in itself a fulfilment of human purpose or a divine duty.

A comparison with dominant medieval understandings of human duty and purpose demonstrates that wanting to improve the temporal world is not a universal human desire, and in fact can only really be successful in arrogantly secular societies or those whose religious understanding attributes considerable efficacy to human planning and action, rather than accepting that the state of the world is ultimately dependent upon the working out of divine intentions or of fate. Other possible positions might be, as in medieval Europe, resignation to the will of God or some other super-human ordering, or an orientation towards the past, regarding the contemporary world as the product of decline and decay, again a widespread conceit in medieval philosophy. In such circumstances, the role of the individual might be in introspection (a bias of the predominantly clerical literature of the medieval period), or perhaps in individual betterment within the existing structure, but not in relation to any systemic or thorough programme of reform. If the human world were subject to a divine order, to tamper with such an order would be theologically questionable.

The idea of Improvement did not, of course, burst forth, fully formed, in 1750. The word was used with increasing frequency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly in relation to husbandry (McRae 1992), but also in the moral sense of self-cultivation. The economic and moral meanings of the term became increasingly knitted together so that by the mid eighteenth century 'Improvement' meant both profit and moral benefit.

Asa Briggs (1959) used the denominator 'Age of Improvement' to describe the Georgian to mid Victorian period in Britain. However, perhaps surprisingly in view of the attention given to the idea of Progress, the ethic of Improvement has received little systematic study or critical analysis. Where Progress is acknowledged to be a historically specific philosophical concept, underlying historical, political and economic thought of the time, the nature of Improvement is assumed to be self-evident and perhaps even part of an ahistorical human drive. Briggs, for example, gives the idea only the most cursory examination, despite the title of his book. Other scholars have limited their discussion of Improvement to the context of agricultural innovation and rural reform (e.g. Thirsk 1983; Wilmot 1990) and focused their study on the writings of agrarian improvers. Wade Martins's discussion of Improvement as a 'moral duty' (2002: 41) as well as a strategy for increasing profit captures some of the importance of the concept that is evident in the literature of the time. Williamson also notes that the term 'Improvement' was used by contemporaries 'indiscriminately for the reclamation of "waste", for schemes of afforestation, and for the laying out of parks and elaborate pleasure grounds' (2002: 19).

Nevertheless, even including estate improvement and forestry does not capture the breadth of meaning encompassed by 'Improvement' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Further acknowledgement of the ubiquity and importance of the ethic of Improvement is made by Roberts (1976) and

Girouard (1990), who notes the pervasiveness of discourse about Improvement, but restricts himself in the rest of the book to the question of urban development. In a brilliant passage he comments:

> 'Improvement' was much in the air in the eighteenth century. Methods of commerce could be improved, by the provision of better quays, docks and warehouses. Manufacture could be improved, by techniques such as the application of steam power, and that subdivision of labour which amazed visitors to Birmingham in the mid-century. Transport could be improved, by the formation of canals, the building of bridges and the making of turnpike trusts. Agriculture could be improved, by enclosure and better methods of farming. Towns could be improved, by the paving widening, straightening and widening of streets, the formation of new streets, the destruction of medieval town walls, the provision of water, the laying out of public walks, and the erection of public buildings. Country houses could be improved, by being rebuilt or remodelled in a purer taste, or given a new setting of idyllic parkland. The arts could be improved, by enlightened patronage and the founding of academies. The condition of the poor could be improved, by the provision of schools, hospitals and better prisons. (Girouard 1990: 86)

Improvement went well beyond agricultural reform, and beyond the whole area of landscape altogether. What is interesting about Improvement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that it cross-cuts all spheres. As I hope to show, landscapes and material culture in the period were both the results and instruments of improvement in numerous fields.

To get an idea of the range of contexts in which the term was used, I assembled a database of publications including the words 'improvement', 'improved' or the verb 'to improve' from the catalogue of the British Library (Table 1.1). A search was also carried out on the word 'improver(s)', but yielded no results for this period. The database considers all publications in the years ending in a zero between 1550 and 1850, which I have taken as snapshots through the study period and the centuries preceding it. It does not include works published in languages other than English, but it does include English books published overseas. All titles where the word 'improved' relates only to a second or subsequent edition (e.g. 'expanded and improved . . .') have also been removed, although they too are perhaps indicative of the spirit of the age, albeit in a minor way. Duplicate copies, or editions which very nearly duplicate another volume published the same year (but for example, with a new introduction) have not been included. The verb to improve has also been used from the seventeenth century and throughout this period in a theological sense meaning

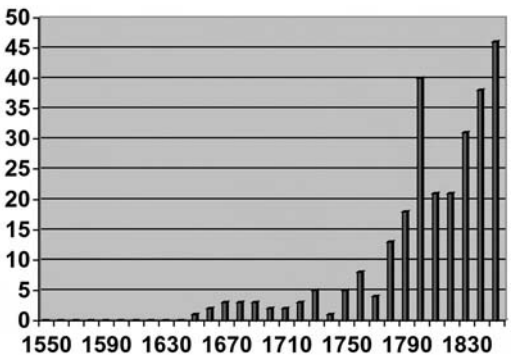
Table 1.1. Contexts in which the words 'Improvement', 'Improved and 'Improver' occur in the titles of books published between 1750 and 1850

	Self (moral)	Skills	The working classes	Agriculture	Animal husbandry	Roads and waterways	Fisheries and coastal	Machinery	Education	Natives	Civic	Domestic	Church	Medicine	Finance
1750	2	3					1	1							
1760	1	1		3	1	1	2				1				
1770	1			1								1			1
1780	4	1		3			1	2						1	1
1790	7	1		1	4		1	2	1					1	
1800	11	3		8	1		5	8	2	1	1	1			
1810	1	3		7		2	1	2			1			1	
1820	4	1	2	1	1	3		4	1	1					3
1830	6		6	5	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	3	
1840	2	2	5	4	3	5	2	6	1	3	1	1	1	5	
1850	4	4	7	3	1	3	1	6	2	1	5		4	1	3

'to turn to account for spiritual profit or edification, to preach or to speak on', as in the phrase 'improving the occasion' (OED 740 'improve' v^2, sense f); these occurrences, chiefly in relation to published sermons relating biblical texts to contemporary or recent events, have also been removed from the database. The titles were then categorised according to the context in which they occur. Generally I have tried to include each title only once, but some titles really had to be included in more than one category (e.g. 'Report of the House of Commons on the Education, 1838 and on the Health, 1840, of the poorer classes in large towns: with some suggestions for improvement' (Slaney 1840) has been included three times, under Health, Education and the Working Classes).

This database is indicative only of the numbers of texts published in the years considered. It does not represent the volume of literature published on particular subjects, since texts which did not include one of the search terms in the title will not show up, even though they may be entirely concerned with, for example, the implementation of new crop rotations or town planning. It is thus only the use of the term 'Improvement' which is monitored here.

The results of the analysis are represented in Fig. 1.1. As the table shows, there is little published discourse about Improvement before the middle of the seventeenth century. From the middle of the seventeenth century till towards the end of the eighteenth there are small numbers of publications on Improvement. From the end of the eighteenth century the number of publications on Improvement increases rapidly. However, this is in line with the general dramatic increase in the volume of published literature in English altogether (see Fig. 1.2), and does not represent an increase in the proportion of literature devoted to Improvement at this time. Although Roberts (1976: 1) claims that the sense of the word was originally confined to agriculture and only later expanded to include towns, manners and so on, the catalogue of the British Library suggests that the contexts in which the word is used are many and varied and from its first occurrences it is clear that Improvement meant more than just rural or



1.1. Occurrences of the words 'Improvement', 'Improved' and 'Improver' in the titles of books published between 1600 and 1900, from the catalogue of the British Library.

agricultural reform. In fact, it is noticeable that, even if the results for agriculture and husbandry are aggregated, for the eighteenth century this is the most frequent category in only 1760. Otherwise, the eighteenth century is dominated by texts which are geared towards self-improvement. This category typically includes titles like *Emblems for the entertainment and improvement of youth* (1750), *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, with a Letter to a New Married Lady* (Chapone 1773) and *Mental Improvement* (Wakefield 1794) (both of these latter works ran to many editions). Related to this is the category which is more about the accomplishment of skills (e.g. at music or painting) than the moral self. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the proportion of titles related to self-improvement had dwindled, and the new context of improvement of the working people, or the poor has grown considerably. Typical titles here include *Warminster Common: shewing the steps by which it has advanced from its former state of notorious vice, ignorance and poverty, to its present state of moral and social improvement* . . . (Daniell 1850) and *The working classes of Great Britain: their present condition and the means of their improvement and elevation* (Green 1850). I have separated out those works that deal with the improvement of the mass of people outside Britain and Ireland, works which deal mostly with the indigenous people of Africa or America. Other significant contexts in which the word 'Improvement' appears are science and industry, usually describing new inventions or techniques or suggestions for the better management of production, communication by road or waterways and the improvement of international shipping and fisheries.

Improvement in the modern era was more than personal or local betterment, although those could be strategies through which it was pursued. Improvement was a cross-cutting ethic, directed not only at the improvement of agricultural production, although this has been a major focus of archaeological and historical work, but also at the moral, intellectual and physical improvement of the self, of the labouring people, of society, of production and of the human environment. Improvement was regarded in the nineteenth century as an ethical imperative. In general, instances of 'Improvement' were regarded as contributing to a larger product: the wholesale transformation, if not of the nation, then at least of one area or one aspect of it. As Smout points out with regard to planned settlements in Scotland, new villages were laid out in Scotland before the mid eighteenth century, but then 'the transformation of the village was not ever seen as part of an overall plan to change and develop the estate, let alone as part of a still larger ideal of promoting economic growth in the kingdom' (Smout 1970: 74), a goal that characterised the new settlements of the period studied here. Improvement, in its most characteristic expressions, partook of a larger eighteenth and nineteenth century project not to conform to what was already there but to change it; not to uphold traditional ways, but to found a new order. Hay and Rogers (1997: 96), among others, have noted from the mid eighteenth century 'a great alteration . . . in the tropes of social legitimation' by reference to the past.

Ancient practice and custom came to be seen and used pejoratively, in contrast to seventeenth and early eighteenth century use, when long antiquity could be used as a legal defence and, both legally and culturally, precedent had been important. Rather than the past, it was now the improved future that was the criterion by which actions should be assessed.

Improvement was also cumulative and progressive. Improvements in one sphere would have repercussions in other spheres and advance the whole progress of humankind. Laurie (1810: xii–xiii) envisages a state in the near future 'when establishments have become so improved, enlarged, and extended, so as to embrace the whole circumstance of society . . . then intelligence takes place of listless activity, and conducts the whole movements of the great machine'. Laurie's mechanistic view of society, typical of the period, allows changes in any aspect of human organisation to affect other aspects. Similarly the effects of improvement are not limited by geography. Laurie goes on to note (1810: xxi) that due to the 'continued increase of improvement . . . there is no ameliorating establishment, however local and isolated, which does not sooner or later, become universally useful and beneficent'.

Traditionally, a Whiggish view of historical trajectory holds that things, as the British 'New' Labour Party memorably put it during their 1997 British general election campaign, can only get better. I am not here proposing a history which maintains that throughout the study period things really were 'improving' or were necessarily any better than in earlier periods. Indeed for some groups in society things appear to have become very considerably worse over the period. What is significant is that many people at the time had a strong self-conscious awareness of participating in history, of *bringing about* progress through active Improvement. Richard Price (1787) expressed typical eighteenth century optimism when he confidently predicted that improvements would continue until paradise was restored and all evils had been overcome. John Millar, an influential thinker of the Scottish Enlightenment, saw active self-improvement as a key aspect of humanity: 'one of the most remarkable differences between man and other animals' he declared, 'consists in that wonderful capacity for the improvement of his faculties' (Millar 1771 [1806]: Section V).

I am not about to suggest that Improvement, rather than capitalism or colonialism, is the single or most significant process occurring over this period. There are many developments over this time which are *not* best explained by invoking the ethic of Improvement. Nevertheless, I shall argue that the significance of Improvement, and a good reason for capitalising it here, is that people of the period recognised it as a process which was having effects on many spheres of life, unlike capitalism or colonialism, whose significance did not structure contemporary discourse in the same way. Because of its particular significance *at the time*, Improvement provides a useful framework for understanding motivated cultural practice.

None of this is to say that every eighteenth and nineteenth century development that was trumpeted as an indicator of 'Improvement' was met with delight by everyone. From as early as the 1790s there was a strong conservative and nostalgic counter-current of 'philosophers, essayists, and satirists [who] battered away steadily at the improving impulse and its utilitarian premises' (Winter 1999: 254). These were people who worried about the assault on a natural, romantic and more or less wild Britain by linear hedges, machines, mines, railways, waged labourers, navvies, rational farming and the like. James Winter (1999) has traced this more pessimistic strain of social comment through the Romantic poets from the late eighteenth century into the beginnings of conservationist movements and medievalist aesthetics in the mid nineteenth. Even among those pursuing the same 'improving' ends, the optimism characteristic of secular reformers was not always typical of many evangelicals who proceeded from an understanding of human nature as fallen and consequently human endeavour as vain and capable only, at best, of alleviating hardship and promoting faith in the divine.

So it is not possible to identify every undertaking in the century as a product of the ethic of Improvement. Perhaps, however, Improvement is an especially useful lens for the discipline of archaeology. Where historical sociologists might choose to focus on mass production and consumption, for example, or historical geographers on the changes to people's spatial awareness brought about by speed, new forms of travel, transit and communication, 'Improvement' is an especially relevant theme for archaeologists. It encompasses and contextualises traditional 'industrial archaeology' and joins material culture with ideology. Thinking about 'Improvement' enables a broad treatment of all aspects of material life in Britain in the period: agriculture and landscape change, houses and architecture, town morphology, artefacts and technology, social practices such as cleanliness and segregation, as well as traditional archaeological concerns such as buried deposits and the recovered debris of everyday life.

Improvement and the Idea of Progress

There may have been little philosophical attention directed to the idea of Improvement, but the same cannot be said for the concept of Progress. Since Bury's (1920) original publication on the history of the idea of 'Progress', meaning a particular sense of history developed in the modern world, there have been numerous books developing and expanding the idea (e.g. Pollard 1968; Spadafora 1990). Bury's thesis is that the idea of Progress only appears consistently from the very end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth. While Bury attributes 'principal responsibility' for the idea to the French philosophers (1920: x–xi), later writers have stressed the significance of other national traditions, especially the Scottish enlightenment (Pollard 1968).

Belief in Progress is essentially a faith that history itself has a 'dynamic purpose' (Pollard 1968: 18). The stadial view of progress held that society naturally passed through a number of stages in its ascent from savagery to civilisation. Those stages were defined by group size, subsistence and ownership of property, but subsistence was, as Adam Smith put it (1776 [1970]: 480), 'prior to' all other variables and thus had a deterministic function. The stages are hunting, pastoralism, agriculture and mercantile exchange, and their progressive ordering was articulated most fully by the Enlightenment historians in Scotland, and the French physiocrats (Pluciennik 2002). The eventual progress of all human societies through all stages was, through much of the eighteenth century, considered to be inevitable (Pollard 1968: 31), but by the end of the century clear differences had emerged around the question of how far active human involvement was necessary in order to bring about progressive change. While many French thinkers believed that 'once the political and legal framework was changed, benevolent natural laws could ensure that economic progress would take care of itself' (Pollard 1968: 68), key thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment argued that more strategic human manipulation was required. One of the most important philosophical ideas to emerge in the eighteenth century is the reciprocal production of Man [sic] and his environment. William Godwin, for example, believed in the perfectibility of Man because Man is produced by his environment. Thus, progress can be brought about by human action and active change. As Pollard reflects on the philosophy of Robert Owen: 'It was, therefore, not the slow and inevitable growth of science or knowledge which would create the good society, but the total, and perhaps artificially created, correct environment.' This is a fundamental tenet of utopian thought, but it underlies the belief in Improvement which developed in the second half of the eighteenth century and reached its height in the nineteenth. Robert Owen, who sits at the cusp of the two centuries, included in his concept of the malleable environment not only fields and farms, but the whole of human society, including the poor. Through the second half of the period examined here, social groups and structures, as well as the physical world and the interior self, were increasingly subject to schemes of Improvement.

Improvement and Progress are not the same, although they are closely related, and the expressions are and were sometimes used synonymously. Progress is a historical current by which passive humans are swept along; Improvement is strategic, active and was seen as a moral and ethical obligation. To take a progressivist view of history is to read human history as a story of the amelioration of the human condition *as an action of time itself*. The past was worse than the present; the future will be better still. Although one could participate in human progress, it was essentially a property of history, rather than an aim for individual agents or groups of people. Almost every celebrated political, economic or philosophical thinker of the eighteenth century subscribed to progressivism in some form. Progressivism is compatible with a range of other political positions, but

tended to fit well with rationalist, Enlightenment humanism. While we may now associate progressivist thought most easily with classical liberal thinkers like Smith, it was equally strong in nineteenth-century socialism such as that of Owen and especially Marx, for whom the growth of capitalism and its eventual collapse were inevitable, directed by the force of history itself. While belief in Progress could be triumphal and self-satisfied, belief in Improvement was not complacent. Improvement required active, directed effort; historical Progress was to be realised through the accumulation of numerous acts of Improvement, enacted upon land, manufacture, communication, society, the self and every other sphere of human endeavour.

Genealogies of Improvement

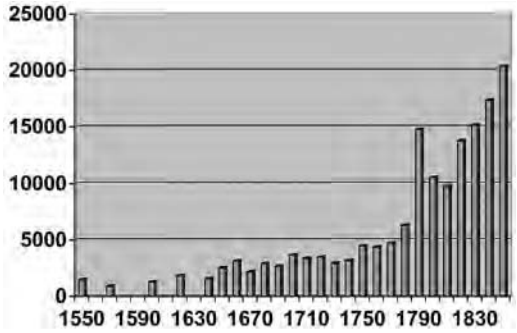
Progress was a keystone of Enlightenment philosophical thought and the progressive view of history was an important, maybe even necessary, foundation for a practical ethic of Improvement. The ideology of Improvement was also underpinned by a number of other important philosophical concepts. The philosophical climate of the time was compatible with – encouraged in fact – a programme of Improvement in all spheres. It is worth giving some brief consideration to that climate and to some of the concepts which allowed the ethic of Improvement to grow and thrive from the eighteenth century. Of course, works of philosophy are not at all the same thing as popular ideas, even among the literate. Nevertheless, eighteenth and nineteenth century landowners and reformers were culturally enmeshed in the ideas of the age which did influence strongly the way they chose to manage their land and other interests. Indeed, the philosophy of this time demanded practical expression, in agriculture, land management and in programmes of urban reform and social provision.

Philosophies of Improvement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were profoundly engaged with the practice and strategy of everyday economic, political and social life. Our distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' sciences would not make much sense to most improvers. Many prominent theorists were also practically involved with improving the land, the towns, the people or the productive process. In Scotland, for example, Lord Kames was both a political economist and a practical agriculturalist; Robert Owen's political and philosophical writings were informed by and fed back into his workers' community at New Lanark and his utopian ventures elsewhere. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were periods of practical and experimental philosophy. In addition, unlike earlier periods, the explosion in the quantity of print literature and the high rates of literacy meant that new ideas were influential and current well beyond the salons of the London literati. Figure 1.2 shows the rapid increase in the annual volume of published works from the end of the eighteenth century. By the 1790s the rate of book publication had quadrupled since the beginning

of the century (Vincent 1989: 11). Although the spread of functional literacy is not easy to trace exactly, by the end of the period, over 64 per cent of grooms and 43 per cent of brides of 'skilled labourer' status were able to sign the marriage register. Among higher status professions the male literacy rate was closer to 90 per cent. (Vincent 1989: 102, 285).

The inadequacies of Enlightenment humanism as a framework for developing complex understandings of the human past have been recently discussed in our discipline (e.g. Thomas 2002). However, the depiction of humanism by some archaeologists, and scholars of other disciplines, as a generally rotten, oppressive movement whose black shadow hangs over the modern world is not only unfair, but wrong, and derives, claims Porter (2000), from an uncritical acceptance of the 'crazed' opinions of Baudrillard, the more reasoned ones of Foucault (1984) and some other post-modernists. Such positions have been thoroughly critiqued by historians such as Eric Hobsbawm (1997) and Robert Darnton (1997). Thomas (1996) has pointed out that the sort of atomised individualistic view of society (where society was simply the multiplication of autonomous individuals, working for their own profit) developed by eighteenth-century humanists is not valid as a universal way of understanding subjects and their social worlds. Indeed, this particular criticism (although couched in other terms) of early Enlightenment views of society came quite soon. By the early nineteenth century, thinkers were pointing out that society was something more than an incidental agglomeration of individuals. Nevertheless, elements of Enlightenment individualism continued to inform both intellectual and popular thought of the nineteenth century, as they do today.

Improvement was associated with a number of ideas developed in the context of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the early nineteenth century. It might (rightly) be objected that many of the philosophical concepts listed here were produced in and debated from the latter part of the seventeenth century, a couple of generations before the period of this book. The reason for including them in a book dealing with the 100 years from 1750 is that many of



1.2. Total volume of published literature from the catalogue of the British Library.

the ideas implicit in the discourse and practice of that later period had their philosophical roots in ideas discussed and developed by a small number of educated men over the preceding decades. Here I will mention some of the ideas that informed and shaped the ethic of Improvement: utility, society, individualism and independence, reason, utopia.

UTILITY: One of the key philosophical underpinnings, not only of the idea of Improvement, but also its articulation with and translation into practical action, is the idea of utility. Utilitarianism holds that basically 'whether an act is morally right depends only on *consequences* (as opposed to circumstances or anything that happens before the act)' (Sinnott-Armstrong 2003). Robson notes, with reference to the philosophy of J. S. Mill, insistence on the utilitarian end requires 'a belief in the possibility of social improvement and moral progress' (1968: ix). In the case of Mill, this means that he acknowledges a distinction between theory and practice and shows concern with the practical institution of his ideas, in his case through individual action. For utilitarians the attainment of desirable ends could be brought about through the proper organisation of society. There was considerable debate about what that organisation should be, and how far it should be centrally organised, but all utilitarians partook of an eighteenth-century reverence for reason: 'To utilitarians, rationality did not only spell personal freedom; it was also disciplinary, a tool in the forging of that efficient regime in which the rational would regulate the rest' (Porter 2000: xxiii). The philosophical mind of the later eighteenth century rejected the superstitious religion of centuries past; rather its reliance on the efficacy of rational action made utility supremely amenable to realisation through practical action.

SOCIETY: Many (but not all) of the types of Improvement discussed here depend on a concept of society as a more or less integrated whole, which will generally respond in predictable ways to changes in its conditions or organisation. There is also a significant shift over the period studied here in the locus of Improvement, which moves from self to society. This accompanies a general shift from an unsophisticated understanding of society as no more than a multiplication of individuals to a more developed sociology. Thus the emphasis moved away from improving one's own self and what belonged directly to the self, to grander plans for the region, city, nation or even world. The word 'society' when used to mean 'the aggregate of persons living together in a more or less ordered community' (OED 2nd ed. definition 3a) does not predate the seventeenth century, and became common from the later eighteenth century. The idea of society underlies all the new political economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Adam Smith's work not only generated a new discipline – classical political economy (Tribe 1978: 7) – but also presented a view of society as a mechanistic whole. The complex inter-relationships of land, capital, labour and so on

delineated by Smith in the *Wealth of Nations* portray a society in which changes to any part of the system can have effects elsewhere, ultimately in the whole economic and moral health of the nation. In many ways this, perhaps even more than his views on progress, is a key idea in the development of Improvement. If society consists of closely interlinked processes and spheres of action, then it can be altered by changing some of those variables. This is important in understanding Improvement because improvers thought that by changing one area – the use of the land, for example – the lives and conditions not only of the landowner but also the farmers and labourers, and ultimately the opulence of the nation itself would be affected. A concept of society is also important in the social and welfare reforms of the period, including the systematic establishment of institutions of education and reform. That society is responsive to its environmental context is an important belief underpinning civic and landscape reforms. The rational organisation of man's physical environment was in a reciprocal relationship with society itself. By improving the human environment, human society would be affected positively, and this improved humanity would then act back on the environment, carrying out further improvements, either indefinitely, or until the utopian point of an ideal society had been reached. Sociology, the science of society, was developed by activists and reformers at this time, originally in a form that had more to do with shaping and improving society than observing and analysing it in a twentieth-century sense (Driver 1988).

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY AND INDEPENDENCE: Individual independence was not only a goal in itself during the eighteenth century, it was also a prerequisite to improvement. Porter asserts that the Enlightenment in Britain was distinctive (in comparison to Enlightenments elsewhere in Europe) for its individualism: 'The hallmark of British thinking lay in casting progress as a matter of individual improvement or (as with hospitals, schools and charities) as the work of voluntary associations' (Porter 2000: 482). Contra Foucault, Porter argues that the Enlightenment in Britain was not about control and discipline, or at least not about controlling and disciplining others, but about 'doing your own thing' (Porter 2000: 482). However, at the start of the period the active individual who was the implied reader of Improvement texts was the possessor of the kind of liberty that comes with financial independence and social power. Implicitly, the individual agents were male and wealthy. Improvement for women, the working classes and other subaltern groups was produced by arrangements made on their behalf by benevolent states or patrons. By the later Enlightenment (late eighteenth and early nineteenth century), some philosophers criticised the early Enlightenment principles of their forebears. Emphatically, many thinkers of the time valued individual liberty above dependence on a benevolent state. There are, wrote J. S. Mill 'as many possible independent centres of improvement as there are individuals' (1859 [1974]: 136). In terms of public policy, however,

Improvements became increasingly orchestrated by the state or other 'top-down' agents of change. As the nineteenth century progressed, the emphasis of 'Improvement' was increasingly on high-level interventions enforcing improvements on individuals and communities, a subjugation of self-determination not strongly present in the eighteenth century.

The valorisation of individual liberty and self-reliance was the impulse that created the New Poor Law and the Union Workhouse. Given that the inmates of the Union Workhouse had so little independence, this may seem paradoxical, but in fact the workhouse was intended to act as a *deterrent*, to discourage reliance on the state, parish or charity of others. By the second or third decade of the nineteenth century, paternalistic mutual dependence in the ordered hierarchy of the countryside might have appealed to a few Tories, but elsewhere the spirit of reform dominated, and at the top of the reformers' agenda was emancipation: independence and the extension of opportunities for personal betterment to all men. (The cause of female emancipation was not so widely embraced, nor with such commitment. Women's suffrage was a very rare and eccentric cause, even among liberals, until the second half of the nineteenth century.) For liberal thinkers such as Adam Smith, individual ownership was essential for Improvement: 'a person who can acquire no property, can have no other interest but to eat as much and to labour as little as possible', he wrote (1776 [1970]: 488). However, although Smith is concerned with the most efficacious economic management in order to raise profit, the *ultimate* aim is not individual enrichment; rather individual enrichment is the means by which 'national opulence' can be attained. Snell's (1985) study of the labouring poor through their own correspondence suggests that a high value was put on personal autonomy and property ownership by many people across the social classes.

The urge for independence seems to have been socially extensive, but exists side-by-side with a desire for self-reliance to be underwritten by mutuality (evident in the growth of unions, friendly and mutual societies and socialism in the nineteenth century), especially for the poor, who stood to lose most if their attempts at self-reliance failed. Different attitudes towards independence, liberty, individualism and self-reliance certainly existed and were affected by class and gender, as well as changing over the study period.

The post-enlightenment period is often described as one of the 'rise of the individual' or where 'individualism' plays an increasing role. What this means is far from straightforward, however. In some spheres this period actually sees the subordination of individual action or individual will to a collective identity of community or place. For example, the replacement of personal responsibility for the maintenance of small stretches of road by collectively organised programmes of standardised road maintenance supported by rates is not obviously an 'individualistic' movement. Similarly archaeologists of this period often claim that the replacement of platters, personal knives and tankards with matching

dinner sets in the eighteenth century represents 'Georgian individualism', but the kind of identity enacted through the use of identical sets of material culture would seem to be more complex than the personal uniqueness we associate with the term 'individualism' (surely better shown in the ownership and use of a distinctive singly owned knife and mug). In some ways there was more scope for developing a unique and single 'individual' identity in the late middle ages than in the modern period, where the replication of a standardised and categorised 'improved' person appears to be the goal of much reform (as in the case of institutions such as prisons and workhouses). It is the replication of sameness to form a corporate identity that the material culture seems to emphasise rather than a distinctively 'individual' personality or taste.

REASON: A crude characterisation of the difference between the medieval and the modern age (and one often invoked by eighteenth-century writers) would show the medieval mind to be religious, superstitious and directed by tradition, and the modern mind as rational, humanistic and directed by reason. This is an unhelpful over-simplification: first, the representation of medieval men and women as irrational slaves to custom needs considerable refining; next, it ignores the late medieval to early modern period, and the process of changing cultural understandings of past and present; thirdly, the situation in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was rather more complicated and heterogeneous than this. For the overwhelming majority of British people religion and reason were not opposites or in any way mutually exclusive. The development of 'rational religion' and the distrust of passionate, unreasoned or excessive religious fervour are evidence of this. Quite often religious and secular reformers worked towards the same ends, especially in the social reforms of the nineteenth century such as education and housing reform. Religious and spiritual feelings continued to be strong for many people in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and outspoken atheism, such as that expressed by Robert Owen, was still fairly unusual and scandalous. In a predominantly Protestant country, forms of religious devotion orientated towards the improvement of self, society and the world were encouraged; religious duty was about 'profiting' from the gifts of God, not only in the economic sense, but in the sense of maximising potential – what Weber (1930) famously described as the 'Protestant ethic'. Reason, then, was not usually contrasted with religion, but with custom. Enlightenment thinkers looked to the organisation of the future, and dismissed reliance on customary or traditional ways. The past was not a source of wisdom, but a place of stagnation and inefficiency. Until well into the nineteenth-century interest in the past was mostly confined to admiration of the classical past (and efforts to connect it to the British present) and interest in the exoticism of the remote past. The more recent past, and especially the social history of the British past was not attractive to most Britons. It is hard to overstate the frequency and ardour

with which eighteenth-century Improvers repudiated tradition, custom and common practice.

UTOPIA: Originally this book was going to have a whole chapter on utopian experiments and this was only revised because the best archaeological utopian sites are not in Britain. Nevertheless, the philosophical impulse towards utopian planning and experiment was widespread and important in Britain, even if most of the purest utopian experiments left little physical trace. Utopia is the ultimate end of improvement; it is what a fully improved society looks like. Kumar (1991) argues that utopia is an idea associated with modernity and with the west. Utopian thought is characterised by a belief in the perfectibility of humanity – an almost unlimited malleability in human nature. Other social and political theory may assume that humans are mostly motivated by greed and self-aggrandisement, and that the maintenance of social order is 'a constant battle against selfishness and the plunge into anarchy' (Kumar 1991: 29). By contrast, Utopians assume a basic human tendency towards co-operation and harmony (both of these are words which frequently characterise utopian writing). The only obstacles that impede the expression of these human traits are to do with the ordering of society. Given the right kind of social ordering, people would attain 'a more or less permanent state of material plenty, social harmony and individual fulfilment' (Kumar 1991: 29). Utopian thinkers are programmatic and pro-active in designing such a society. The communal experimenters (but not all utopians) believed that the new ideal society would be designed and engineered, rather than the product of organic, undirected cultural development or social evolution. The belief that one could roll up one's sleeves and, through practical action, bring about a better society, is a fundamental belief not only of utopians, but of most modern thought.

CLASS AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: So far all discussion of Improvement has been rather philosophical and abstract. While it is possible and even fashionable to underestimate the extent to which discursive philosophical and political beliefs do inform action, it is also important to remember that practices such as Improvement are not undertaken by atomised individuals, but happen in complicated social contexts. One of the major questions this book will explore is how engagement in Improvement was involved in the formation of social relationships, particularly relationships of class, and the positioning of people and families in social networks. Did 'Improvement' mean the same thing to everybody? Was there unanimity about what constituted an 'Improving' reform? A coarse reading of Improvement would see it as a wholly middle-class belief, an ideological justification for exploitative and unequal class relationships; the poor would be seen as essentially reactive, either resisting Improvement or being duped by it. However, the relationship between class and improvement

seems to have been far more complicated, as we shall see. First, neither the poor nor the middle class were homogenous entities, as persuasively demonstrated by Chris Dalglish in a recent analysis of landowner and tenant responses to Improvement in Argyll (2003). Numerous factors affected the degree to which people embraced 'improvements'. Second, as will be seen, the social significance of Improvement might have lain more in the creation of new horizontal relationships of belonging than with hierarchical and exclusive relations of dominance.

Some Notes and Omissions

Why Such a Wide Focus?

To an archaeologist, there is nothing remarkable in choosing to consider general cultural and social developments over a whole century and taking all of Britain. Prehistorians and archaeologists of the classical and medieval worlds take on tasks of equal or greater scope routinely. However, most students of later historical periods do not often attempt work of such broad scope. Inevitably there is an intellectual cost in attempting to produce a book of this breadth: subtleties must be lost, over-generalisations result and exceptions ignored. What I have tried to do in this book is not to include all relevant archaeology and history, or to explore exhaustively every manifestation of an ethic of Improvement, but to draw out some examples of the social and cultural values that informed material practice in the period. This is a necessary corrective to and synthesis of many previous studies of the material remains of the period which have concentrated on the very local or on the technological aspects of production, and have rarely incorporated a sense of larger historical processes at work, of the ideological dimension of human practice, or of the manifold experiences of creating, using and consuming landscapes, artefacts and architecture.

In constructing this kind of large-scale historical archaeology, giving prominence to the cultural understandings which contributed to and proceeded from material practices, there is a risk that we identify concepts which would be anachronistic to the people of the time, or that ideas are given substantive force beyond and outside of those who held them and acted upon them. As Quentin Skinner wryly comments:

> As the historian duly sets out in quest of the idea he has characterized, he is very readily led to speak as if the fully developed form of the doctrine was always in some sense immanent in history, even if various thinkers failed to 'hit upon' it ... The fact that ideas presuppose agents is very readily discounted, as the ideas get up and do battle on their own behalf. (Skinner 1969: 10–11)

Interestingly, it is the early sections of Bury's *The Idea of Progress* (1920), in which Bury sees the idea of progress foreshadowed in pre-Enlightenment texts, that attract Skinner's opprobrium here.

However, the ethic of Improvement is remarkable for the historical self-consciousness with which it was acted upon, even at the time. By Improving themselves and their worlds, the men and women of the eighteenth century were proudly aware that they were founding the future of the nation. By the eighteenth century, the idea of Britain was meaningful to most of its inhabitants, and thus, despite its many local variations, it does constitute a coherent geographical entity (Colley 1992). Shared culture among the upper levels of society, and with the rise of literacy and much improved communications, among the lower levels too, was increasingly the norm during this period. In fact, for many people the object and focus of Improvement was Britain itself, perhaps through the improvement of a country or region within it. Smout (1999) makes the point that in the eighteenth century there is little sense of a separate Scottish nationalism (as opposed to British) except in the writings advocating patriotic Improvement of the land, and the pursuit of 'national opulence'. Otherwise Scottish nationalism in the eighteenth century was not of a nature to cast off the English yoke, being too closely identified with a strong sense of Britishness, at least among the 'cultured' voices of the Scottish enlightenment. I therefore think that the selection of evidence and examples from across Britain is legitimate in this period. Moreover, there is now sufficient volume of published archaeological work on Britain to make a cultural and historical synthesis of the archaeology of the period possible and necessary. I have also found it necessary to range promiscuously around subject disciplines in order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the ideology of Improvement. Although most chapters are archaeology-led, in that they deal with landscapes, buildings, material culture and sites, considerable and free use is made of the work of historians, geographers, philosophers, art, architectural and cultural historians and others.

Why Such a Narrow Focus?

From another point of view, the scope of this book is too parochial. Why is there virtually no mention made of Ireland? Where is the European context for these developments, and indeed the global context, for as Orser has reasonably argued (despite the Americentric period designation) 'it is no longer possible to study the post-1492 world as if it had happened in only one place' (Orser 1996: vii). The European character of historical archaeology has yet to be extensively explored but the synthesis of work in numerous disciplinary fields, dozens of languages and over many different systems of political, social and economic organisation is too great a project for this book. Moreover, the ethic of Improvement may not be a uniquely British philosophy (there is much evidence from North America,

for example, some of which is drawn on here), but it would not be appropriate to represent it as a global phenomenon either. Indeed I would not feel entirely comfortable including Ireland, with its very different religious and cultural history in the broad 'archaeology of Improvement' I have sketched here, although I think that archaeologists of this period in Ireland will recognise many of the trends I discuss. Thus I have chosen generally to limit the selection of examples to mainland Britain, although occasionally developments elsewhere in the Anglophone world are used as points of comparison or elaboration.

But is it Archaeology?

Non-specialists often imagine that an archaeological approach to later historical periods must be aimed either at the detailed study of material objects themselves (in terms of manufacture, functionality and material) or at filling in gaps in our historical knowledge. After all, when we have plenty of historical sources available, what can archaeology teach us that we do not already know?

Part of the value of archaeology in later historical periods undoubtedly is in its ability to add to our knowledge, particularly the details of ordinary life which are often only obliquely visible, if at all, in the usual historical sources. But archaeology is more interesting than that. Archaeology is concerned with the physical and material aspects of past lives. The material traces of the past are not only of interest because they provide us with historical facts when the documents let us down. Objects, places and spaces are, and were, important and valuable in themselves. Archaeology proceeds from the recognition that the material aspects of human life are meaningful and constitute, in part, our values, identities and relationships. So, archaeologists deal with the physical remains of the past. These remains include buildings, cities and landscapes, as well as artefacts. For this period, they also include texts, maps and documents. Material evidence, however, does not give up its meaning in any transparent or unambiguous way, any more than texts do. We need to formulate questions, interrogate evidence and interpret it creatively. Moreover, just as material evidence cannot simply be decoded in the present, so too in the past its meanings were multiple, contextual and contested. One of the major developments in archaeological theory in recent decades has been the recognition that material culture is actively involved in the creation of identities, the formation of cultural values and the negotiation of social relationships. People are shaped and changed through their encounter with the material world, just as much as the material world is shaped and changed by us. The clothes we wear, the crockery we use, the way we deal with our waste (and what we consider to be 'dirty') are all social and ideological practices.

Beyond that, however, an archaeological approach probably does not differ greatly in many ways from that of a historical geographer, social historian, historical sociologist or anthropologist. We share many theoretical frameworks and

interpretive philosophies. As archaeologists get better at dealing with history, and more historians incorporate some recognition of the material, old disciplinary boundaries are less and less relevant. A process of disciplinary convergence is underway and across the humanities scholars are moving more freely around the frontier regions.

The Time Span

This book focuses on the period between the mid eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth. Some of the processes examined saw significant developments before this period, and some reached their zenith only in the later nineteenth or even the twentieth century. No great watershed was reached in either 1750 or 1850 that clearly marked the beginning or end of a period, and given the large number of processes examined in this volume, they could not possibly all have the same trajectory. Therefore both dates are circa, and the definition of the period is in some ways arbitrary. However, the hundred years from 1750 to 1850 witnessed huge and significant developments in both intellectual and social history, as well as many important events of political history, the repercussions of which altered the world and the way it was seen forever. The middle of the eighteenth century saw the start of the most dramatic rise in Britain's population. The population of England and Wales in 1740 was about 6 million. By 1790 it had risen to 8.3 million, and by 1801 the population of all of Britain was 15.8 million, most of whom lived in England or Ireland (Pugh 1999: 1); by 1851 there were 27.5 million people in Britain. The political events of what Hobsbawn aptly called the Age of Revolutions include the American and French revolutions in the later eighteenth century (events which generated a useful metaphor for the rapid and significant changes in industry and agriculture over the period), the Napoleonic wars and the reshaping of Europe. These revolutions, particularly the French Revolution, had the effect of heightening contemporary consciousness of living through a period of change (Pugh 1999: 19). Further afield, European colonial power was consolidated over much of Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas. At home, economic changes in agriculture and industry changed the demographic profile of Britain. The annual rate of increase in industrial production rose from 1 per cent in 1760 to 3 or 4 per cent by 1850. In absolute terms, average wealth increased considerably, but disadvantaged groups in society suffered from the erosion of traditional social networks within the new geography of the country. All of these processes will be considered in more detail later in the book, as will the new or growing movements to ameliorate the conditions of the poor and what we would now call the socially excluded: slaves, women, children and the 'working classes'. This is the period of capitalism triumphant and also of the birth of socialism (both words that appear for the first time in this period).

The period 1750–1850 embraces the end of the Georgian period and the beginning of the Victorian, according to the traditional way of dividing up the British past for the purposes of historical analysis. Thus it brings together two familiar but contrasting caricatures: the eighteenth century – all wigs, assemblies and politeness; and the nineteenth: smoke, poverty and Gothic churches. There is something behind the stereotypes: the years around 1830 do appear to mark a change in British social history, from individual, charitable and libertarian reform to a more centralised, state-based and uniform kind of programme. The New Poor Law, the empowerment of local authorities and the beginnings of national education and welfare provision contrast with the more local and contingent reforms of the preceding eighty years. However, the workhouse, prison or school of the 1830s or 1840s was the product of many decades of reforming thought and practice, not only as regards institutions but partaking of the whole of the improving spirit of their birth. Laurie (1810: xiii) observes: 'Thus [by means of improvement], society is itself bent down with all its energies and faculties, into that state which renders all its motions subservient to the wants of the community; and mankind continues to add one improvement to another always advancing the state of the community, and always partaking of those benefits, which this advancement induces.'

There is, finally, an important point to make here: this book argues that Improvement was a cross-cutting ethic that affected many spheres of practice in Britain in the century following 1750. It does not argue that we now in the twenty-first century should look back upon the period as one of improvement, but that most contemporary commentators saw it that way. It is not the aim of this book to undertake a moral audit on the period.

At the same time, political disengagement with the ethic of Improvement is neither possible nor desirable. We are the heirs of the tradition examined by this book, as Roy Porter acknowledges,

> [T]he world they were making is the one we have inherited, that secular value system to which most of us subscribe today which upholds the unity of mankind and basic personal freedoms, and the work of tolerance, knowledge, education and opportunity. (Porter 2000: xxii)

Today's talk of 'rights', 'development', 'reform' and so on invoke the values, and even the registers of the eighteenth century and many of us, including me, do subscribe to those general values. This book does not champion all the ethics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it does try to historicise them, and to point out that what may seem to us today to be universal political and social values are in fact historically and culturally specific. At a time when the rhetoric of Enlightenment humanism (democracy, freedom, the individual, human rights)

is regularly deployed in legitimation of the politics and economics of exclusion, aggression or intervention, the task of historicisation seems more vital than ever.

The Layout and Organisation of this Book

The essential argument of this book is that Improvement represents a cross-cutting ethic in British cultural life between the mid eighteenth and the mid nineteenth century and that it informed many spheres of practical action. Therefore the archaeology of the period can be read, in part, as the record of the attempts of British men and women to improve aspects of their lives, environments and experiences. For that reason this book will examine a number of spheres of practice, all of which have produced considerable material remains in the present and all of which represent attempts at Improvement.

Chapter Two addresses the Improvement of agricultural production. This study necessarily owes a lot to the work of economic rural historians, but also considers landscapes and other forms of archaeological evidence. We shall start with an examination of agriculture, considering the nature of change over the period and the areas in which change is evident. Looking at changes in crops and regimes, fields and farming technology, stock breeding and a number of classic agricultural improvements like drainage, and the perennially complicated topic of enclosure, we will critique some dominant ways of telling the history of the period, suggesting that the ideological significance of Improvement needs to be considered alongside economic rationality in order to make sense of the dramatic changes of the period.

Chapter Three extends this argument in relation to other developments in the organisation and management of the countryside more broadly. We will look at a few different rural landscapes of Improvement in Britain, including new rural settlements and buildings. We shall look at the experimental landscape of Hafod in mid Wales to see an aesthetic, not only of the picturesque but also of Improvement. The chapter ends with a particular consideration of the 'Highland Clearances', where the ethic of Improvement complicates a historical process that is too easily represented as purely economically motivated class conflict.

Chapter Four moves on to a discussion of the urban environment. A number of Improvement Acts and Improvement Commissions accomplished major changes in British towns in this period, including new buildings, especially public amenities, and putting in place the modern urban infrastructure of roads, bridges, pavements, lighting, water, drainage, piped gas and so on. Urban space was re-organised in a time of rapid expansion to incorporate public open spaces, and re-zoned to move noxious or dangerous activities, and deviant members of society, away from the centres of civic pride. By giving particular consideration to developments such as lighting, street cleaning and modern rubbish disposal we

can see that urban reforms were in tune with ideological values associated with 'Improvement', where dirt and darkness had powerful meanings that were more than metaphorical.

The Improvement of the people is considered in Chapter Five. As the period progresses, the object of improvement increasingly moves from self, place or practice to other people, particularly the labouring classes, and the poor. This chapter considers two of the main strategies developed to improve the poor. The first was improvement of the people through reform of their environments, particularly their housing. Like the last chapter, this section will consider the elision between physical dirtiness and moral pollution that underlies much reform of the period. Reforming the people and reforming the urban environment are thus impossible to separate entirely. The other strategy considered here is the birth of modern institutions of segregation and reform. In particular the workhouse and the prison will be considered as institutions of Improvement and reform, and the Mechanics' Institute as a non-coercive institution of amelioration.

Chapter Six attempts to examine the kinds of things that archaeologists of the period frequently encounter and to show how they are involved with the process of Improvement. It will consider certain kinds of site and material frequently encountered by archaeologists: I have chosen to use bleach works, window glass, transfer-printed ceramics and rubbish pits as examples of how even the least glamorous archaeological discoveries of the period are indicative of and embedded in meaningful cultural practices and ideologies.

At the end of the book we will return to some of the apparent tensions in the period and in our explanations of it, such as those between the local and the national, middle class and working class and so on to consider some of the implications of an archaeology of Improvement as a way of narrating the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Obviously much has been omitted and some omissions might surprise or annoy readers. For example, there is little discussion of transport and communications, even though obviously the rapid developments in this area were part of the broader project of Improvement I describe. Similarly, there is little here about 'industrial archaeology' as the remains of technological process, except as it relates to a few selected examples in Chapter Six. Rural landscapes are considered in Chapters Two and Three, but the parks and gardens surrounding country houses are not included. Most of the topics considered here have their own extensive and detailed literatures, and I am indebted to those scholars on whose work I have drawn in order to formulate the ideas expressed in this book. I hope the interested reader will be sufficiently curious or frustrated to seek out those texts that deal with these subjects in more detail; I hope too that a reading of them in the light of an eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophy of Improvement would be illuminating.

TWO:

AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT

> . . . all lands are capable of improvement, none being so profitable by nature as they are capable of being made by man's assistance.
>
> Hitt 1761: 1

Take a train from Birmingham to Peterborough, across the fields and coverts of the English midlands. The historical landscape is obvious in the large numbers of moated houses, ridge and furrow field systems and the vernacular architecture of the villages and small towns through which the railway passes. Yet there is a historical period which is even more evident, if its very familiarity does not cause us to overlook it. The fields of productive arable and rich grazing; the straight, hawthorn hedges around rectilinear fields; the isolated rural farm houses connected by straight roads; even the railway itself: all were largely products of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In fact it is only the particular nature of eighteenth and nineteenth-century agricultural practice in this area that enables the landscape archaeology of earlier periods to survive here so clearly; the late enclosure of open fields, and the relative infrequency of deep ploughing mean that the ridge and furrow of earlier fields is easy to spot, as are the deserted villages, moated manors and other medieval earthworks. The efforts of eighteenth and nineteenth-century farmers to improve their land and their methods of agricultural production left enduring marks on the landscape and we will begin our exploration of Improvement by assessing the traces it has left on our rural landscape.

The agriculture of Britain changed dramatically in the century following 1750. Much of the rural landscape of fields, moors, roads and villages that we see today is a product of this period. In recent years environmental historians have emphasised the more profound changes to the agricultural landscape of Britain that occurred in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century when the impact of machine technology was greater. James Winter (1999), for example, has argued that the depredations of the twentieth century were far greater than anything managed by the Victorians. However the period 1750–1850 perhaps

marks the most optimistic phase of modern agricultural reform, relatively little troubled by the sense of loss and powerlessness in the face of destruction that characterised later periods. Agricultural improvements in our period were almost always accompanied by, and accomplished with, enthusiasm and conviction.

When they use the term 'Improvement' modern economic historians and landscape historians usually mean the efforts made by landowners in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to enhance the productivity of their land and the efficiency of rural management; landscape historians also consider 'Improvement' to relate to the aesthetic appeal of the estate park. This book argues that the ideology of Improvement was something wider than this, both in its remit and in the social position of its adherents, but our inquiry starts with the land. Improving the rural landscape, and agriculture in particular, had special prominence for many writers of the period; famous opinion-formers at the time such as Arthur Young and Erasmus Darwin paid particular attention in their writing to the improving reform of rural Britain.

In the database of titles from the British Library, discussed in the previous chapter, the word 'Improvement' occurs in relation to agriculture and husbandry more frequently than in any other context, except the improvement of the self, in all years from 1760 to 1800. In 1810, 1830 and 1840, agriculture and husbandry was the most frequently occurring context. Williamson (2002) noted that 'Improving' landowners in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries often used the word 'improvement' indiscriminately to describe agricultural reforms, aesthetic improvements such as laying out of new parks, woodlands and ornamental grounds and the improvement of the rural peasantry through, for example, the construction of planned model villages and new rural housing. 'Improvement' of agriculture may relate to increased yield, greater efficiency of operation or an increase in profit. However, there were several changes in the management of land which landowners of the time *perceived* as improving regardless of their actual economic impact. 'Improvement' had a moral value and a social desirability far beyond the mere enhancement of profit, and it is easy to find numerous examples of landowners who spent vastly more money on enclosing, draining, fertilising and clearing their land than they were ever able to recover in increased rents.

An agricultural subsistence base was, according to the stadial view of progress which dominated educated thought at the time, both a prerequisite for and an index of cultural advancement (Pluciennik 2002). The improvement of farming methods, with the aim of increasing yield and often therefore profit as well, had been underway in Britain for some time. This gradual progressive amelioration was evident to many reformers of the period; their goal was to accelerate the rate of progressive change through active improvements. In their discussions, a time dimension is frequently evident, and history imputed a progressive force. Thus opposers of agricultural reform could be characterised as belonging to the

past and resisting the inevitable (Wilmot 1990: 43). Tradition was the enemy of progress. The valorisation of the present and future at the expense of the traditional past is a theme which occurs in all spheres and one to which we shall return.

From the eighteenth century, agricultural production itself also acquired a strong moral value; it went from being the necessary prerequisite for life and the limiting factor on economic and industrial expansion to being a respectable interest for even the highest born members of society, and the foremost subject for the well-born land-holder. To maximise the potential of the earth, i.e. its capacity to provide for the needs of Man [sic], was not only economic optimalisation, but also a religious and moral duty.

Farming 1750–1850

The profound changes in farming practice that took place in the century following 1750 included the growth of 'scientific' farming, and the permeation of its teachings through society, propagated through journals, societies and publications (Wilmot 1990). In the eighteenth century, the intellectual interest in the culture and cultivation of land reached unprecedented levels of growth. Between the mid eighteenth and the mid nineteenth century there was an explosion in the numbers of societies dedicated to agriculture, paralleled by a similar growth in the number of scientific societies, particularly in the provinces (Wilmot 1990: 8–9). In Scotland 14 new agricultural societies were formed between 1723 and 1784. By 1834 there were 136 (Boud 1984). In England there were 35 agricultural societies by 1800; more than 360 by 1845, and numbers continued to rise. Cultural beliefs about the ethical importance of cultivation were reinforced in these societies, and augmented by the knowledge and skills necessary to institute practical reforms.

In the mid eighteenth century scientific farming was generally the preserve of the high-status gentleman farmer, sponsoring or promoting reforms on the lands he rented to tenant farmers. From the late eighteenth century agricultural improvement, although still usually brought about by private initiatives, was increasingly supported by infrastructure and communication organised at state level. Parliamentary intervention was used not only to secure Acts of Enclosure, but also to initiate county-by-county reports and recommendations published as the 'General Views' of agriculture in England, the majority of which were published between the 1790s and the 1810s. In Scotland, the first and second Statistical Accounts (1791–9 and 1845) contained similar economic information. By the mid nineteenth century, there were very few traditional (as distinct from scientific) farmers left; only 'high farming' (the intensive exploitation of land through imported chemical fertilizers and artificial feedstuffs, demanding

knowledge derived from the laboratory as much as from the field) could permit a continued growth in productivity on land which had already been about as improved as it could be with purely natural resources and good management.

Agricultural reform in the period is evident in a number of related areas: fields and regimes; crops and stock; organisation of land; buildings and so on. This chapter will consider each of those things in more detail in turn. Improvement, however, also characterised the organisation of agricultural practice, including the management of labour. Because 'Improvement' goes beyond merely maximising profit, the rural workforce itself was sometimes subject to improving initiatives, as will be considered in the special case study of the Highland Clearances, in Chapter Three. Although this analysis separates out crops, soil improvements, enclosure, stock, labour and so on for discussion, it is important to note that agricultural improvements were often carried out in association with each other. In order to introduce new rotations, soil improvements and/or deep drainage might be required. These developments in turn were widely believed to be possible only with new forms of management, which meant enclosure of fields and re-organisation of labour. New crops and enclosed fields facilitated improvements to stock and animal husbandry, which were also demanded by the need for more manure. Thus we should not aim to identify a single motor of reform (although plenty have tried) or to consider any of these developments in isolation from the others.

The Agricultural Revolution

The reforms of the period 1750–1850 are associated in most of our minds with the 'Agricultural Revolution'. Like its cousin, the 'Industrial Revolution', the term 'Agricultural Revolution' has been widely problematised by economic historians for many years. Nobody disputes that significant changes in British agricultural practice and increases in yield took place between the fifteenth and the twentieth century, but whether these changes were due to innovative techniques, introduced crops or simply the expansion and intensification of pre-existing practices is still debated. So too is the question of whether these changes were revolutionary in nature, and which periods were most significant in bringing about the transformation from medieval to modern agriculture.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lord Ernle placed the most significant changes in agriculture in the eighteenth and particularly the nineteenth century: 'The gigantic advance of agriculture in the nineteenth century dwarfs into insignificance any previous rate of progress. Yet the change between 1700 and 1800 was [also] astonishing' (Ernle 1912: 148). That a dramatic 'agricultural revolution' occurred in Britain in the nineteenth century remained the dominant

thesis until the 1960s and 1970s, when a number of agricultural historians emphasised the degree to which reform of crops, land management and organisation had taken place in the centuries before 1800 or even 1700; some suggested that the truly revolutionary period had been in the medieval or early modern period. Eric Kerridge, who suggested that agricultural developments after 1767 were 'irrelevant' in understanding the agricultural revolution, was particularly influential in this regard (e.g. Kerridge 1967). Robert Allen has subsequently suggested that the 'landlords' revolution' of the second half of the eighteenth century was preceded by a long 'yeoman's revolution' from 1600–1750 in which many of the improvements of the period were pioneered by small to medium scale tenant farmers (Allen 1991). In general, over the past few decades the tendency has been to push back the period of 'revolution' from the nineteenth century to find its origins in the fifteenth century or even earlier. It has been pointed out that few of the 'innovations' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were actually new; most of the new crops and new techniques had been known and used somewhere in England for decades or even centuries. One can pick out at least five different key periods between 1560 and 1880 in which economic historians have identified an 'agricultural revolution' (Overton 1996: 17–19), and some historians, notably Michael Clark, have questioned whether 'Agricultural Revolution' is actually a meaningful term at all, and suggested that the transformation of agricultural practice in the early modern and modern periods was not revolutionary in nature but part of a more gradual process (Clark 1999). Recently, a qualified version of the traditional eighteenth to nineteenth century agricultural revolution has been widely accepted, incorporating a recognition that major innovations occurred much earlier in some parts of the country. What marks out the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that it was only then that the whole package of reform became really widespread in Britain. The archives of the Economic History Forum for November 1998 (http://www.eh.net/lists/archives/eh.res/nov-1998/) contain a discussion between prominent economic historians which gives a good flavour of the nature of recent debate.

The timing of an agricultural revolution, if one believes in it at all, rests on the significance attributed to developments such as enclosure of fields, new labour relations or patterns of land ownership, new crops and rotations, technological developments, economic demand and so on. The true economic significance of any of these factors in increasing productivity is still hotly debated among economic historians, and their evaluation depends also on the technicalities of how productivity is estimated, the sources used to infer prices, rents, levels of employment, etc. and how these are correlated with various technical, organisational and economic changes. However, to point out the early origins of some of the aspects of the 'agricultural revolution', or to note that yields had been increasing steadily since the fourteenth century, does not necessarily mean that nothing distinctive happened in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.

Overton demonstrates a substantial overall rise in output and an increase in the productivity of both land and labour between 1700 and 1850. Output rose by between 240 and 285 per cent (Overton 1996: 63–132) depending on the variables used to calculate it, and the productivity of the land between the middle ages and the mid nineteenth century doubled for cereal production, and increased sixfold for livestock. Labour productivity (output per labourer) also approximately doubled over this period. Much of this increase in output was derived from the extension of the total land area in agricultural use but, as Overton's figures on output per acre demonstrate, land was also being exploited more intensively for agricultural production. What is certainly true is that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whatever the size of any real increase in productivity, people *believed* that dramatically productive improvements were being made in agricultural practice and that these were having an unprecedented effect on yields. Many of the authors of the Statistical Accounts for Scotland of the 1790s note a dramatic increase in productivity over the preceding twenty years or so which they link to agricultural improvements. The author of the account of the parish of Ardrossan in Ayrshire, for example, says that 'forty, even thirty years ago, the land was almost in a state of Nature . . . the price of vivres not above the half, in many instances not above the third of what they now bring' (Duncan 1793: 43). Arthur Young, in the *General View of the Agriculture of Oxfordshire* (1813), cites a number of county farmers on the subject of the effects of Improvement, including Sir Christopher Willoughby's opinion that improvements in the last twenty or thirty years have allowed a tenfold increase in livestock in the county, Mr Fane's that improvements in the Chilterns have yielded a 50 per cent rise in output, and Mr Davis's that agricultural Improvement was closely linked to the general improvement of its practitioners:

> If you go into Banbury-market next Thursday, you may distinguish the farmers from enclosures [here representing improving agriculturalists] from those from open fields; quite a different sort of men; the farmers as much changed as their husbandry – quite new men in point of knowledge and ideas. (1813: 269)

Scores of similar examples can easily be found by looking in any of the English county 'General Views' or Scottish 'Statistical Accounts' published around the same time.

Very few economic historians, however, have concerned themselves with the *causes* of Improvement in the rural eighteenth and nineteenth century. Nearly all explanations attribute deterministic force to population pressure (more mouths to feed), combined with either economic rationality at the individual level, or the implicit use of a systems theory of human culture whereby the needs of the

systemic organism are mechanistically supplied by its other parts. The economic rationality model posits that all farmers will want to maximise the productivity and thus the potential for profit of their land. The systems model is implicit rather than fully worked out, but underlies the kind of historical account that moves directly from summaries of population growth in the period to descriptions of agricultural intensification (e.g. Chambers and Mingay 1966; Jones 1968; Harvey 1976; 1980), assuming that population growth in itself is enough of an explanation and giving no role to cultural or ideological factors, or developing a clear theory of the mechanisms by which a (putative) rise in population results in more food being produced. In fact the population of Britain did indeed double between 1760 and 1821, from 6 to 12 million, and then more than doubled again in the next 60 years, reaching 26 million by 1881. However, Mark Overton (1996) has argued that in fact the rise in population was actually enabled by agricultural reform: that the increased food supply removed the previous 'Malthusian check' on population growth and thus the demographic change was a *consequence*, rather than a cause, of agricultural reform. For a sophisticated consideration of the relationship between population and productivity, and for some of the complexities of demographic research in this period see Wrigley (2004).

Implicit in much discussion is an assumption that profit is a universal motivating factor and economic rationality a ubiquitous way of proceeding. Therefore, given an adequate market and the necessary infrastructural and social support, the increase of surplus yields for the market needs no explanation. It is assumed that at all times and in all situations it is desirable to increase the yield from one's land and labours. It is only the failure of those of previous ages to do so that requires explanation, usually in terms of obstacles to Improvement or structural limiting factors. The question thus becomes for many writers not why was there a take-off in agricultural production and productivity in the eighteenth century, but what factors prevented this expansion from taking place earlier? Hence the search has been for a technological or structural explanation of the 'Agricultural Revolution', rather than an ideological one. Addy blames small farm size and the innate conservatism of a traditional agricultural society in which experiment was not encouraged (Addy 1972: 18). Jones explains the timing of the 'Agricultural Revolution' in terms of a rational response to high cereal prices, but as Overton (1996: 202) demonstrates, the imputation of considerable economic foresight and strategic ability to eighteenth century farmers is problematic and the relationship between price and production is far from straightforward. Inferring motivation from outcomes is not a safe strategy. Overton himself sees the 'Agricultural Revolution' as the 'unintended consequence' (1996: 203) of essentially conservative risk aversion strategies in crop growing and animal husbandry, a view shared by Reed (1990). Nevertheless, even Overton's explanatory framework only makes sense within the terms of self-interested and economically rational thinkers.

This kind of pared-down strategic economics is not sufficient to explain the rapid and widespread adoption of agricultural innovation at a particular time in British history.

Accompanying all the increase in output and the adoption of new practices was a powerful ideological conviction that knowledge of, and a practical interest in agriculture was not only fit but necessary for a modern gentleman. Agriculture in the early modern period had been a subject for pastoral whimsy, or philosophical speculation. From as early as the sixteenth century there was also an English tradition of landlord involvement in agricultural matters. Thirsk (1992) attributes the growth of interest in the farming of one's estate to the influence of classical agricultural manuals and the positive evaluation of rural retirement that proceeded from their popularity. Typical of the seventeenth century improving farmer would be Peter Smith, an 'improving farmer' of the 1650s whose letters lament the separation of the philosophical from the practical, but who spent much of his rural life contemplating the classics and composing eclogues (Leslie and Raylor 1992). The seventeenth century rural landlord might well take an interest in the farming of his estates, but the interest was essentially supervisory and somewhat removed from the actual mud and ditches. Many of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century texts on husbandry celebrate a conservative and stable framework, identifying the maintenance of good order as the goal, rather than radical innovation (McRae 1992). From the mid eighteenth century agriculture increasingly became not only a necessary part of the education of a gentleman, but also a locus of innovation and experiment for landowners. What brought this about was the association of agricultural production with Science and Progress and thus with the moral welfare of the individual, the community and the nation as a whole. Joan Thirsk has noted that a 'moral duty' to exploit the land fully constituted the philosophical basis for taking an interest in agricultural work for agricultural writers back in the seventeenth century (Thirsk 1983: 300). By the mid eighteenth century this attitude was both more widespread and more profoundly embedded in practical action among the landowning classes of Britain. Maximisation of the potential of the land, through work, was a religious duty placed on Man by God. The failure to put land to agricultural use, by contrast, constituted ideological justification for its expropriation. In the case of European colonial attitudes to the indigenous peoples of America and Australia, for example, the seizure of indigenous people's land was legitimated by the natives' 'failure' to maximise its productive potential, rendering it terra nullius (empty land), according to European standards (Gosden 2004: 27–8). Human curation of God-given resources at the time involved bringing the wild, untamed and 'natural' into the realm of the cultural, through cultivation (an etymologically interesting complex of words including 'culture' and 'cultivation' derive from specifically agricultural origins, but came to signify all that was desirable in human character

and society as well as agricultural practice). Farming powerfully united moral, religious and patriotic duties.

Enclosure

In many people's minds the agricultural changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are inextricably involved with the controversial issue of enclosure. 'Enclosure', in an eighteenth to nineteenth-century context, refers to the act of marking off for private use land which had previously been farmed or grazed collectively as part of an open field system, or been exploited as 'commons', or was in some other non-intensive use (and thus could be described at the time as 'waste'). It usually involved the consolidation of scattered holdings and use-rights into compact farms, divided into bounded fields. The land enclosed for private use – 'in severalty' was the contemporary term – had not previously been 'commonly owned' in an absolute sense, but traditionally these lands had often been encumbered with common rights of use for at least part of the year, even if they were formally in private ownership.

The reason that enclosure is so closely associated with the other agricultural reforms of the period is that contemporaries, and many subsequent scholars, saw it as a necessary precondition for any serious improving endeavour. Enclosing land would permit full control over crops or animals. At the same time, giving control of the land to a single individual would allow innovative farmers to improve their land and give them (and the landowner) the incentive of profiting from any consequent increase. Outside of the Midlands, most of England had already been enclosed before the beginning of the eighteenth century. The 'old-enclosed' lands had been taken into severalty either as the result of local arrangements to reorganise the fields of a parish or estate made without recourse to parliament ('enclosure by agreement'), or by the occasional enclosure of a few strips of land for particular individuals or purposes ('piecemeal' enclosure). Piecemeal enclosure is sometimes evident in modern field boundaries where it preserves the reversed S-shape of the open-field strips (Fig. 2.1), and in the 'dog-legging' of field ends, where instead of field corners meeting at a point of four right angles they do not match up with the line of fields adjacent, resulting in staggered T-shape nodes (Williamson 2002: 7–8). In general, piecemeal enclosure, because it did not occasion the replanning of an entire parish or estate, pays more attention to pre-existing field boundaries, roads, paths and land uses, as well as to natural topography. So where later parliamentary enclosure might institute boundaries diagonally up a steep scarp, or define fields which were bisected by streams or cliffs, piecemeal enclosure paid more attention to the practicalities of working the land within the existing system. Nevertheless, it is often impossible to know from the existing field pattern alone exactly what kind of enclosure took place

2.1. Reversed-S shape characteristically produced by ploughing a strip and turning the plough team at its head preserved in modern field boundary near Chelmorton, Derbyshire.

in a certain area. The size of fields is no guide and varies considerably within all types of enclosure. And although later, parliamentary enclosure tends towards large, geometric fields and straight boundaries, some areas of early enclosure show these characteristics too, or less regular field boundaries might have been tidied up at a later date.

Although enclosures by agreement continued to happen occasionally beyond the early eighteenth century, the usual practice by which enclosure was accomplished in the period 1750–1830 was to secure a private act of parliament by which open field or common land could be re-organised into a number of privately owned and individually worked farms and fields. At the same time, plans for new roads or improvements to existing ones, and for other improvements such as marsh drainage might also be stipulated (Mingay 1997). In place of scattered strips in an open field system, consolidated fields were assigned to land-holders. Commoners with rights of use were generally given ownership of a small piece of land in compensation for the loss of common lands. In practice, this was often not a fair exchange in terms of productive value, and many people at the bottom end of the rural scale who had used common land informally were excluded from compensation arrangements altogether. For very small land-holders the costs of fencing their new enclosure could well be greater than the value of the land (Mingay 1997: 120), and small farmers increasingly decided to sell up. This contributed to the general increase in the size of farms over the period, as larger farms

were able to augment their holdings by acquiring small pieces of land which were too expensive to farm independently.

Fields enclosed under parliamentary act in the great age of parliamentary enclosure – the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – typically have a rectilinear shape. Because they were often marked out on a map first and then marked out on the land itself by professional surveyors, the field boundaries often ignore local topography, especially where enclosure was of common or 'waste' land and thus did not have pre-existing divisions. The boundaries themselves were often either fences or quick-growing hawthorn or blackthorn, especially in the Midlands and south of England. Further north and in those parts of Wales and Scotland where trees did not grow well, boundaries generally took the form of drystone field walls, which also served to clear the field of stones and thus improve its productivity. The drystone walls of this period take the form of two stone faces, laid in random courses or a herringbone pattern, one looking into each adjoining field, tapering towards the top and filled with rubble. In the fenlands of East Anglia and in some other marshy areas where neither trees nor suitable building stones were present, drainage ditches comprised the boundaries and these, of course, helped to keep the field dry as well as defining its extent (Fig. 2.2).

Much of the rural landscape of the English midlands and Yorkshire belongs to the period of parliamentary enclosure (Fig. 2.3). Isolated farm houses sit in the middle of huge square fields; communication takes the form of dead straight roads; extensive woodlands are infrequent, although spinneys and coverts

2.2. Fields in the Lincolnshire fens defined by drainage ditches.

2.3. Parliamentary enclosure near Tilton-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire.

(for fox-hunting) do occur. Enclosure roads were of standard widths: usually either forty feet, fifty feet or sixty feet (Hindle 1998: 6). Because enclosure roads were usually laid out by the surveyor who enclosed the fields of a parish, and the next stretch of road was planned by a different surveyor for another parish, the two stretches did not always meet up; doglegs of two 90° bends show where this has happened (Hindle 1998: 6). There was, however, much other variation. Some nineteenth-century field boundaries enclosed much smaller older fields or were less regularly shaped, and there are many exceptions to the rule that parliamentary enclosure was enclosure 'by map' that paid little attention to local land forms and traditional use, as opposed to older field systems which respected natural boundaries, old routes of communication and so on. In some cases, notably the Scottish highlands, the consolidation of land holdings for individual use did not involve the demarcation of boundaries at all. Instead, vast unfenced sheep runs were created by the removal of tenants and their small settlements and fields from the land.

The land selected for parliamentary enclosure was primarily of two kinds: the first was the old 'champion' land, open field, which still predominated across the Midlands at the start of the period. These fields were mostly farmed in strips and, in their classic regime, comprised three large fields which would be farmed in rotation, one field being left fallow every year, although there were in practice many other local arrangements of fields and rotations in place. The second type of land was what contemporaries called 'waste'. This was indeed a weasel word, for

the land in question was not unused as the word suggests; what the eighteenth and nineteenth-century reformers called 'waste' was often productive, although non-agricultural, land. The fens were rich resources for waterfowl, eels, fish and so on, which had been important parts of the local economy; woodlands offered 'wild' resources such as firewood and turf, nuts, berries, fruit, rabbits, birds and small game, acorns, dye stuffs and medicinal plants for the support of local people and their animals; uplands were generally in use for low-intensity or seasonal grazing, turf or peat cutting and the exploitation of mineral resources. Nevertheless, these small-scale economic activities were perceived by many, especially among the upper classes, as being inefficient and unrewarding land uses (with the exception of mineral exploitation). Their conversion to high intensity arable and livestock production was one of a small number of 'Improved' uses to which the 'wastes' could be put. (Others might be conversion into parkland, rational forestry, more intensive mineral extraction or the development of towns.)

Probably no topic in the rural economic history of Britain has been so hotly debated or seen such swings of opinion as enclosure. Once held to be the key structural development of the period, which permitted the whole 'Agricultural Revolution' to take place (e.g. Toynbee 1908; Ernle 1912), since the 1970s the effects of enclosure in facilitating increased productivity have been challenged (McCloskey 1994), and the negative consequences of enclosure for the rural poor have been emphasised, particularly by Marxist historians such as E. P. Thompson (1980). Mingay suggests that the influence of Hammond and Hammond's *The Village Labourer* (1911) which argued that enclosure was the single most important cause of rural unrest in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth continued to shape popular understandings of enclosure for the rest of the century. Among economic and social historians, however, traditional accounts of 'enclosure' are now widely discredited, in terms of its nature and progress and of its social consequences.

There is now general consensus that most enclosure in England and Wales occurred before the major period of parliamentary enclosure. Estimates of the proportion of England's total land area enclosed by parliamentary act between the mid eighteenth and the mid nineteenth century range from a fifth to a quarter. This is still a significant amount of England, and conceals considerable regional variation. Some counties, like Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire had nearly half their area enclosed by parliamentary act at this time, and in Wales over a million acres of common land were enclosed between 1795 and 1896 (Harvey 1980: 53). Other areas, such as Cornwall and Devon saw only negligible enclosure in this period (Mingay 1997: 14–20). Even given that many of the 5,265 parliamentary acts of enclosure (Turner 1980) only represented formalisation of existing land-holding arrangements, this is still a substantial change in land ownership patterns and consequently in the organisation of rural life.

The impact of these changes varied not only according to geography, but also according to one's position in the social system (Mingay 1997). For the landlords, the organisation of their land into compact farms with, often, improved access and new or extensively restored farm buildings enabled them to raise their rents, although the full new rent might not be charged until many years or even decades after enclosure, to encourage the tenant farmer to carry out improvements on the land. For the tenant farmer, the new farms normally offered greater autonomy (although not always – sometimes landlords tried to impose their ideas of what the land should produce and how it should be managed). Enclosed fields provided greater control for stock breeding and for putting into practice new rotations, particularly those that involved 'convertible husbandry': the use of the same fields for arable and stock farming. It was obviously not practical to keep livestock on unhedged strips of open fields, adjacent to which one's neighbours were growing barley, and where a communal decision was required it could be hard to persuade one's neighbours to move to new rotations or introduce new crops. Long leases (in most parts of Britain) meant that farmers could expect to see the benefits of long-term improvements such as drainage, intensive manuring, new rotations and so on. For small-scale tenants the effects might be less positive. The costs of fencing their holdings would be proportionately higher and they would lose the support and the risk-sharing of farming with other members of the community. The consequences of failure could be much more serious. In these circumstances, many very small landowners (those whose settlement was fewer than ten acres, for example) chose to sell their land and concentrate on small industry, commerce or service (or some combination of these) as a living. At the very bottom were the landless poor and these were the people for whom enclosure generally had the worst consequences. Since commoners' rights were usually formally related to the ownership or established tenancy of village plots and cottages, those who owned no land at all, or who tenanted cottages that had either been sub-let or informally constructed, were not usually entitled to any compensation. Thus they lost informal rights to common grazing, which might have allowed them to keep a cow, some geese or pigs, as well as their other traditional rights of usage, such as pannage, turbary, estover and so on (respectively, the right to let one's pigs forage for food in woodland, to cut turfs, to cut bracken and gorse), which might not have been formally enshrined in local law, but were often tolerated anyway. These people were the major casualties of the reorganisations involved in enclosure. Enclosers of woodland in Scotland often failed to provide any recompense whatsoever even to the established tenantry for the enclosure of land of which they had traditionally made some use (Smout 1999: 221).

Marx famously traced the origins of the urban proletariat in Britain to those dislocated by enclosure, and there is no doubt that some of the rural poor went on to form the workforce for the developing industrial revolution.

Others provided waged agricultural labour, or took up small trades like higgling (peddling) or 'took in' manufacturing work. Increases in productivity per labourer (Overton 1996: 121–8) certainly meant that a smaller proportion of Britain's population were employed in agricultural labour, which in turn meant that a greater proportion needed to find work elsewhere.

The social and economic costs of enclosure borne by the rural poor caused some unrest (in Cardiganshire for example, rioters knocked down fences and attacked surveyors, even robbing one of them of his theodolite (Jones 1966: 280)), and provoked some eloquent protest, most famously from demotic poets like Oliver Goldsmith and John Clare. However, the extent to which enclosure was responsible for rural discontent in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is not clear. The Swing riots of 1830 hardly touched the areas most affected by parliamentary enclosure, nor was enclosure much mentioned as a factor of grievance (Hobsbawm and Rudé 1969: 195), although indirectly it may have had an effect in keeping rural wages low by increasing the labour pool.

Resistance to enclosure was by no means new to the age of parliamentary enclosure. Bill Frazer (1999) has argued that enclosure 'by agreement' was not the consensual process it first appears; he has suggested that in seventeenth century Derbyshire there were growing tensions within the peasant classes, whereby the upper yeomanry shared the enthusiasm of the gentry for adopting a lifestyle of agrarian capitalism, whereas their poorer neighbours' concerns were for subsistence and the preservation of 'neighbourliness'. These latter, he argues, manifested their resistance in illegal squatting in upland cottages, and working the lead seams the landowner had attempted to appropriate to his own profit. 'Squatter' settlements of displaced rural poor are known from many places around Britain. At Rhos-gelli-gron near Tregaron in Wales, for example, illegal houses and small enclosures were erected at the edge of the common some time before the end of the eighteenth century; the last houses there were not abandoned until after the Second World War. The squatters erected their *tai unnos*, or 'one-night houses' under the traditional Welsh practice whereby if a house could be erected overnight so that by daybreak there was smoke coming from the chimney the house-builder had rights to that house and to a portion of land around it. The rudimentary turf houses were later replaced by two-room stone cottages (Fig. 2.4). The inhabitants of Rhos-gelli-gron made a meagre living combining work at the local lead mines with selling knitted stockings and taking care of their own small gardens and few beasts. It seems likely, given the evidence of communal projects such as digging ditches and building roads, and eventually a chapel, that the inhabitants of the common preserved or formed bonds of community to carry out their 'improvements' collectively.

Undoubtedly enclosure of the wastes and commons had negative consequences for some rural people, particularly those whose common rights were not secure to start with. However, this should not be exaggerated; rural population

2.4. Stone 'one-night house' at Rhos-gelli-gron, Ceredigion. An original turf structure constructed in a single night, according to Welsh traditional law, in order to secure rights of residence and limited cultivation, would have been later replaced by this sturdier two-room house.

growth meant that increasing numbers of the poorest members of society were in any case excluded from using the commons even before the period of enclosure.

The nature, purposes and consequences of enclosure differed so much across the country that it is hard to write of 'enclosure' as a unified phenomenon. In some areas, enclosure took place early; in others not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The course of enclosure, the uses of the resulting landscape and the effects on its people could differ even between adjacent parishes. In a single area the nature of enclosure could change frequently, even over quite short periods. In the extensive upland wastes of Westmorland the reasons for enclosure changed over time (Whyte 2003): early enclosure by agreement enabled the cultivation of the better soils and addressed the needs of drovers passing through the county; during the Napoleonic wars in the early nineteenth century, when prices were high, more marginal soils were enclosed for cultivation; later in the nineteenth century, enclosures were related to improvements to pasture land.

The literature on enclosure is vast, and no comprehensive review of it has been attempted here. However, the literature has been dominated by social and economic historians of the countryside who have generally contextualised the discussion in terms of long-term changes in patterns of land ownership and management. Johnson (1996) argues that enclosure needs additionally to be seen as part of a larger process of 'closure' and as the agrarian manifestation of an ideology which also affected domestic architecture, church liturgy, and numerous other aspects of material practice. Johnson is mainly interested in the enclosures that took place between the sixteenth and the early eighteenth century, rather than the

parliamentary enclosures considered here, and he argues convincingly that division and personal appropriation – possession 'in severalty' – was more important in early modern enclosure than efficiency of agricultural production. As the previous chapter argued, private ownership, and the setting of boundaries and limits around that ownership was important to the culture of 'Improvement' and in that sense Johnson's project of associating enclosure with cultural and ideological change rather than narrating it as a part of the history of land ownership is close to the argument of this book. For the enthusiastic Improvers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Improvement was impossible without enclosure; enclosure, and the agricultural improvements which ensued, distinguished the modern, rational man, favoured by God and Nature, from the earlier, 'backwards' stages of human history. The Reverend J. Howlett of Great Dunmow in Essex, was clear upon this point, and it is worth quoting him at length:

> Have not the improvements of late years, by the use of lime, chalk, marl, &c. and by the culture of turnips, clover, sainfoin, & [sic] rendered those high and light lands abundantly productive, which before were of little or no value? And as to the low and heavy ones, has not the general introduction of draining been the means of converting cold wet arable, to dry healthy pasture, and of rendering many thousand acres of boggy unwholesome meadow, sound and proper for breeding and fattening cattle, on which it was before impossible they should either be fatted or bred? . . .
>
> If I am answered in the affirmative, allow me to ask, how could all these things have been accomplished, unless the common fields and pastures had been divided and allotted, in specific shares to every proprietor, so that he might have it in his power to manage his land in that way which Nature intended, and in which his own experience taught him it would be most productive and profitable?
>
> If I am answered in the negative, then let all the ancient enclosures, as well as the new, be again thrown open. Let us no longer boast of our improvements, but let us return to our primitive barbarity, and let our flocks and herds resume the undisturbed possession of the forests. (Young 1808: 47–8)

Strategies of Improvement

I drained bogs, burned heath, grubbed up furze and fern; I planted copse and willows where nothing else would grow; I gradually inclosed all my farms, and made such improvements that my estate

> now yields clear twelve hundred pounds a year. (Smollett 1967 [1771]: 369)

According to educated men of the time, enclosure was an essential prerequisite to agrarian improvement, but it was only the first step. After land had been enclosed, it had then to be subjected to various procedures and improvements in order to realise its full potential. Attempts to increase output fall into two broad strategies: either new land that had previously been 'waste' (a loaded term, as we have seen) could be brought under the plough, or land already in cultivation could be made more productive. Improvements to the soil were carried out in a number of ways including marling, manuring and drainage among others; contemporary and subsequent commentators also emphasise the spread of new crops and new rotations. The new crops included especially fodder crops such as turnips and clover which enabled more stock to be kept, and thus more manure produced and the arable fertility of the ground consequently enhanced. At the same time, the nutritional value of these fodder crops, in relation to hay, meant that smaller areas of land could feed proportionally larger numbers of beasts, thus releasing meadow land for other cropping and increasing the amount of manure available. Clover had the additional fertility-enhancing property of fixing nitrogen in the soil, so its incorporation into rotations allowed the abolition of fallow periods.

The total amount of land in England and Wales in arable use around 1760 is estimated to be about 9 million acres. By 1850 it is estimated to be around 14.3 million, an increase of around 70 per cent (Overton 1996: 76). The high demand for food during the period of the Napoleonic wars was a particular incentive to extend cultivation: production of food between 1793 and 1815 was both a commendable act of patriotism and a good opportunity for personal profit. This extension was mainly accomplished by the conversion to arable use of common and 'waste' land. The three main types of 'waste' on which the Improvers fixed their attention were fens and marches; woodland and scrub; and grass, heath and moor. By draining marshes, converting and enclosing uplands, canalising rivers and so on, marginal grazing land or waste was transformed into rich pasture.

Draining Bogs

Drainage of wetlands had been going on in Britain since early medieval times but, as with so many agricultural processes, it expanded and accelerated in the post-medieval period. Much of the East Anglian fen, for example, was drained by the start of the study period. Nevertheless, most of England's remaining wetlands were finally drained and converted to agricultural use during the eighteenth to nineteenth century. At the same time, the interminable project

of safeguarding land that had previously been reclaimed was given a fillip by developments of the period. New technology in the nineteenth century did not only permit new drainage, it also ensured that old reclamations were not lost (Harvey 1980: 26–9). The steam pump, for example, allowed the fields of reclaimed – and rapidly shrinking – peat in the fens to keep from sinking below the water table.

In other parts of the country land reclamation continued. The reclamation of Romney Marsh, a process that had begun in prehistory, was finally finished in 1838 when the saltings below the town of Rye, including much of the old harbour, were enclosed (Murray 1972). In Lancashire the drainage of the formerly extensive 'mosses' was almost entirely completed by the end of the nineteenth century. Lytham Moss, near Blackpool was reclaimed in the sixty years following 1776, at first in a series of piecemeal enclosures and then later by a planned campaign of estate improvement in the 1840s, directed by the Clifton family of Lytham Hall (Middleton et al 1995). It has been pointed out that this improvement activity was not economically rewarding, since the costs far exceeded the increased revenue in rents, but the activities of the Cliftons at Lytham Moss could be seen as typical of 'wider estate improvement as a prestige activity' (Newman 2001: 114). Drainage of wetland had a moral value that exceeded its agricultural potential and could even envelop the moral well-being of local people. This was certainly believed to be true of Lord Kames's reclamation of Blairdrummond Moss in 1811. One contemporary panegyrist claimed that the rural workforce employed in the process of draining the Moss were themselves also improved by this worthwhile endeavour: 'healthy and happy, delighting in their situations, warmly attached to their patron, and to the Government, ready to extend their brawny arms, in the cultivation of the dreary wastes, or to repel their country's foes' (William Aiton, 1811, cited by Smout 1999: 218).

Draining mosses, marshes and fens involved major engineering works and is not directly comparable with the placement of deep field drains in areas which were soggy but already in cultivation. Drainage of previously unworkable land produced virgin fields. The boundaries, roads and farms which were subsequently positioned upon them are thus very distinctive: they do not need to conform to existing routes of communication or water courses. Field boundaries in reclaimed lands tend to be very regular and roads straighter than any in Britain since the Romans. This landscape is clearly visible on the drained fen of Lincolnshire, for example.

The fields of former Prestwick Carr in Northumberland, drained in the mid nineteenth century, are geometric and the roads straight (Harbottle 1995). Schemes for draining Prestwick Carr had been circulated since the late eighteenth century, but it was not until the 1850s that drainage actually took place, at a cost of nearly £12,000 (Harbottle 1995: 9). It never fulfilled the expectations of its

Improvers, however, and the land is subject to regular flooding up to the present day. By the late date of Prestwick's 'Improvement', public enthusiasm for fen drainage had waned somewhat, and early environmental conservation combined with romantic nostalgia to produce, at best, an ambivalence about large-scale environmental change: by 1890 the secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle was lamenting the loss of 'a favourite place of pilgrimage for the naturalists of Northumberland . . . a picturesque, unprofitable waste' for the sake of 'two square miles of common-place Northumbrian corn-land' (Thomas Hodgkin, cited in Harbottle 1995: 1). This is quite a change in aesthetics as well as sentiment from a hundred years before, when 'waste' was not picturesque but an eyesore and an indictment of the laziness and failure of those who owned and worked the land; and well-regulated corn-land a landscape much to be admired.

Grubbing Up Furze and Fern

The light chalky soils of eastern England did not require drainage, but had until this period supported a large proportion of 'waste' land – high heath or down which was not in arable use but acted as sheep walk for low-intensity grazing, and constituted a common resource. The problems here were not to do with drainage but with soil fertility. These very light soils did not contain enough nutrients to act as useful arable land (although their contemporary representation as 'wastes' is misleading – their utility as sheep grazing was a significant and sustainable agricultural use) so 'Improvement' here had to concentrate on manuring and, through the institution of new crop rotations, enhancing the productivity of the land. Principal among the new rotations was the Norfolk four-course. The Norfolk rotation consisted of a crop of wheat followed by one of turnips or swedes, one of barley or oats and finally a year of grass or clover. Sometimes an additional year of grass pasture was added to the rotation. Thus fodder crops alternated with food crops for the market. More livestock could thus be kept on those farms which integrated animal and arable production, with a consequent increase in available manure which, along with the nitrogen-fixing clover in the rotation, enhanced soil fertility and crop yield. Turnips and clover were both newer crops in most of Britain, although historical records suggest that both were well established in eastern England well before the study period. Nevertheless, the Norfolk rotation did not become really widespread in England till the early nineteenth century (Overton 1996: 119). The classic Norfolk four-course rotation was perceived at the time (and since) to be a crucial adoption, not only on these light soils where it certainly did make a difference; some variation on the Norfolk four-course was also advocated for parts of Britain with very different soils and climate, after deep drainage and other modifications (Williamson 2002).

Soil Improvement

Improvers of the eighteenth century were becoming increasingly aware of ways in which even poor soils could be made to yield better and more abundant crops, and to provide for more animals. In parts of the country with little common or waste to enclose, the only way to increase yields was to enhance the fertility of land already in cultivation, and again the soil itself needed improvement. The problem of soil acidity could be addressed by adding lime to the soil. It is unlikely that eighteenth century farmers and landowners understood the precise chemical effect of marling (adding marl – a rich kind of soil made up of lime, clay and other constituents) or liming (adding lime), but they certainly recognised its efficacy. Even so, lime was sometimes applied to soils that had no problem with acidity, or in other cases it was expected that marling alone would restore the fertility of exhausted fields, without the replenishment of organic content (Mawson 1980: 137). Like enclosure, draining and the adoption of new rotations, liming had a symbolic value to Improvers that is not always explained by economic efficiency. Both marling and liming were highly labour intensive and involved transporting heavy loads over sometimes considerable distances. Marling leaves little archaeological trace, except in the soil chemistry itself, although it was a widespread practice, known from documentary sources for most parts of the country. Liming, however, leaves clear archaeological traces. To make lime, the quarried limestone must be heated in a kiln (usually, in this period, fired with coal, although in some areas such as northern Scotland, peat fired kilns were more normal) until it breaks down and makes quicklime. Because it requires such heavy loads (about two tons of limestone and up to half a ton of coal to make one ton of quicklime, according to Mawson (1980: 137)), kilns tended to be sited close to the source of stone or fuel (or both) or in locations which minimised the distance of land transport necessary. Thus lime kilns are frequent in limestone areas such as Derbyshire (Leach 1995; Barnatt and Smith 1997) and close to wharves or quays. In the case of the lime quarries around Buxton and Bradwell in the Derbyshire Peak district, tramways and later railways were constructed to facilitate the movement of stone, fuel or processed lime. In northern Cumbria numerous lime kilns were constructed along the limestone outcrops of the Bewcastle fells, where the limited local coal supply was used to make lime that was used extensively across north-western England and south-western Scotland (Mawson 1980). Lime kilns are also common along the coasts, particularly on the north coasts of Devon and Somerset (Cossons 1993: 159) and close to harbours. Kilns might be made of brick, stone, or even turf or earth (Leach 1995), and those for agricultural lime (as opposed to those used to make lime for cement or other industrial uses) were often small. These days many are in ruinous conditions or barely visible, but lime kilns are still a fairly common sight around Britain (Figs 2.5, 2.6). By the end of the period, the import

of guano from South America and the Pacific was obviating the need for native limestone – an economic development which brought depression to some parts of Britain and human and environmental degradation to places like Peru, where the guano was collected under often brutally inhumane conditions by the last of the Easter Island indigenes (Bahn and Flenley 1992).

Agricultural soil was manured with numerous substances including bird dung, the bark from tan pits, saltpetre, ox blood, soot or bones. Both household and foul waste from the towns might be collected and transported to the neighbouring fields, by road or canal. The waste products of local industry might also be used: shoddy in textile areas, or kelp in coastal regions, for example (Addy 1972: 20–1). However, the most widely used substance was undoubtedly farmyard manure. Sheep and cow dung was of enormous value in enhancing the fertility of enclosed fields, especially on the light, chalky soils of the south east of England. This dung could be distributed both by transporting and spreading the muck from stables, yards, animal barns and dairy parlours and by allowing the animals to feed off fodder crops, stubble or grass in the field and deposit their dung directly where it was needed. This latter technique of manuring had some advantages, mainly in that it allowed animals to be fully integrated into farming rotations. The alternation of crops and stock on fields was known as 'convertible' or 'up-and-down' husbandry and became common in the early modern period, but was undoubtedly more widespread as the proportion of enclosed land increased.

2.5. Lime kilns on the quay, Solva, Pembrokeshire. Small kilns like these are commonly found in harbours and estuaries where the lime and fuel were probably delivered by sea and the burnt lime taken inland by horse and cart (by kind permission of Marilyn Palmer).

2.6. A field kiln near Ravenstonedale in Cumbria, which shows how kilns were, where possible, built into banks which facilitated the top loading of the kiln with limestone and fuel. Such kilns were usually intermittent in operation and were often associated with particular farms (by kind permission of Marilyn Palmer).

Until this period, the number of beasts kept had been limited by the need to feed them overwinter, which meant harvesting hay in the summer and storing it to sustain animals through the winter months. As well as the widespread adoption of new rotations, like the Norfolk four course, which encouraged the cultivation of new, more versatile and calorific, fodder crops such as clover and turnips, other innovations in practice encouraged early fodder availability. The famous 'floating meadows' of south western England, widely constructed from the seventeenth century, protected the ground from the extremes of winter cold through a system of irrigation which meant that grass was available in the field earlier in the year, thus decreasing the period of reliance on stored fodder (Williamson 1998). Irrigating water meadows was labour intensive and required considerable maintenance, but the inflated rents such lands commanded – sometimes twice as much as unfloated meadows – suggests that contemporaries believed that they had a significantly beneficial effect (Williamson 2002: 59). With new crops, water meadows and a large overall increase in the amount of land in agricultural use, the ceiling on the numbers of animals kept had been, if not demolished, at least considerably raised. Wade-Martins and Williamson (1999) note that the interest in 'floating' meadows propagated by the Improvers led to a vogue for the establishment of water meadows in the north and west of Britain between about 1800 and 1870. Nevertheless, the uptake of 'floating' technology in the south-western style was limited and far more prevalent among the great landowners than among small and medium farmers whose efforts at irrigation were largely aimed at

safeguarding summer crops, rather than forcing early ones. In fact the topography and particularly the colder climate of eastern Britain made the water meadow an inappropriate technology. In these areas Wade Martins and Williamson suggest that the technology was adopted by great estate-holders in Norfolk not as a rational economic and agricultural decision, but an ideological one on the part of elite 'Improvers'. In this respect it is interesting that the hydraulic systems of water meadows in East Anglia were sometimes linked into aesthetic landscaping projects, as at Woburn, Bedfordshire, where meadows were fed from the Temple Reservoir, a landscape feature of the park (Wade Martins and Williamson 1999: 208).

In Scotland, by the end of the seventeenth century the effects of millennia of environmental degradation were obvious. Denuded of forest cover, soils were eroded and nutrients from them had been washed out leaving them low in nitrogen and very acid. Smout (1999) says that the eighteenth-century Scottish Improvers should have concentrated on 'legumes and lime' to address these problems, which in many areas is what happened. New rotations, including clover, were indeed widely practiced in the lowlands in the second half of the eighteenth century. Liming was also popular through this period, and became almost universal across the lowlands in the eighteenth century. At Charlestown in Fife, the Earl of Elgin established a major lime-burning enterprise in the late 1770s, distributing over £10,000 worth of lime per annum (Smout 1999: 215). However, in much of Scotland, including nearly all the Highlands and many parts of the lowlands, more profitable use could be made by turning land over to pastoral use than by trying to improve its fertility for crops. The farmstead at Over Newton at Crookedstane, Elvanfoot in Upper Clydesdale shows a pattern of change typical for the period (Dunwell et al 1996). In the middle of the eighteenth century the farmstead sat in the middle of an arable area; by the mid nineteenth the settlement had been abandoned and the surrounding land enclosed for stock rearing. The enclosure overlies earlier cultivation rigs. Since the enclosure was then itself truncated by the Caledonian railway in 1846/7, it was probably made sometime around the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Similar patterns exist elsewhere in Britain: in the English midlands for example, the depth of surviving ridge and furrow in many fields suggests that the arable land enclosed by parliamentary act has not been extensively ploughed for crops since then, being almost entirely given over to pastoral use.

Consolidation of Land Tenure

One of the significant ongoing processes of the eighteenth century, although one which had its origins considerably earlier, is the increase in farm size. This happened through the amalgamation of small farms and their purchase by fewer,

wealthier landowners. Land tenure was thus consolidated in the hands of a prosperous few, and smaller landowners (the 'yeoman farmers') were bought out. During the eighteenth century agricultural land in England was increasingly organised into 'great estates', owned by aristocratic or gentry landlords, managed by tenant farmers and worked by poor landless labourers (Allen 2004: 100). The pattern was similar in Wales and Scotland. Did this increase in farm size change the appearance of the landscape, or shape the physical organisation of agricultural production in any archaeologically visible way? Most obviously, the farm house, yard and central buildings became larger and more imposing features as they came to serve larger farms. Many new farmsteads were built from scratch at times of enclosure, a development which contrasted with older farms which were generally the products of accretion and adaptation over long periods. The houses and barns of smaller farms that had been absorbed by large neighbours sometimes continued in use as housing for higher status farm workers or remote food stores, but many older buildings fell into disrepair and were abandoned.

These new, larger farms were also becoming more specialised in the production of a smaller number of commodities. A greater proportion of agricultural production was destined for market exchange, and accordingly less for the subsistence of the farmers. By the time of Defoe's *Tour around Britain* published in the 1720s, the country's agriculture was already regionally specialised (John 1968). This period saw the rapid acceleration of the process of changing from numerous local economies, with the majority of commodities produced either at home or locally for limited market exchange, to integrated global markets, where agricultural production was highly specialised and no longer aimed at significant subsistence production (Butlin 1992). Instead single commodities would be traded nationally or internationally for cash which would then be used to purchase imported goods. The development of global capitalism is one of the key processes relating not only to the agricultural revolution but to all the processes examined in this book. This trend reached its fullest expression in the colonial plantations of the Caribbean, the southern United States and South-East Asia: vast areas devoted to the production of one or two commodities, such as rice, sugar, tea, coffee or tobacco, for a global market. Many British landowners held estates in colonial territories, particularly the Caribbean, as well as their British home estates and participated in the production of many different commodities for various worldwide markets. Sir George Cornewall owned both an estate in Herefordshire and a sugar plantation in Grenada (Seymour, Daniels and Watkins 1998). The cultural values he brought to the management of both enterprises relate to his position as an early nineteenth century 'multinational' and to the pervasive obligation to improve:

> In later Georgian Britain, discourses of landed estates increasingly integrated landscape aesthetics with estate management, mixing

> material and cultural concerns. Discourses of estate management encouraged owners to undertake estate 'improvements' which combined aesthetic, financial and patriotic imperatives. The process of polite colonization proceeded not only be the acquisition of land overseas, but also in Britain through such practices as land enclosure and the increased surveillance of land and labour. (Seymour, Daniels and Watkins (1998: 315)

As a more capitalistic attitude towards farming took hold of British landowners, farms themselves became increasingly commoditised and alienable. Where lands might have traditionally been farmed by one family for many generations, the improved consolidated holdings were often (but not always) rented out to strangers or entrepreneurs who offered to pay higher rents or demonstrated a willingness to further landowners' own programmes of progressive Improvement. In west Wales, this change was particularly pronounced: traditional rental periods of three generations were replaced with annual rentals and considerable hikes in rent payments. Local farmers took on rents above the value of the generally poor land and higher than those elsewhere in Britain in order to retain land they considered to be their 'family' farms (Colyer 1981). Rental agreements, which had often been informal or based only on a spoken contract or traditional expectations, were increasingly produced in written form (which in parts of Scotland, and especially Wales, placed farmers with little or no knowledge of English at a disadvantage). The use of documents and paper agreements gave the landowner both the opportunity to insist on improvements or to set out a programme for the use and management of the land, and the sanction of evicting the tenant if the land was not farmed to his liking. Texts, plans and maps were attributed great importance in the allocation of farm land and the organisation of agricultural practice during this period. Indeed, texts, maps and documents were accorded great significance as material objects and were often elaborately produced, illustrated and bound, as Sackett has shown with regard to Acts of Enclosure in the Chilterns (Sackett 2004).

Field Drainage

As an inexperienced archaeology student I had a summer job on a project recording the archaeology of a beautiful valley in the south-west of England before it was flooded to create a new reservoir. We carefully planned and recorded the remains of walls, ditches and buildings. Once the topsoil was off, I remember being particularly struck by a grid of ditches evident across the whole area and dutifully began to add these to the plans I was drawing until the site supervisor noticed what I was doing and told me to leave off what were 'only nineteenth-century field drains'. Exclusion of nineteenth-century archaeological

features from archaeological recording was standard practice in the 1980s, and still is in some places, but in retrospect I think in choosing to omit those field drains we probably ignored one of the most interesting archaeological features of the valley. In the nineteenth century, across the fields of Britain thousands of miles of drains were dug, and thousands of miles of pipes and tiles produced. Millions of hours of labour went down these drains, and they are symptomatic of the drive for Improvement that transformed the British countryside over the course of the century. The project of deep drainage (laying field drains to improve soil consistency and fertility, as opposed to the drainage of fens and bogs which had not previously been cultivable at all) began in a small way in Stuart times, but reached its height in the mid nineteenth century (Harvey 1980: 71).

Field drainage tends to be presented fairly far down the list of significant changes in many conventional accounts of the agricultural revolution, but it is likely that it was underdrainage, more than four-course rotations, or turnips, or horse husbandry, or any other innovation (many of which were only really effective on light soils anyway) that enabled the huge increase in arable production in the Midlands and north of England (Williamson 2002) and in much of Scotland and Wales, although in some areas the profits made as a result of extensive drainage projects do not appear to have been worth the cost of their installation, at least in economic terms (Phillips 1975).

Until the early modern period, field drainage had generally depended on open ditches or on furrows between cultivation ridges to carry off excess water, even though that meant that a considerable proportion of the potentially available land was waterlogged for much of the year. Underdrainage thus not only improved the quality of the ground; it also freed up more of the land to be brought under the plough or made accessible to animals, either for grazing in pasture or for the production of fodder. Drainage was thus an important factor in making possible intensive grassland husbandry.

The first wide-scale attempts at under-drainage made use of trenches or pits filled with bracken, gorse or small branches of alder or ash (Beckett 1990: 20–1). In East Anglia, they were commonly filled with straw (Addy 1972: 21). In some areas, drains were lined with stones, which were hard work to lay, but had the advantage that they did not often need to be replaced, and by the first half of the nineteenth century, stone field drains had become locally common. At the same time, tile and pipe drains began to be more frequently laid. Early drainage tiles were hand made and thus expensive to produce. From the late eighteenth century they generally consisted of a ridged tile, horseshoe-shaped in section, often laid on a flat tile to make a kind of culvert that could be buried (Harvey 1976) (Fig. 2.7). A cylindrical clay pipe was produced by John Reade in the 1830s or 1840s, but after Thomas Scraggs's invention of a machine for mass-producing 'land-tiles' in 1845, for which he won the Royal Agricultural Society of England prize

2.7. Nineteenth-century drainage tiles from archaeological sites in Leicestershire. The horseshoe-shaped tile and detached footing on the left is earlier than the extruded pipe tile on the right, but British archaeology at present lacks a full chronology and typology of drainage tiles.

(Harvey 1980: 72), drainage by industrially produced cylindrical tile pipes became common. By 1880, two to three million acres, one twelfth of British agricultural land, had been deep drained with new pipes (Harvey 1976: 22). Field drains were often laid in a grid or herringbone pattern and the lines of the drainage ditches are sometimes still visible. The technique of laying drains with a mole – a device for tunnelling through the ground from one pit to another – was developed in the eighteenth century, but did not come into widespread use until the later nineteenth (Taylor 2000: 150). Williamson (1999) argues that a considerable amount of British agricultural land had been drained by stone drains before 1840, but Chambers and Mingay (1966) and, to a lesser extent Phillips (1999), contend that significant underdraining did not really take place in Britain until after the 1840s. The nature and progress of field drainage in Britain has not yet, sadly, been taken sufficiently seriously by archaeologists. A thorough archaeological study involving the mapping and dating of excavated field drains would be crucial in resolving the history of underdrainage in Britain. Drainage pipes and tiles are frequently encountered in rural archaeological projects, but a proper typology still awaits us. We know that tiles and pipes marked 'DRAIN' date from the period 1826–1850 when tiles used for field drainage were exempt from the tile tax that had been in force since 1784 (Harvey 1976: 23); better dating of other tiles would allow more careful study of the fascinating history of underdrainage.

Early drainage tiles and pipes (also called 'tiles') were generally produced close to their eventual places of deposition because of the costs of transport. Often large estates sponsored their own drainage works, such as the tile works established in 1826 by the Duke of Portland in Cessnock, Ayrshire, to supply his lands (Douglas and Oglethorpe 1993: 16); until the middle of the nineteenth century most tile works in Scotland were associated with particular estates (1993: 16). In England too this was the early pattern. The tile works at Johnby Wythes in Greystoke, Cumberland had close links with the Greystoke estate, which in fact probably kept the works open throughout the century when many other small works failed in the second half of the nineteenth century (Davis 2002). With the expansion of railways and other cheap bulk transport, larger tile works with good transport links could afford to supply remote locations at relatively low expense, and isolated, single-kiln works like the Johnby Wythes site almost disappeared.

Land Improvers of the nineteenth century attached more importance to drainage than simple economics would appear to warrant. Drainage of the Earl of Scarborough's estates in Yorkshire in the mid to late nineteenth century, for example, did not result in any increases in rental income, nor was there any ensuing change in land use (Phillips 1972: 206). Drained land was still worth less, in purely monetary terms, than land that had never needed draining (Phillips 1972, 1975). A survey of reports to enclosure commissioners relating to a number of Midlands estates in the mid nineteenth century suggest that high economic expectations of under-drainage were not met in extra rental income (Phillips 1975). Moreover, although the marl soils were extensively drained, drainage was also put in place over large areas of the sandstone and limestone based soils that would not appear to be prone to waterlogging. Geology cannot entirely explain the pattern of drainage; tenurial arrangements, land uses and land values also had a role (Phillips 1972: 202) and so, I would suggest, did the ideological meaning of drainage as an indication of Improvement. Like floating meadows in the north and east of the country, large scale underdrainage was earliest and most widespread on large estates and in the wealthiest places (Phillips 1999: 70), so it seems that the ideological meanings of drainage were particularly prestigious among the improving owners of big estates.

Cultivation and Machinery

As far back as 1966, Chambers and Mingay noted that the Agricultural Revolution (which they believed in and placed in the period 1750–1880) was not the result of technological innovation. There was no 'wave of gadgets' (Chambers and Mingay 1966: 3) constituting the prime cause of rural change. Winter (1999) concurs that the major impact of steam technology in agriculture did not occur until the twentieth century. Nevertheless, there were significant improvements

in farm machinery over this time, and technological change formed one of the main preoccupations of improving agricultural writers. Metal ploughs gradually replaced wooden ones, and horses had replaced oxen and humans as the main source of motive power in most agricultural tasks by the mid nineteenth century, a process that had begun over a hundred years earlier. New breeds of horse were selected for weight and power in farm tasks – the Suffolk Punch, Clydesdale and Shire horses all date from this period and are recognisable archaeologically by their much bigger and heavier bones and indirectly in the horse-powered agricultural machinery of the age. A powerful horse could provide enough traction to operate harrows, ploughs, reapers and so on, without damaging crops and land as a yoke of oxen would. In addition, heavy horses were docile, trainable and relatively inexpensive to keep. Many farms acquired threshing machines, powered by horses in a gin at first, and later some used steam engines. Numerous specialised agricultural hand tools, showing much local variation, were produced in specialist workshops (Collins 1996).

Developments in farm machinery helped to make ploughing, sowing and harvesting more efficient and permitted more intensive use of the land. Tull's drill husbandry, for example, allowed seed to be sown in rows which permitted hoeing between rows and thus greater control over weed growth. Erasmus Darwin was sufficiently impressed by 'the ingenious Mr TULL' that he suggested there should be 'a statue erected to his memory, as a benefactor of mankind, like Ceres and Triptolemus of old' (Darwin 1800: 611). Nevertheless, the adoption of new technologies was not straightforward, and it is clearly not the case that the availability of technology by itself released the brake on agricultural Improvement. Contemporary Improvers probably overestimated the contribution that inventors made to agricultural change. Although Jethro Tull's *Horse Husbandry* on the use of seed drills and horses in sowing was originally published in 1731, it was forty years before others began to use the drill, and his ideas were not put into widespread use until around 1850. Wilkes (1981) puts this down to a combination of practical difficulties, an inertia among the farming community and the difficulty of separating in Tull's work the useful (drilling and the use of horses) from the eccentric or even wrong (he claimed that his system would obviate the need to rotate crops or manure the soil, for example). Take-up of technological innovation is the most significant factor in bringing about change, and this depends on the ideological climate and the desire for innovation more than availability, which tends to follow demand.

One technological development which is relevant here, although not strictly an agricultural tool, is the spread of cheap printing technology which made manuals and periodicals describing new agricultural methods more easily available to farmers around the country (Addy 1972: 24). The new (relatively) cheap print media were equally instrumental in the propagation of an ideology

of improvement and the development of a cultural climate in which the attempt to improve agricultural production was regarded as an economic, social and ethical necessity. Another important, but indirect, effect of technological change may have been in the way that the growth of science changed the *outlook* of the middle classes (Roberts 1976: 219–20). Rather than the facilitation of any task occasioned by a particular bit of innovation, the general sense that the application of scientific principles to any sphere of activity could result in improved results greatly affected the drive for change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Stock

At least as dramatic as the development of new crops was the increase in meat, milk and wool production that took place over the course of the 'Agricultural Revolution'.

Arthur Young, the prolific diarist and enthusiastic chronicler of eighteenth-century Improvement, mentions numerous attempts to breed improved stock. Both historical and archaeological evidence point to an early origin for selective stock-breeding (of course, one could take it back to the Neolithic), but there are significant increases in meat yield over the period of the traditional agricultural revolution which appear to relate to animals being bred larger and maturing younger. In recent decades historians have been keen to stress the early origins of 'improved' breeds of domestic animal and archaeological research confirms this (Thomas 2004). A recent review of animal bone evidence in assessing selective breeding in the early modern and modern periods finds that an increase in animal size is most evident between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (Davis and Beckett 1999), although the evidence on which this argument is based includes very little from after the seventeenth century. Davis and Beckett considered bone reports from fourteen sites of medieval and early post-medieval date, most of which demonstrate an increase over time in the size of cattle and sheep which is probably the result of selective breeding for meat yield, although the authors note the difficulty of estimating meat yield per beast from this evidence. In general post-medieval animals were larger, and were slaughtered younger, than medieval ones. The animal remains from Launceston castle appear to confirm this; cattle underwent a rapid increase in size between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and sheep increased more gradually from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century (Albarella and Davis 1996). At the same time, changes in the shape of cattle suggest a genetic change in the stock, perhaps related to the importation of new breeding animals (1996: 57). Animal bones from other British sites also support the idea that selective breeding was having a marked and rapid effect on domestic animals by the seventeenth century.

However, strong evidence for an early date for the start of improvements to animal stock, as provided by the archaeozoological data, do not mean that nothing much happened in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Up to now, a significant limitation of the archaeozoological evidence is the dearth of analytical study of material deposited after the mid eighteenth century. In fact, the latest research, while confirming that significant changes took place in the size and morphology of food domesticates as early as the fourteenth century, shows that sheep, for example, continued to increase in size into the nineteenth century as at Launceston (Albarella and Davis 1996), and therefore 'instead of the single "Agricultural Revolution", the onset of which has been argued by both historians and zooarchaeologists, there maybe have been multiple advancements beginning from the 14th century onwards' (Thomas 2005). Eighteenth-century horn cores recovered from a pit in Bedford included 'unimproved' and 'improved' cattle horns, in addition to a number of 'improving' cattle, intermediate in size and shape (Hutchins and Steadman 1999) which suggests that Improvement was still going on at the time. Further research in this area would clarify how 'real' and widespread this late increase in size is, and whether it was due to genetic factors (selective breeding) or to matters of husbandry. New fodder crops would have had a role in growing larger animals with a higher proportion of meat, but age of slaughter, as much as absolute size, is a crucial factor in increasing meat yields.

Improved breeds of stock had an aesthetic role as well as an economic one. Between about 1750 and the early years of the nineteenth century, paintings of improved breeds and of prize-winning livestock animals were produced in huge numbers and seems to have been widely popular. More than 2000 prints of the Durham Ox, a huge beast weighing over 171 stone, were sold in a single year (Jewell 1964), and that particular beast is celebrated to this day in pub signs up and down the country. Owners of the large estates delighted in stocking their parks with unusual and improved breeds, which had an aesthetic function as well as being a sign of ideological soundness.

There had been increasing specialisation in animal husbandry, both regionally and at household level, throughout the post-medieval period and the eighteenth to nineteenth century saw that trend continue. A lowering in the age of slaughter, evident in cattle, pigs, poultry and sheep bones in the study period, is a strong indication that more animals were being produced primarily for meat, rather than secondary products such as wool, milk, eggs etc. In the case of pigs, where there is no useful secondary product to be gained while the animal is alive, it probably reflects a shift in the style of production from the single pig or very small number of swine kept by householders, which would be fed on domestic waste and 'pannage' from common land, to specialised pig husbandry involving the market production of animals for consumption (among the poor, however, household pig-husbandry was relatively common even in cities, until well into the nineteenth century). By the Victorian period, some farms had specialised

piggeries where pigs were kept in the same sort of fattening boxes as cattle, with systems for the delivery of food and water (Brigden 1986: 68). The evidence of poultry bones, although not well studied, suggests that chickens and geese were increasingly bred to supply meat to the market rather than eggs and feathers for domestic use. This is suggested both by the larger size and the apparently younger age at slaughter of the remains of eighteenth century chickens recovered from sites such as Castle Mall, Norwich, although again these changes in breeding and husbandry seem to have begun up to 300 years before the period studied here (Albarella et al 1997).

This chapter has noted that 'technological' change cannot be explained entirely in terms of economic rationality, even in the period which valorised the rational economic man. Ideology, and specifically the moral value attributed to Improvement, was inextricable from the characteristic agricultural innovations and processes of the time. Enclosure, drainage, soil improvement and so on were all widely practiced and promoted not only because they were (sometimes believed to be) the most direct route to profit, but because they were the right, progressive, projects to be engaged with. In the following chapter we will explore further how the ideology of Improvement shaped the aesthetic and economic rural landscapes of Britain.

THREE:

THE IMPROVED RURAL LANDSCAPE

In the previous chapter we saw how a belief in Improvement affected agricultural production in Britain; this chapter considers the closely related issue of how changes to the appearance of the rural landscape were brought about through a concern with economic, aesthetic and human Improvement. We have seen already that the ethic of Improvement incorporated economic, moral, religious and philosophical aspects. There was also a strong 'improved' aesthetic in later historical Britain. Its characteristics were cleanliness, order, rational organisation, light and clarity. It demonstrated the ownership of rational knowledge and taste, a general orientation towards the future and a selective rewriting of the historical and classical past. The improved aesthetic was particularly influential in shaping the towns of the periods and forming strategies for the Improvement of the poor and deviant, as we shall discuss in Chapters Four and Five. The rural landscape was also a product of the aesthetic of Improvement, although landowners at the time would not have recognised a distinction between aesthetic, economic and moral improvement. Aesthetic and economic improvement of the landscape carried out at this time had a positive moral value. This chapter considers the new aesthetic landscape, particularly through the consideration of the Hafod estate in Wales. Finally the archaeology of the Scottish highlands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries will be discussed as a manifestation of the ethic of Improvement.

New Buildings, New Settlements

The creation of new consolidated farm land holdings across Britain was frequently the impetus for the construction of new farmhouses and associated buildings. The typical enclosure period farmhouse is a large isolated building set among fields with a number of other buildings and a yard either immediately adjacent or nearby. Rather than the piecemeal accretion of buildings which characterises most farms of the early modern period, there was often

an effort in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to attain a cohesion of style and a 'rational' arrangement of features which resulted ultimately in the 'model farm'. Susanna Wade Martins has carried out an extensive study of the history of the model farm from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century (Wade Martins 2002). The construction of model farms was at its peak between the mid eighteenth and the late nineteenth century, and Wade Martins identifies four major phases in its development. Up till 1800, the model farm was usually centred on a courtyard, one side of which comprised the farmhouse itself. Opposite the farmhouse was the barn; stables, cowsheds, the dairy and hen-house pan down the other sides. Manure was collected centrally in a pit or a stack in the centre of the yard. In the first forty years of the nineteenth century the farm became more elaborate, with more specialised buildings appearing, some of which made provision for pieces of agricultural machinery such as a mechanical thresher. The power source could be a water wheel or even a steam engine, but most commonly in this early period was the use of horses, and an extension for a circular gin was often built adjacent to the barn. The farmhouse itself had moved away from the noise and smells of the yard, which allowed room for more elaborate and specialist buildings to be constructed, often to an E-shaped plan. Attempts to distance the farmer's family from the dirt, smells and noises of the farmyard are evidence of an aspiration towards the 'improved' social and cultural values of the nineteenth-century middle classes (Fig. 3.1). At the same time other changes in the material culture of the household might emphasise this cultural repositioning. Lucas and Regan (2003) found that the acquisition of new 'polite' ceramics accompanied the 1830–40s rebuilding, in a modern style, of a Buckinghamshire farmhouse. The rebuilding of the house also entailed its reorientation; it now no longer faced in towards the yard, but out towards the road and the town, figuratively echoing the new cultural orientation of the house's occupants. At the very end of our period, the introduction of 'high farming' necessitated further elaboration of the farm-yard. The stock were fed on imported high-calorie feedcakes, which needed to be stored and processed in the yard. As livestock fattening became more intensive and was based more and more in the farm buildings rather than in open fields, covered yards became increasingly common.

Model farms, especially in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, were designed to be seen and admired. A large number are visible from the main road or are situated close to the estate owner's own residence. Estate owners enjoyed the aesthetic of the rationally organised and efficiently planned farmyard; but this appreciation of the farmyard was also expressed in design features of the farm itself. An eighteenth-century pastoral aesthetic informed the choice of Palladian-style architecture for many model farms of the period and explains the emphasis on the clean, cool and expansive dairy, which had already by this time assumed meanings of pastoral innocence

3.1. Croom Farm, Sledmere in the Yorkshire Wolds. This eighteenth-century farmhouse shows an attractive front to the road, while the rationally organised farmyard is tucked behind it. It is part of a group of planned farmsteads dating from the late eighteenth century.

derived from the sentimental appeal of milkmaids in pastoral literature. The model farm contrasted with its less 'designed' predecessor in being expressly organised for ease of cleaning; the farmyard had moved from being a necessary, but distasteful, element of the rural landscape, to being the emblem of wholesome and progressive activity. Its prettification was part of the Improvement movement.

However, most farms belonging to this period were not model farms. The model farm was expensive to construct and was designed to enhance the estate aesthetically as much as economically (although the two cannot easily be separated, and rarely were by contemporaries). They were thus common mostly on the farms of the great estate owners, particularly on the home farms of major estates, adjacent to, or even incorporated into, the grounds of the main residence. While the model farms are undoubtedly important in exemplifying the most modern trends and scientific thinking in agriculture, and indeed their architecture exemplifies principles circulating in the published literature of the time, the majority of farms were not expensive show-pieces, but incorporated elements of the new thinking within older layouts. Model farms were most frequently built in parts of the country that were held by very large landowners; where there were more small or medium-sized farms and private freeholders, most farmers, especially those of more moderate means, simply adapted and augmented their

existing buildings, rather than undertaking a wholesale rebuilding. For example, when Sir Michael le Fleming, an absentee landlord, rebuilt farmhouses for two of his tenants in the Lake District, he made attractive houses, but did not go to the expense of creating farms for show, instructing his agent to re-use building materials and source slate and mortar with care to minimise his costs (Tyson 1981). Nevertheless, smaller farms exhibit considerable regional variety, depending on the nature of farming practiced, what pre-existing buildings there were, and regional vernacular traditions (Barnwell and Giles 1997: 146). Yet, as Barnwell and Giles note, it is important to consider those farmsteads of little architectural merit, as well as the model farms, 'since it is only by means of understanding the way in which those "ordinary" farmsteads relate to their more scientifically planned counterparts that it is possible to assess the actual impact of new ideas ... their success [and] the speed with which they were adopted' (Barnwell and Giles 1997: 146).

Most farmsteads were less compact in plan than the model farm, and the buildings stood in less efficient relation to one another: smelly animal accommodation might be sited next to the farm house, or feed might need to be carted rather than simply tossed from its store to the animal byres. Local circumstances also affected the imposition of a 'standard' plan. Provision for agricultural machinery, for example, was more frequently made in the north where labour was more expensive; in the south, where human labour was cheap, machines were far slower to be integrated into the farm. In areas such as Cheshire and Cornwall, where dairy farming predominated, the farm buildings did not make provision for the sort of integrated arable and animal farm that most model farms were designed for (Barnwell and Giles 1997: 156), so the barn might take the form of a single storey above cattle stalls rather than a major storage and threshing building.

Apart from these new farmsteads, the rural settlement pattern in England saw relatively little change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Occasionally villages would be re-sited by landowners to make way for some estate improvement scheme (usually enhancement or redesign of the park), but on nothing like the scale of medieval movement or abandonment. Nevertheless, some areas did see new abandonments at this time as a result of local economic and political circumstances. Wrathmell has studied a number of villages in Northumberland and elsewhere that were abandoned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a result of enclosure (Wrathmell 1980). The townships of Clarewood and East Matfen were acquired by a Newcastle attorney called John Douglas, a keen early Improver, in the late seventeenth century. The village lands had taken the form of a small number of open fields and a common around a nucleated village site. The reorganisation carried out by Douglas and his successors had, by the mid eighteenth century, replaced the central village with a number of dispersed farmsteads, each situated within its own farm of small enclosed fields. The former village sites are now visible

only as indistinct earthworks (Wrathmell 1980: 116). This kind of total depopulation of village sites at a comparatively late date is not as uncommon as was once thought, although the reasons for depopulation are different from medieval village desertions which were often the result of falling populations. The majority of eighteenth century abandonments took place either as a result of emparkment, when a new village site was generally established, or as what Wrathmell (1980: 124) calls a 'by-product' of changes in the management of agricultural land.

In Scotland the story was very different, and this period saw very considerable changes in its settlement geography. Some 300 new planned towns and villages were founded in Scotland from the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Whyte 2002: 78). Apart from these, the old loose agglomerations of cottages that had formed traditional clachans and fermtouns were abandoned and the inhabitants moved to the cities, or to new nucleated villages, or were resettled in crofting settlements designed by the land owners (we shall discuss these in more detail later).

British patterns of urban landholding – with small plots in private individual ownership – made re-organisation difficult, unless a fire or similar catastrophe opened the possibility to rebuild large areas at once. However, in the case of new settlements this was not a problem. In the second half of the nineteenth century attempts to engineer politically unthreatening communities were made by philanthropic, but essentially paternalistic, capitalists. Titus Salt's workers' town at Saltaire (established 1853–76) was such a 'community', as was the Cadburys' Bourneville (established 1895) and the Lever brothers' Port Sunlight (established 1888). Nineteenth-century movements in town planning also evidence a quasi-utopian quest for the reconstitution of small-scale society, such as the garden city movement which sought the salvation of society through architecture and planning. Nevertheless, even before this period workers' communities were being designed and established by reforming, philanthropic and improving entrepreneurs who wanted to effect changes in the lives of the working people of Britain as well as in the production of industrial goods.

New Lanark

Most famous among the early industrial communities was probably David Dale and Robert Owen's mill town at New Lanark in Lanarkshire. Owen himself was of relatively humble origins, but through his energy, management skills and a good marriage rose to become manager and part-owner of the mills and village of New Lanark. David Dale, the original founder of the New Lanark mills, was an employer of progressive and improving tendencies. His mill, using Arkwright's technology to harness the power of the Clyde, was among the most advanced and efficient of its day, and he was already known as a benevolent employer,

providing dormitory accommodation for the orphans who worked in the mill. Most of the workers, many of them displaced highlanders, were housed in tenements in relatively attractive terraces on the slope above the mills. The tenement houses themselves are sturdy, but not exceptional for their region and period, and would be considered appallingly overcrowded by modern standards. Although the eighteenth-century tenements now provide pleasant flats, at the time of their construction they were intended to hold several families, so that each family, of about 6 people, lived in a single room. Caithness Row now houses 30 people in 16 flats; once it held 300 mill workers (New Lanark Conservation Trust 1988: 17). As Lowe (1977) points out, poor living conditions were not necessarily inherent features of the architecture; some workers' housing is well-constructed and attractive with spacious rooms. To understand what conditions were like for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century workers and their families we need to know how the buildings were populated; overcrowding and poor sanitation are often more significant than any inherent problems with the structure itself.

Thus it was not for the workers' accommodation that New Lanark attracted attention during its heyday. When Owen took over the running of New Lanark he saw the opportunity not just to increase production and profits through building more mills, but also to make a major impact on the lives and experiences of his employees. His own accounts of the New Lanark experiment attribute greater and greater significance to the place as he aged and became more distant from it, but it seems likely that his improvements to the town were intended to demonstrate that it was possible to bring about a new kind of society through altering people's environments. Owen's radical beliefs place him at an interesting juncture between the individualism of the Enlightenment and the emergence of radical socialism. He believed that a person's character was the result of the intersection of their natural disposition and environmental factors. To him, the individual was supremely malleable and thus the project of 'character formation' could be undertaken through education and environmental change. What distinguished him from his contemporaries, however, was his concern for the working classes and his very modern idea of 'society' which took the possibility of social and cultural change to a level of collective endeavour.

Owen set up a school for the children and an institute for the adults, which he explicitly called the 'Institute for the Formation of Character'. New Lanark was, however, whatever Owen's boasts and posterity's claims, a philanthropic community rather than a workers' utopia. It operated entirely within the system of global capitalism. No matter what he did for his Scottish labourers, he continued to process cotton grown on American plantations under institutional slavery, even while he dedicated one of his books to William Wilberforce (Harrison 1969: 22). Similarly, the Owenite community at Queenwood in

Hampshire, despite utopian hopes of organising a collective agricultural community, ended up buying in local labour to help farm the land they had acquired, and then complaining at the cost of local wages and the laziness of the workers (Harrison 1969: 184), even as they depleted their own capital keeping themselves and their children in luxurious surroundings.

Owen's ultimate dream was to found a truly new kind of settlement as part of a new world order. His utopianism, perhaps the apogee of the Improvement ethic, expressed itself through his plan for New Harmony, a designed community influenced by the ideas of Charles Fourier, but ultimately his own vision, which was to be established in America. New Harmony was established in the 1820s, and failed within two years. Other 'Owenite' communities were established in Britain, but none lasted very long. Owen's utopianism was typical of the kind of 'Improvement' ethic of his day in that he hoped that the new world order could be brought about voluntaristically and non-violently simply by example and education. Marx and Engels later scoffed at the idea that the ideal society could simply be commenced upon without allowing the existing system to arrive at the point of collapse, or cataclysmically overturning the capitalist order. But Owen's utopianism was not entirely naïve; as we have seen, much 'Improvement' was accomplished in Britain by the institution of local and private voluntary initiatives, before the intervention of strong state and local government policy in the second part of the nineteenth century.

The improved community of New Lanark was remarkable among factory towns of the time, but was not exceptional among the 126 villages founded or substantially rebuilt in Scotland between 1730 and 1830 (Smout 1970: 8, 96). New Lanark is well-known because it was much discussed in political and philosophical circles at the time; Owen's own energetic promotion of the New Lanark experiment was significant in keeping 'Mr Owen's plan' for a new society prominent in the public eye during the height of its success and ever since. The extent to which New Lanark represents a radically new kind of society, however, is disputed. Owen was, as discussed above, a successful capitalist and New Lanark was fully embedded in global capitalist network. In some ways, with its progressive school and institution, its co-operative village store and communal identity, it was a 'utopia', but it was also very much a product of its time. In its valorisation of order, cleanliness, rational organisation, its willingness to employ new technologies and innovate further in the cause of greater productivity, its underlying ideology that men and women could be shaped by their environment and its belief in education as the means of accomplishing this, in all these ways New Lanark was an expression of the widespread contemporary spirit of Improvement. Owen's own contribution to the development of modern political philosophy is not belittled by seeing New Lanark as part of a broader trend towards the improvement of towns and cities.

Beauty and Utility

Agricultural change in the countryside was often instigated, as we have seen, by major landowners. These landowners did not limit their intervention in the landscape to the promotion of agricultural reform on their farms, but also carried out 'improvements' to their residential estates and parks. Indeed, the phrase 'making improvements' usually embraced both farms and parkland. The distinction between farming improvements related to the management of crops and animals and landscape improvements related to aesthetics is not one that eighteenth-century landowners would recognise. For them, 'improvements' were both aesthetic and practical, and the ideal for many was the union of 'beauty and utility' in Humphry Repton's famous phrase. The pleasure park would also provide opportunities for agricultural improvements. Indeed there was considerable prestige to be gained from the demonstration in one's park of experimental improvements such as 'floated' meadows (as we have seen), the cultivation of new varieties of tree (which could be managed for timber), specialised animal breeds or model farms. Similarly the improved agricultural landscape was held to be of greater aesthetic value than the unimproved waste. A view of orderly fields profuse with crops, grazing cattle enclosed in a meadow, straight, well-surfaced roads, irrigated terraces and efficiently designed and arranged farm buildings delighted the eye of many contemporary commentators. Although the romantic power of untamed nature in the case of great mountains was undeniably attractive to many early nineteenth century men and women of taste, the improved rural landscape stood in comparison not to the sublime Alps, but to the 'unimproved' British countryside: scrubby commons and wastes, blighted, as contemporaries saw it, with irregular houses of the poor or illegal squatter huts, pigs, geese and stubby 'unnatural-looking' pollards.

The ideal improved estate united increased productivity, through the use of new practices discussed in this chapter, and an improved workforce, perhaps living in specially designed homes and villages and provided with a school, church and other facilities, with a house, home farm and park showing all the signs of improved taste and useful activity. 'Improved' private parks were thus charged with demonstrating the progressive and experimental approach of the improving landowner, with being in some ways economically useful, with demonstrating improved aesthetic sensibilities and finally with the provision of a resource for leisure and the formation and consolidation of social relationships. One of the key activities which appeared to the better-off Improvers as a union of pleasure and usefulness was hunting, whether that be hunting foxes, hares or otters with hounds or shooting birds. These were also key leisure activities for nineteenth-century gentlemen and could be ideologically justified with the claim that they were also getting rid of vermin or producing food for the table. Moreover, the adaptations that were made to the great estates were held to be

laudable aesthetic improvements in their own right. The legacy of fox hunting is evident in the coverts of the Midlands; pheasant shooting in the copse and perimeter belt plantings of the great estates; grouse shooting in the grouse blinds of upland landscapes; and waterfowl in the duck decoys on lakes and ponds everywhere. Fox hunting in particular became an extremely popular country sport in this period and leaves a distinctive archaeology well beyond the aesthetically landscaped estate park (Finch 2005). Coverts were planted and artificial earths were constructed to encourage the quarry to breed. The needs of the horses and hounds were met by the construction of imposing new stables and kennels in an 'improved' style. Animals themselves were selectively bred and so we see a development of new breeds in sporting animals that parallels the selective breeding of stock. In previously open landscapes such as the English midlands, new landscapes of enclosure presented new challenges to the rider: dense hawthorn hedges, banks, ditches and so on made the hunt more varied and skilful. Country towns in hunting areas, like Melton Mowbray, saw the construction of impressive hunting lodges for the seasonal occupation of the well-to-do.

The best kinds of Improvement married an awareness of beauty ('taste') with economic utility and maximised the potential of the land. The estate of Thomas Johnes at Hafod near Aberystwyth in west Wales was much admired in its heyday in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Johnes was a keen Improver and was particularly admired as an arboriculturalist. Hafod would not at first appear to be promising material for the would-be Improver. The soils are thin and rocky, gradients steep and rainfall high. But by concentrating on forestry rather than cereal cultivation, he was able to exploit his estate both economically and in other ways. He planted many new and exotic varieties of trees on the slopes of the mountains around the estate residence, but at the same time made aesthetic improvements by planting gardens, constructing bridges and features and laying out walks and drives.

Hafod

> Hafod, usually pronounced Havod, is a place in itself so pre-eminently beautiful, that it highly merits a particular description. It stands surrounded with so many noble scenes, diversified with elegance as well as with grandeur; the country on the approach to it is so very wild and uncommon, and the place itself is now so embellished by art, that it will be difficult, I believe, to point out a spot that can be put in competition with it, considered either as the object of the Painter's Eye, the Poet's Mind, or as a desirable residence . . .
>
> Neither are the luxuries of life absent; for on the margin of the Ystwyth, where it flows broadest through this delicious vale, we see hot houses, and a conservatory; beneath the rocks a bath; amid the

> recesses of the woods a flower-garden; and within the building, whose decorations, though rich, are pure and simple, we find a mass of rare and valuable literature, whose pages here seem doubly precious, where meditation finds scope to range unmolested. (Cumberland 1799)

Howell (1993: 64) argues that eighteenth-century Cardiganshire had been 'barely touched' by the processes that had affected the rest of Britain, but in fact the changes to rural life and land at the time were not dissimilar to those in many other poor parts of the United Kingdom. Admittedly, by the end of the eighteenth century nearly half the land in the county was still unenclosed, but that mostly comprised the upland grazing of low fertility; nearly all the lower-lying agricultural land was enclosed by 1800. Contemporaries deplored the slowness of the tenantry in adopting improved methods of husbandry, but then this was a familiar trope in the agricultural literature of many regions at the time. The rural problems of Cardiganshire were similar to those elsewhere, particularly in other parts of Wales and Scotland. Since the middle of the eighteenth century the rural population had expanded rapidly and this, combined with changes in the organisation of land and agricultural labour created a squatter population who occupied small dwellings and made small enclosures on unenclosed common. Some of the landowners perceived the squatters to be a serious problem; nor were the commoners and tenant farmers necessarily more tolerant. Even 'the highly moral and discriminating Rebecca' was unsympathetic to them, says Howell (1993: 70), alluding to the popular riots led by a pseudonymous transvestite 'Rebecca'.

Into this place of unrest and change at a key moment in the negotiation between the traditional and the 'rational' in agricultural practice, between Welsh custom and English law, arrived Colonel Thomas Johnes (1748–1816), a true Improver. His interests, appropriately for a man of his time, ranged widely and included printing, trees, architecture and agriculture (Kerkham and Briggs 1990: 191). In 1780, he acquired the estate of Hafod, twelve miles east of Aberystwyth in Cardiganshire (Fig. 3.2), and his work there attracted national attention. Around the house at Hafod he planned an elaborate series of gardens, gravel walks, carriage drives and numerous other features. Hafod had a 'subterranean cavern', an obelisk and numerous other garden ornaments. There were two enclosed flower gardens: 'Mrs Johnes's garden' and 'Mariamne's garden', both dating from the late eighteenth century. These two gardens formed part of the landscape of leisure that attracted numerous visitors to Hafod in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, they had a philosophical message as well as a function of pleasure. Flowers expressed the virtues of nature and the rural life; flower gardens suggested the moral cultivation of simplicity, rather than a simple abandonment to the forces of nature. Nature was controlled

3.2. The proto-Romantic forested landscape of Hafod, Ceredigion.

and ordered in the garden. The gardens were walled to effect a symbolic separation from the woods outside. The separation was also gendered, for the flower gardens were feminine, dedicated to the female members of Johnes's household. Virtue, simplicity, artlessness and sequestration not only from the moral contagion of the city but also from the thrusting vitality of wild nature, were appropriately feminine charms.

Walking through the landscape of Hafod was an experience of moral improvement as much as an exercise of pleasure. Just as the soft attractions of the flower gardens signalled and reinforced the feminine delicacies of Mrs Johnes and Mariamne, so the rest of the garden inspired and educated the morals and intellects of its visitors. Nature at the end of the eighteenth century was both a force for good and a potential threat. The appreciation of nature was enabled by technologies of landscape and of seeing that encultured it, and this project of enculturation and thus moral appropriation was key to the development of Hafod. Johnes was noted most of all for his experiments in arboriculture. Rather than trying to plough up the high mountain slopes to plant crops or graze cattle, he planted trees; between 1795 and 1801, Johnes reputedly planted more than 2 million of them on his estate (Andrews 1989: 145), including native broadleaf trees like beech, oak and birch, exotic garden and specimen trees like rhododendrons and cedars, and most of all timber-yielding conifers. Excavation of the walled kitchen garden revealed a number of zinc plates with the names of pear varieties on them. On the rest of the estate he grew trees that could be managed

for timber but would also provide an appropriate aesthetic setting for his house and gardens. In the fields merino sheep grazed (Andrews 1989: 145) – both enhancing the picturesque qualities of the landscape and demonstrating an interest in stock improvement.

The taste for picturesque and Romantic landscapes was widespread in Britain at the time and is evident in the artistic and literary attention given to mountainous and wooded landscapes. As far as landscape design was concerned, however, the ability of an estate owner in, say, Norfolk to have an alpine style park was limited by local topography and particular land-use histories. Hafod, however, was situated on the steep wooded slopes of the mountains of mid Wales. The river Ystwyth ran a few hundred metres below the house, its course winding through rocks and forming natural waterfalls. Johnes saw the aesthetic potential of the estate and worked with the landscape to create walks which linked places from which the views were especially spectacular and built an 'alpine' bridge over the river.

The garden at Hafod, however, was more than an aesthetic or a moral landscape. Near the house were a kitchen garden, conservatories and an ice house. He also sited tree nurseries close to the main house and grew both fruit trees and a wide range of exotics for timber. Improvement, for Johnes, meant the marriage of beauty, practicality and economic success.

'Improving' the Rural Landscape: The Highland Clearances

An understandable, but in some ways unfortunate, disciplinary division has grown up in the discussion of rural history in Britain by which the histories of England, Wales and Scotland are rarely considered together (with some worthy exceptions). Thus, many of the texts on enclosure, for example, will discuss at length the apportionment of the open fields in the English midlands and ignore the similarly high levels of enclosure in the Scottish lowlands at the time. In fact, the effects of agricultural and rural Improvement are especially evident in Scotland because of the relatively slow rate of change in much of the country in the earlier post-medieval period. The Scottish landscape underwent a particularly dramatic change from about 1770 to 1850. In the south of Scotland, the changes resembled some of those seen in northern England: the change from an infield/outfield system to one of closed fields worked by individuals. As in northern England, the fact that much of lowland Scotland was in the hands of a few huge land-owners meant that enclosure and improvement was often planned and executed on a major scale. Scottish law meant that the lairds had almost total freedom of action with respect to their lands and did not need a parliamentary act to enclose or reorganise their fields, as in England and Wales. The principal

cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow grew precipitously over the nineteenth century and agricultural production in the surrounding rural areas intensified to serve these cities. However, it is perhaps the developments in the north and west of the country that have left the most enduring mark on popular consciousness and some of the most evocative remains in the landscape. If you drive through the upland regions of the north and west of Scotland the modern landscape is one of largely open high moor, mountainous in the west, with large tracts of twentieth-century forestry, conifers planted in straight rows. Away from the coast there is little settlement, and even the coastal towns are smaller than they once were, evidenced by the ruinous crofts on their edges. But here and there among the bracken, heather and rushes of the interior are the remains of walls and long houses, loosely grouped into little settlements. These ruins are the remains of rural highland *clachans* or *bailtean* (villages or hamlets) abandoned either voluntarily or by forced evictions between the late eighteenth and the mid nineteenth century in a process known as the 'Highland Clearances'.

The story of the Highland Clearances has served as a key myth in nationalist and expatriate narratives of Scottish identity and in structuring class and ethnic relations for the Scots over the past two centuries. The popular and most widespread version of the clearances story goes like this: the Highland landowners – distanced from traditional ways, made decadent by aristocratic society in Edinburgh or London, and consequently crippled by debt – found themselves in need of money to support their sybaritic lifestyles and their parasitic relatives. Ignoring the ancient traditional duties and obligations that the laird rightly owed his clansmen, the poor tenantry were evicted in order to create vast, lucrative sheep walks. This was brutally accomplished by the estate factors, with the connivance of the 'tacksmen' – middlemen who held land from the landowner and rented it on to poor subtenants. For poor families, the consequences depended on the generosity of their lairds. The luckier ones were settled in new coastal towns and allocated inadequate crofts overlooking the sea. Many sought a new life abroad – in Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand or British Africa. Others, deprived of livelihood and lacking the means to emigrate, were forced into indigence. Many people starved. Thus the highlands were transformed from ancient, settled farming lands to empty, bleak wastes because of the lapse of traditional clan relations and greedy, exploitative lairds.

However, the traditional narrative, immortalised in popular histories, is not an uncontested account of either the motives, the nature or the consequences of the clearances. Since the time of the clearances themselves, the majority of which took place between about 1790 and 1840, narratives and evaluations of a strongly moral character have been produced by historians, politicians, political economists and others. The significance of clearance narratives in the construction of both national and diasporic Scottish identities can hardly be overstated. Until the mid twentieth century almost all commentators were either indignant defenders

of the tenantry or apologists for the landowners. The latter emphasised the economic and demographic pressures on the Highland region at the end of the eighteenth century and recounted the philanthropic efforts of many lairds to ameliorate the conditions of their tenants during times of overpopulation and famine. The former, especially in the twentieth century, concerned themselves with cataloguing the many instances of brutality and callous indifference shown by the landowners as they dispossessed people of their traditional rights and lifestyles, and destroyed a happy and successful social order and a rich and fecund culture. Just as those on the side of the landowners rarely detail the complaints of the tenants, their antagonists often fail to address what Richards (1982) calls the 'counterfactuals' – the 'what-if...?' questions: in what form could Highland society have survived the nineteenth century given the grinding poverty and enormous demographic pressure of Highland townships by 1800? Across the whole of Britain, as we have seen, small farms were becoming increasingly uneconomic; on areas of poor land they had become virtually extinct. In Norfolk for example, while numerous small farms survived on good soils, in areas of poor soil the small farmer was virtually extinct by the nineteenth century (Williamson 2002: 16).

However, it was not really until the second half of the twentieth century that any real attempt was made to address the question of the clearances in a wider historical and economic context, notably by Eric Richards (1982, 1985). It is worth noting, however, that the most widely read book on the subject is still John Prebbles's *The Highland Clearances*. Published in 1963 and never out of print since that time, it is an anecdotal, personality-driven account replete with pathetic evocations of the trials of the peasants and crude representations of the landowners as pantomime villains. Politically, this is a tricky subject to write about; any discussion of the motivation of the clearing landlords risks sounding like an apology for the indisputable violence of many evictions. Yet failure to consider the ethical climate prevailing among the land-owning classes of the early nineteenth century leaves only anachronism: a cartoon history of dastardly villains, driven by wickedness and greed, and a helplessly passive peasantry, powerless to prevent the annihilation of their bucolic idyll.

On the following all writers agree: during the first half of the nineteenth century many people were forced, by economic hardship or eviction, to leave the lands they had traditionally farmed in the Scottish Highlands. Many of them emigrated; others settled in coastal towns or occupied small coastal crofts. Sometimes this 'clearance' was accomplished with great brutality. The clearing landlords hoped to achieve, among other things, increased revenues by consolidating small, labour-intensive farms traditionally farmed by a community of a few families, into vast open areas which were largely turned over to the industrial-scale production of sheep for the export market; or, later, to deer for sport and rental income. The fate of the evicted Highlanders varied according to the

benevolence of the laird, the wealth and social position of the tenant, and the economic climate at the time. For the unluckiest, no alternative provision was made, inadequate notice was given and their only option, unable to afford a passage abroad, was to join the hordes of dispossessed men, women and children heading for the big towns of the south. In the cities, whole families were frequently reduced to begging, or throwing themselves on the charity of the state. The more fortunate might be able to afford passage to Canada or Australia for themselves and their families. Emigration should not be viewed as an extreme response but was often a more attractive option than remaining to see dwindling crop yields, inflated rents, famine and the inexorable spread of the cheviot sheep among the broken remnants of one's displaced and demoralised clansmen. It is worth noting, however, that both population levels and emigration rates in early nineteenth-century Scotland are similar for areas which were cleared and for those which were not, and that voluntary emigration from the Highlands was already well underway by the late eighteenth century (Richards 1982).

Eric Richards (1982) contextualises the clearances as part of a widespread (pan-European) movement of agricultural Improvement, often necessitating reform in land-holding and management, in the face of massive population rises, rural unemployment and poverty. Highland landowners of the early nineteenth century were responding to a number of factors: heavy economic demands on the revenue of their estate; rising rural unemployment and increasing levels of population; recurrent crop failure and resultant periods of famine; all of these things increased pressure on land. Even before the clearances the pressure on land in the Highlands is evident in the spread of systems of land management designed to maximise subsistence production, including the subordination of stock to arable even in areas far more suited to livestock (Dodgshon 1993).

While much of Great Britain was benefiting from the rewards of the Industrial Revolution, in the form of greater wealth and rising standards of living at most levels of society, the north and west of Scotland continued to make only small profits from raising cattle, and much of their effort was directed towards subsistence level farming in an essentially feudal social system, more reminiscent of the thirteenth century than the nineteenth (although the characterisation of the Highlander as irredeemably conservative and unable to cope with the capitalist world is inaccurate too – Devine 1999). Obviously the landowners were keen to increase the revenue of their estates, but they were also concerned by what they saw as the 'backward' methods of agriculture and primitive living conditions of their peasantry. Numerous visitors to, and educated inhabitants of, the Highland region in the later eighteenth century commented on the inefficient farming styles, yielding so little profit that the inhabitants were forced to live in squalid, filthy conditions, which rendered the possibility of their own

'improvement' remote. Robert Southey, who toured the Highlands in 1819, commented

> I have never – not even in Galicia – seen any habitations so bad as the Highland black-houses . . . these man-sties are not inhabited, as in Ireland, by a race of ignorant and ferocious barbarians, who can never be civilised till they are regenerated . . . Here you have a quiet, thoughtful, contented, religious people, susceptible of improvement, and willing to be improved. (Southey, cited in Richards 1982: 217)

Southey's comparison between the Highlanders and the Irish betrays the English prejudice typical of his age. While Highlanders were Romantic and noble people, the Irish were considered by the English to be at an altogether earlier stage of historical development: uncivilised 'barbarians'.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the Highlands were seriously overpopulated in terms of the capacity of the land, as exploited in the traditional way, and the Highland population was subject to periodic epidemic disease. For the 'Improvers', there was no question that the conditions of the peasantry were inadequate, and that they would be happier, healthier and more spiritually and morally advanced if they could be persuaded to abandon their inefficient agricultural practices and their turf and stone houses, which they shared with their stock. Educated men of the time were convinced that economic diversification would provide some security against periodic famine when the crops failed, even if, at that stage, they were unaware of the dreadful hardship to come when the potato crop, on which the peasantry had become very dependent, was hit by blight in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Similarly, life in a 'proper', modern town with an established church and a school house would, they believed, go a long way to bring about the moral and intellectual improvement of the people. It is notable that when they spoke with Smithian assurance of the property rights of the individual, although most improving landlords were thinking only of themselves as 'individuals' in this respect, many reformers did believe that by giving their remaining tenants longer leases and greater security of tenure, as individuals rather than communities, they (the tenants) would be persuaded to initiate improving reforms for themselves. Individual landholding rather than communal cultivation was considered essential to the project of Improvement. Here again we see the essentially ideological nature of 'Improvement'; although ostensibly its adherents pursued the most rational and effective courses of action, certain practices and principles were considered 'improving', almost regardless of actual consequences in specific instances.

From a twenty-first century perspective, landowners efforts to 'improve' their tenantry seem excessively paternalistic to say the least, and their perception of the wretchedness of their tenants' ways of living were not necessarily shared by

the tenants themselves; however, by the standards of their time, such experiments in social engineering, with or without the consent of the 'improvees', was regarded as morally admirable and is not unparalleled. The thousands cleared from the Highlands compares with the 76,000 Londoners displaced by the construction of the railways (Dyos 1955: 14). Resettlement in new villages was common in the lowlands as well as in Highland Scotland, and the replacement of communal styles of agriculture by autonomous individual farmers and waged labourers was the central process of enclosure in the English midlands.

To the landlords the need for reform was evident; and the superiority of stone-built houses, in villages, with the inhabitants practising a range of occupations and having easy access to desirable imported commodities was indisputable. In a wildly partisan account of the notorious Sutherland clearances, Harriet Beecher Stowe cites the availability of imported boot blacking in the new coastal towns as a clear indication of the amelioration of people's standards of living:

> Before 1812 there was no baker [on the Sutherland estate], and only two shops. In 1845 there were eight bakers and forty-six grocers' shops, in nearly all of which shoe-blacking was sold to some extent, an unmistakable evidence of advancing civilization. (Beecher Stowe cited in MacKenzie 1914: 84)

An interesting footnote to the nineteenth century clearances is the attempted reforms made in the early twentieth century by the philanthropist Lord Leverhulme after his purchase of the Hebridean islands of Lewis and Harris (Gold and Gold 1996). Just like his predecessors a hundred years earlier, Leverhulme blamed what he saw as the economic retardation of the Hebrides on communal cultivation, which decreased individual motivation and the incentive to generate profit, and insufficient specialisation. Instead, he tried to direct the islands' inhabitants into fisheries and light industry and attempted to move them into newly planned coastal settlements, away from their small crofts and shielings in the upland interior of the island. Like the Highland reforms of the early nineteenth century, his attempt was ultimately unsuccessful. The resistance of the island's inhabitants to Leverhulme's proposals relate to an incompatibility of values articulately expressed by one of his tenants:

> You have spoken of steady work and steady pay in tones of veneration – and I have no doubt that in your view, and in the view of those unfortunate people who are compelled to live their lives in smoky towns, steady work and steady pay are very desirable things. But in Lewis we have never been accustomed to either – and strange though it may seem to your lordship, *we do not greatly desire them* . . . . You

> have referred to our houses as hovels – but they are our *homes*...
> (anonymous tenant cited in Gold and Gold 1996: 204)

The aim of many 'clearances' (not, incidentally, a widely used term at the time) was the resettlement of Highland dwellers in new or enhanced coastal towns. Families were allocated new crofts along the coast. These were designed to be worked by a single family, in distinction to the communal system of the traditional clachan community. Any livestock had to be supported year-round on the croft itself; access to summer shielings was no longer possible now that sheep had the run of the hills all year round. Crucially, the crofts were also too small to support an entire family without additional income. This was the stick with which Highlanders were to be beaten into participation in the modern, capitalist economy. But there were also carrots. Progressive landlords restored and enhanced harbours, wharfs, fishing sheds and ice-houses, as well as developing many new fishing ports on the north and west coasts of Scotland. Almost all of the harbours described in Graham and Gordon's (1987) survey of northern Scotland were founded or redeveloped between 1790 and 1850. The fine ice-houses at Brora, Helmsdale and Bettyhill (Fig. 3.3) for example, were intended to promote the Highland fisheries. The new Highland economy was to be supported by efficient modern communications. New ferries linked coastal towns and facilitated trade with the south. Between 1803 and 1828 the Commission for Highland roads and bridges built 1,480 km of road and 1,117 bridges, much of which is still in use today (Curtis 1980: 484). The Caledonian canal, making a navigable passage along the Great Glen between Inverness and Fort William,

3.3. Ice house at Helmsdale, Sutherland, built in 1824.

3.4. Caledonian canal, opened in 1822, looking towards Fort William.

was completed in 1822 (Fig. 3.4). For a few years it had provided employment to some of those evicted from inland settlements and its sponsors hoped that better transport would boost the development of a more diverse Highland economy.

Ultimately, however, the hopes of the progressive reformers were not fulfilled. Despite the new roads, inns, towns, amenities and institutions, the coastal crofters mainly failed to thrive. Even more poignant than the ruined clachans of the highland glens are the ruins of the crofts that replaced them, overlooking the sea at Helmsdale or Bettyhill (Fig. 3.5). The fisheries proved dangerous, unreliable and ephemeral. The Highlands offered few economic opportunities beyond the sheep and the hunting; certainly not enough to support the large population of the region in the nineteenth century. Even now, the economy of the Scottish Highlands remains precarious.

The case of the Highland Clearances shows both the positive and negative effects of the Improvement ethic. As we have seen, Improvement, as the poet William Cowper says, is 'fed with many a victim', and in general those victims were the poorest members of society: those dependent on traditional and informal rights and the support of extended communities of place. Improvement did not mean the same thing to all members of British society, but some understanding of the ideological frameworks in which people of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries operated is necessary if we're going to move on from well-intentioned prejudging of the meaning of the material past by supposing that all human practices are 'really' about the exercise, legitimation, manipulation or rejection of power relationships of inequality, or reducing all explanations to the economic 'bottom line'. Of course, the story of the clearances involves

3.5. Ruined croft at Bettyhill, Caithness. Even the crofts that replaced the old communal settlements mostly proved difficult to make a living from.

money and it involves the exercise and negotiation of power. But it also involves the playing out of particular cultural and conceptual ideas at a particular historical moment in the development of the modern West. It would not be right or appropriate to blame the poor for their own suffering, but neither is it quite correct to characterise the highland landowners as a homogenously greedy and self-interested class. Their attempts to coerce the tenants into farming individual crofts and diversifying into new areas of the capitalist economy was pretty much in line with the reforms underway in other parts of Britain.

What does the history of the Highlands in this period tell us about the ethic of Improvement? First, that Improvement was about more than profit. Underlying many projects for the Highlanders was an attempt to impose a new culture and a reformed social and economic system to the people themselves. Second, that Improvement can easily be seen as a paternalistic and arrogant middle- and upper-class ideology imposed on the labouring people (and also, though this is beyond the scope of this book, on foreign natives). Whether the ethic of Improvement was also widely embraced by working people is a difficult question to which we will return. Third, that although 'Improvement' was itself a moral imperative of the period, it works in the context of a set of values and a broad (but not uncontested) consensus about what an 'improved' society would be like: educated, modern, clean, 'moral' according to a particular understanding of moral virtue, individualistic and self-sustaining. As in England and Wales, communal patterns of ownership or land working were believed to be inimical to Improvement, and to belong to the past. Private, demarcated territory

and some economic autonomy were necessary in order to improve and the replacement of communal clachans with family crofts was thus driven by ideology as well as profit. Pluciennik (2002) has described eighteenth-century thought on historical progress (much of it coming from thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment) which placed settled individual farming on bounded territories above any strategy which incorporated elements of transhumance, communal farming, pastoralism or unbounded landscapes. Traditional highland land-usage therefore belonged clearly to an earlier stage of development; it had failed to progress; it was 'lower' and not fully civilised. Forcing Scottish peasants into modern agriculture was thus bringing them into the present and, as reformers saw it, to civilisation: Improvers often saw themselves as bringing something *good* to their tenants. 'Clearance' was the enactment of active Improvement.

Dalglish (2003) divides the literature of highland history into 'people's histories' and 'economic histories' and notes the limitations of both. People's histories of the Highlands are guilty of representing tenants as virtuous victims and lairds as greedy villains; economic histories emphasise land-reform as a rational response to difficult economic circumstances. Both schools are guilty of representing both landowners and peasantry as homogenous entities and assuming that the relationship between the groups is necessarily oppositional. However, as we have seen, the motivations of the improving landowners are more complex and varied than simply economic gain or the consolidation of social power. Dalglish demonstrates that the responses of the Argyll tenantry to Improvement were also varied and complex. For example, while some tenants seem to have continued organising their domestic space in 'unimproved' ways, others embraced some aspects of Improvement such as the specialisation of interior space, nucleation around the self and the immediate family rather than extended community, and individualistic forms of holding and working the land. Symonds (1999: 115) retells a story about many of the tenants of the improved and cleared estates of South Uist refusing to take their grain to the new mill set up by the laird, and continuing to use their own quern stones instead. The laird sent his enforcers around the homes of the tenants, removing and breaking their quernstones and throwing them into the loch. Whether the tenants' resistance to the improved mill was because they were unwilling to give any portion of their crop to the miller, or because they had other reasons for preferring their traditional technology, it is clear that the responses of the poor to 'Improvement' varied not only from area to area but even between adjacent households.

Improvement?

Overall, then, there is little doubt that many of the major changes to the rural scene that took place in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries could be described

as 'improvements', at least by the standards of the time. The productive capacity of the land for both crops and animals was increased considerably in most parts of Britain; high profits were made from which many people, not only the landowners, did benefit. New rural settlements provided new opportunities and in many ways better living conditions for large numbers of country-dwellers. However, despite all the advances, of which contemporaries were very proud, there were significant numbers of people who did not benefit from rural reforms. Those on the margins of society whose precarious livings were taken from them; those who lost their homes to enclosure or other 'Improvements'; those who would not or could not live within the normal moral or legal codes of society; the sick and elderly and above all the very poor continued to constitute a problem for the Improvers. What was to be done? Could they also be improved and made fit for the 'progressive' society that was so widely anticipated? Or could they merely be contained and limited? In Chapter Four we shall explore some of the strategies that were put in place to deal with the problem of those who did not conform to the norms of 'improved' practice and lifestyle.

This chapter and the last do not constitute a comprehensive review of agricultural and rural change in the period 1750–1850. Instead we have seen how the idea of Improvement, and the consensus among a group of politically and culturally powerful people about what Improvement was, informed many of the changes of the period. Attempts to explain changing agricultural practices of the period in terms of economic rationality and agricultural expediency do not always work because they ignore the ideological dimension of practices. Many of the key 'improvements' did not actually repay the costs of their enactment, or yielded only a very small increase in productivity. Enclosure, for example, probably did not produce big increases in yields; underdrainage often failed to repay the initial investment; meadows were floated even where the climate and topography were inappropriate; lime and marl were added to soils that were already alkaline. What is interesting about the adoption of agricultural improvement is that it appears to be greatest on the large estates owned by improving landowners. The improvements were generally learned from journals or in communication with other Improvers from all over the country, and were not the result of local tradition or folk knowledge. Being an agricultural Improver meant more than making profitable decisions about the management of one's land; it made one a qualitatively different sort of person – a fully modern man. Arthur Young said of the farmers of Oxfordshire that their considerable assiduity in enclosure and the adoption of innovative practices . . .

> has changed the men as much as it has improved the country . . .: a vast amelioration has been wrought, and is working; and a great

> deal of ignorance and barbarity remains. The Goths and Vandals of open fields touch the civilization of enclosures. (Young 1813: 35)

Young's metaphor is not accidental. Agricultural improvement was the present and the future; those who did not adopt it belonged to the past. In fact Young goes on to say that the contrast between the improving farmers and those who were not making improvements was like having 'lost a century in time' or travelled 1000 miles (1813: 35), distancing the unimproved in both time and space.

Improving the rural world was undoubtedly one of the most important projects for progressive thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, at this time a smaller proportion of the people of Britain than ever before were actually living in the countryside. Ameliorative intention was evident not only in the agrarian landscapes and agricultural changes of the time, but also in the transformations taking place in that most appropriate and progressive habitation of the improved man: the town.

FOUR:

TOWNS AND CIVIC IMPROVEMENT

When the Chichester Literary and Philosophical Society was founded in 1831, the prospectus proudly declared: 'A City, so distinguished for its public spirit, and usually so forward in the march of improvement, should no longer be outdone in this respect, by so many other places inferior to it in size, wealth and consequence'. (Prospectus of the Chichester Literary and Philosophical Society 1831, reproduced in Steer 1962: 3.) As well as acknowledging a desire to improve the intellectual, moral and social well-being of the people of Chichester, and to promote learning and innovation, which were universally believed to have economic spin-offs, this statement betrays a spirit of urban pride (and indeed competition); the Society was to be an ornament to the town, as well as to improve its citizens. Chichester was not alone. Between the mid eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth the towns and cities of Britain underwent extensive rebuilding and re-organisation in order to improve the health, morality, cultural and civic life and the aesthetic experience of its wealthier inhabitants and visitors. For the poor, urban improvements sometimes had less life-enhancing consequences, however. This chapter looks at the attempts of reformers to improve their towns and cities through the enhancement of existing amenities, the planning and institution of new ones and the development of new towns.

It is not usual in social and cultural history to consider the development in towns from the late Georgian to early Victorian period as a single chunk of urban development. Classic studies of urbanisation have generally concentrated either on the early modern to high Georgian (e.g. Sweet 1999; Borsay 1990) or on the Victorian city (e.g. Briggs 1996); developments in between and across the two have been somewhat downplayed. Moreover, our ideas of the Georgian town and the Victorian city are very different; indeed, the contrast between the two is part of what has shaped this tradition of work. As Ellis has commented (2001: 47), the Georgian town is elegant, tasteful, affluent: one might think of the wide avenues and stone-built architecture of Edinburgh New Town, or the polite city that was Jane Austen's Bath. Similarly, one might think of the Victorian town as

polluted, overcrowded, industrial and the home of masses of poor people, with brick-built, gothic factories and the criminal slums of Charles Dickens's London. The stereotypes, of course, are overdrawn: there was dirt, industry and poverty in the Georgian town, just as there were elegant and accomplished developments in Victorian cities, but in the case of large cities, the change between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries was remarkable. The population of cities expanded hugely. At the beginning of the period between two thirds and three quarters of the people of Britain lived in rural areas (Ellis 2001: 7); by the end the majority of the population, which itself had increased more than threefold in a century (Jackson and Timmins 1989: 135), lived in towns. Towns had grown rapidly to accommodate this increase. Changes in the location of industry and residence, in retailing, transport and communication all contributed to the rapid changes that took place over the period. Many of the reforms associated with Victorian cities were responses to perceived crises generated by the rapid growth and industrialisation of towns, but even before the 1830s concerns were growing in some quarters about the consequences of industrialisation, and attempts made to mitigate or resolve those problems. Nevertheless, most of the 'improvements' of the period 1750–1850 were not responses to particular crises, but were motivated by ambitious and even utopian ideas of what the town could and should be like. This was a key period in the history of British towns that saw not only the culmination of private and local attempts at planning, urban improvement and expansion of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries but also began the processes that culminated in the later nineteenth-century social reforms in planning, health, education and politics.

Accounts of urban reform in the nineteenth century often begin with descriptions of the overcrowded and insanitary conditions prevailing in large towns by the mid nineteenth century; thus Victorian improvement schemes such as slum clearance, hygienic reform and the institution of new street plans in the city centres were presented at the time, as by subsequent historians, as responses to those problems (e.g. Rodger 1989; Briggs 1996). Yet Peter Borsay has demonstrated that these processes were well underway in many towns long before the conditions of cities reached their mid-century nadir. In fact, the 100 years before 1850 laid the foundations of later amelioration of urban conditions as well as unwittingly, or indifferently, creating those conditions.

The Changing Town

Sometime between 1785 and 1800 the landlord of the King's Arms in Uxbridge, Middlesex had a clear-out. Into an old water cistern went an assortment of broken pottery and glass and other rubbish. Much of the pottery – more than half of the more complete vessels – was creamware that was just going out of

fashion, but the assemblage recovered by archaeologists 200 years later also included wine glasses and imported Chinese porcelain. The analyst of this assemblage thinks it might represent the dumping of old, no longer fashionable stock, when new wares were acquired (Pearce 2000: 177).

The inn, in the later eighteenth century, was not just a place to drink ale or break a journey; it was also a centre for local social and commercial interaction. Clubs and societies met there, and it was the usual venue for business and social meetings, plays, shows and other entertainments, especially in smaller towns without purpose-built theatres of their own. The clientele of the inn, unlike that of the alehouse, included tea-drinkers as well as beer and wine drinkers, and the ceramics deposited at the King's Arms include fashionable tea wares and smart dinner plates as well as plainer table wares.

If the King's Arms was smartening up, it was in keeping with the spirit of Improvement afoot in Uxbridge at the time. Around the same time as this clear-out, the High Street was widened and paved. A new market house was completed in 1789. Lighting and cleaning of the town's main streets was organised so that by 1868, the *National Gazetteer of Britain and Ireland* could describe the town as 'a flourishing town ... The streets are clean and well-lighted, and the shops have a thriving appearance' (National Gazetteer 1868: 723–4).

These improvements were intended to promote the economic and cultural life of the town generally, rather than to benefit specific individuals (although general landscaping improvements were rarely made to the poor parts of town, and concentrated on the main central streets and buildings). In many towns and cities of Britain, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a period of intense activity related to improvement. Just as in rural areas fields and farms were reorganised and enhanced, so too were the settlements, both urban and rural, that constituted the living environment for a rapidly increasing proportion of Britain's people.

The Mechanisms of Urban Improvement

What characterises the developments of this period in particular is the scale of planning that informed the laying out of new streets and the construction of new buildings. In earlier periods, new buildings in the town had tended to appear in a fairly piecemeal and haphazard way, related to the needs and aspirations of those individuals and families who had sufficient resources to realise them. As a result, most towns grew fairly organically, as individual dwellings, shops, workplaces and other buildings were erected one at a time and without reference to any larger plan or future vision, taking account only of existing roads and buildings, and sometimes even ignoring them. One historian observed in 1773, buildings went up 'in whatever place and form best suited his own purposes,

without consulting the appearance of the town, or so much as imagining that it would afterwards be of any consequence to the public, what situation he chose, or what style of architecture he adopted' (Enfield 1773, cited in Ellis 2001: 96).

During the eighteenth century improvements to British towns were carried out in both private and public ways. 'Private' improvements consisted in the rebuilding, refacing and redesign of existing buildings, or the erection of new ones in a 'tasteful' and modern style. Houses and private buildings were much more likely than in previous centuries to take account of the appearance of neighbouring buildings and to aim at achieving some kind of regularity in style, material and position, although the private Improver still had almost total legal freedom to do as he wished on his own land; 'planning permission' as we know it today was still far off. Even without much in the way of planning laws, towns such as Edinburgh's New Town managed to achieve considerable cohesion (Fig. 4.1). Voluntarily, houses adopted a common front line with their neighbours, generally avoiding the protruding stairs, kerbs and cellars which made walking down a dark street in the seventeenth century such a hazardous business. The near universal adoption of a broadly classical style was instrumental in achieving considerable stylistic unity in new developments, as well as in dampening down local and regional variations in architectural tradition. Speculative developments of several houses as a row, terrace or around a new street, square or crescent, of course facilitated a more unified kind of building style.

4.1. Edinburgh New Town achieved considerable architectural cohesion through the widespread choice of neo-palladian and neo-classical building styles.

Even the houses of the poor, which were not generally built with much concern for planning or the appearance of the town, often achieved a degree of architectural coherence at this time for the same reason, albeit that the result was endless rows of back-to-backs in grid developments.

'Public' improvements were collective rather than state-based, but required that the town council, or some other local committee, be empowered to levy rates from private occupiers to pay for communal improvements like street lighting, cleaning and paving. Before the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, the town authority entrusted with the right of raising and spending rates varied across Britain, from the 'Lord of the Manor' (sometimes a collective body), corporation, burgesses or even, still, the manorial court (Jones and Falkus 1990: 129–30). Often several bodies and officers had overlapping areas of reponsibility. The use of rates and contractors meant that a higher degree of standardisation in the appearance and maintenance of the street becomes observable. Before the eighteenth century, street care such as lighting, paving and so on had been organised so that each householder was responsible for that stretch of street directly in front of their own dwelling. This meant that the street might be cobbled for a few metres, then surfaced with gravel for a few metres, neglected entirely for a few metres and so on. Lighting and cleaning worked in a similar way, with numerous individual practices in place. Some householders were more diligent than others in putting lights in their windows or outside their houses, with the result that even main streets often had only occasional pools of light. The role of the town authority was merely to try to enforce regulations about the duties of individuals. From the mid eighteenth century, however, a new system removed from the householder any direct responsibility for organising lighting, paving or cleaning and placed it, along with responsibility for policing public places, in the hands of the local authority who then employed contractors with the money levied from ratepayers.

The bodies responsible for instituting and overseeing such work were often called 'Improvement Commissioners' or 'Improvement Trusts'. As Jones and Falkus point out, this meant 'not simply the more effective compliance with traditional standards but also the raising of those standards through new technologies and their application' (1990: 130). Improvement Commissions not only contracted street cleaners, but also promoted schemes of general urban improvement such as widening streets, constructing new streets, bridges, markets, water systems and public buildings. They instituted street lighting and championed the use of gas in lamps. The Improvement Commission or Trust was established by an Act of Parliament which gave it powers to borrow money or raise it locally by levying a rate, and to make compulsory purchases of properties that impeded a particular improvement scheme. A commission was constituted in order to oversee a particular local development or series of developments, such as road widening or redirecting, bridge building (the two often went together), or the

construction of a local amenity. Commissioners gradually came to take over the function of town corporations or local authorities. By the end of the eighteenth century 'hundreds of towns all over England, whether they had a corporation or not, were being largely run by one or more bodies of commissioners' (Girouard 1990: 89). The precise arrangements for the town authority varied according to the status of the town – whether or not it was incorporated, for example, and its location (different administrative arrangements applied in Scotland) but in all cases the membership of the town authorities, as of any charity commissions involved in making improvements or alterations to the town such as schools or hospitals, consisted mainly of the wealthy middle class with perhaps a few local aristocrats. In looking at the history of Improvement 'across the board' it is interesting how frequently the same names recur, involved in all sorts of improvements and reforms. Joshua Hobson of Leeds was responsible for publishing much Owenite and Chartist literature, and was also elected a member of the Improvement Commission for the city of Leeds. Erasmus Darwin, for example, was known not only for his scientific work, but was also involved in political causes like the abolition of slavery, and infrastructural improvements like canal building (Porter 2000: 435–8).

In Liverpool a committee was set up in 1785 to consider the best ways of improving the town. Public meetings were held and in 1786 an Improvement Act was passed and an Improvement Committee was formally established. Under its aegis Castle Street and Dale Street were widened and Brunswick Street laid out. The old Town Hall was ornamented with a dome and a portico, to give it a fashionable and tasteful neo-classical appearance. At the time of those improvements 'only three docks had been formed (and a fourth was on the way), the common land was only partly built over, but the resulting income already made it the second richest corporation in England' (Girouard 1990: 177). In 1825 a second Act allowed the widening of other central streets including Lord Street. A crescent was built around St George's Church and a grand new Customs House was built on the site of the old dock, which was now filled in. Although the buildings from the time of the improvements are now all gone, with the exception of the additions to the Town Hall, the wide streets and street plan of central Liverpool preserve the work of the Improvement Committee.

At around the time of Liverpool's second phase of improvements, the re-planning of Brighton's central and sea-front area was also underway (Girouard 1990: 181–3). There, several local bodies and landowners co-operated to improve the town around a series of open spaces: the old Steine, the Market Promenade and the Cliff Walk. All of these areas were enlarged, planted with gardens and flanked by new terraces of attractive houses to make a north–south axis through the town which was open and pleasant. The Level and the North Steine had been common open land, condemned for their dirt and

criminality, but were also redeveloped. By 1838, a new drive along the sea front had been completed and a new sea wall constructed. All these changes were directed not only at improving the environment for the residents of Brighton, but also at increasing the number of leisure visitors to the town and developing it as a resort.

The separation of public and private developments in towns over this period is not absolute, and indeed one of the features of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century town was the way that private improvements were increasingly brought under public control and scrutiny, through the growing powers of town authorities. Even apparently trivial details like the introduction of house numbers and the display of street names, which began in many British towns in the eighteenth century and were ubiquitous in all but the smallest villages by 1850, exemplify the centralised and corporate control of civic life. In 1796, for example, an Act of Aberdeen Town Council, specified that all houses should have numbers painted on them in white paint.

Peter Borsay has suggested that in the century and a half before the period examined here, British urban society had been largely shaped by the demands of the moneyed middle classes for leisure facilities. Facilities for leisure and pleasure continued to be significant motors of urban change, but the town between 1750 and 1850 was not only a place for socialising; it also had to provide a suitable environment for, and indicate the presence of, a new, improved kind of population. This period sees a strengthening of the view that the town was (or should be) a coherent, ordered space, as well as an assemblage of private places, and that the people of the town had a collective and communal identity, in addition to their private and social identities.

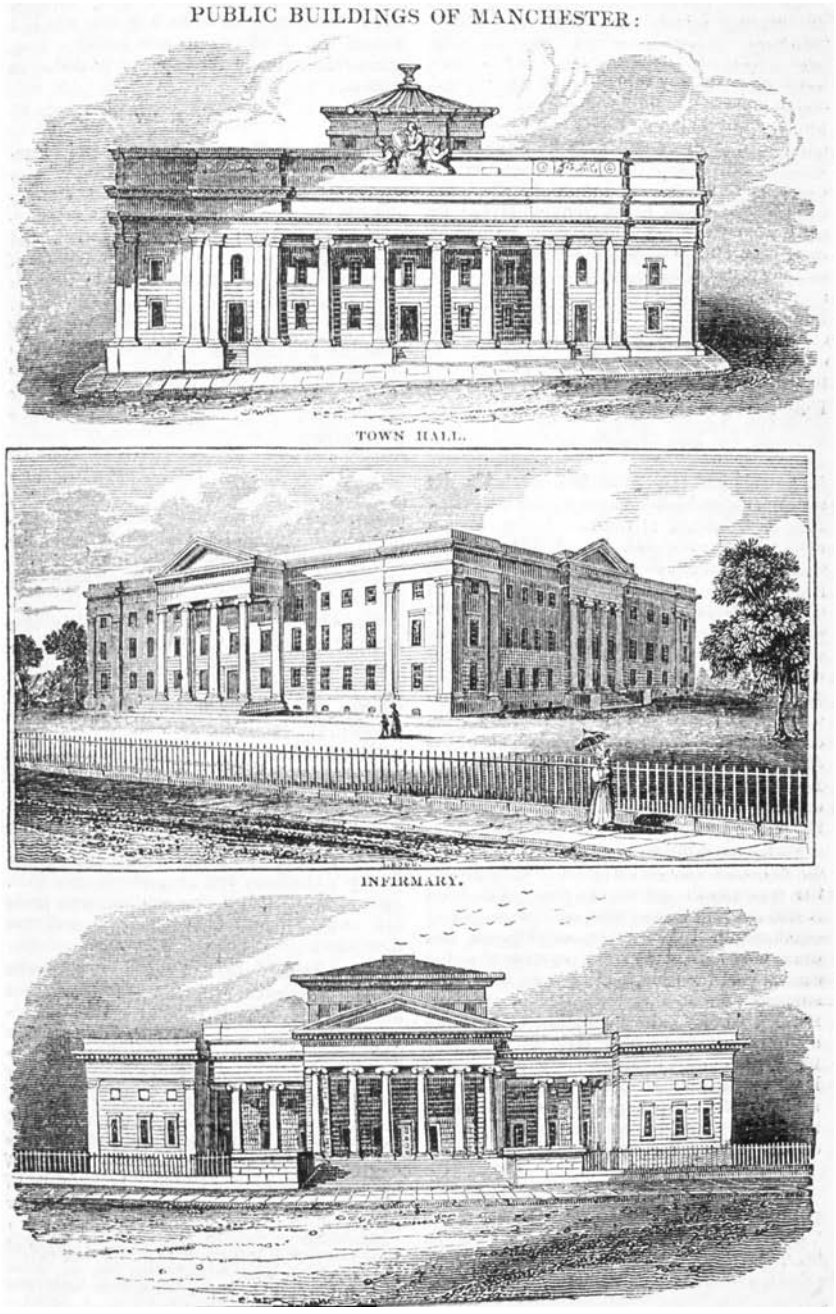
Improvement and the Classical Style

It is interesting to note that nearly all the public building that happened in British cities between 1750 and 1850, and nearly all middle-class private building, adopted a broadly neo-classical style. Even much of the working-class housing adopted elements of the 'Georgian' style – a regular pattern of even and symmetrical fenestration, or a classical style door case, for example. Properly, to an architectural historian, 'neo-classical' architecture refers to a particular style that was at its most popular in the late eighteenth century, characterised by a turn directly to the ancients for inspiration, and ignoring earlier post-medieval manifestations of the classical style. It is what Worsley (1995: xii) terms 'fundamentalist classicism'. More conventionally, and always alongside strict neo-classicism, was neo-Palladianism, which incorporated elements of other styles and worried less about historical purity. However, it is improbable that the majority of those looking at the new shopping and residential streets would have been aware of

the precise differences in style, or worried about whether or not a Doric style pillar had a base, and would probably have retained instead a general impression of classical antiquity, metaphorically signalled through use of material (stone and stucco), colour (pale or white), symmetry and characteristic architectural features (pediments, porticos, pillars and pilasters, projecting sills and lintels, geometrical construction). Moreover, although there was a range of variability in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century urban architecture, there is virtually no new vernacular or medievalist building in towns dating to the century considered here. The public buildings of Manchester, illustrated in the *Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* in 1832, attain a coherence of style, to the untrained eye at least because of the broad popularity of classical styles. The Manchester Royal Infirmary, founded in 1752, and the Royal Manchester Institution built in 1823 both used a similar style, despite the seventy-one years that separate them (Fig. 4.2).

Why this remarkable conformity in architectural style? Changing tastes are easily dismissed as 'fashion' and their adoption often put down to social climbing or the expression of class identity, but these kinds of explanations do not account for the specific tastes, the particular places and periods referenced and so on. Styles become aspirational because they invoke associations which are attractive ideologically or emotionally to those who employ them. The neo-classical style was fashionable for a reason, and that reason involved its associations with the classical past and the particular place of Britain in the eighteenth century. As we have seen earlier, 'Improving' Britons had little time for what we might call the folkloric past. That was about tradition, conservatism, irrationality, superstition, general backwardness and all the things from which progressive Improvers wanted to distance themselves. The past of classical antiquity, however, was a different matter. The Greek and Roman worlds were rational, literate, enlightened, powerful, imperial, rich and civilised: all the things to which eighteenth-century Britons aspired for their nation. Classicism had been an important style in art, architecture, literature and other forms of cultural expression since the seventeenth century; classical writers were still cited as authorities on a wide range of topics in the eighteenth century. The classical world was in many ways a model for the British, and from the later eighteenth century the influence of the classical was noticeable not only in the fields mentioned above but also in far more mundane contexts like dress, ceramics, table wares and interior design. The almost ubiquitous use of neo-classical architectural style is indicative of a particular kind of historical positioning, with an eye to their perception by Britons of the future, and those of other nations at the time. John Gwynn, in *London and Westminster Improved* (1766), makes that link explicit:

> Publick magnificence may be considered as a political and moral advantage to every nation; politically from the intercourse with



4.2. Public buildings of Manchester, from *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* vol. 20, p. 177 (1832). The Royal Infirmary (middle) was established in 1752; the Royal Institution (bottom) was built in 1823. Both share a neo-classical style with the old Town Hall (top) which was replaced in the second half of the nineteenth century with a Gothic style building (by kind permission of Cambridge University Library).

> foreigners expending vast sums on our curiosities and productions; morally, as it tends to promote industry, to stimulate invention and to excite emulation in the polite and liberal arts . . . The English are now what the Romans were of old, distinguished like them by power and opulence [wealth], and excelling all other nations in commerce and navigation. Our wisdom is respected, our laws are envied, and our dominions are spread over a large part of the globe.
>
> Let us therefore, no longer neglect to enjoy our superiority; let us employ our riches in the encouragement of ingenious labour, by promoting the advancement of grandeur and elegance. (Gwynn 1766: 91–2)

A Moral Urban Population

Towns in the eighteenth century held an ambiguous position. On the one hand they were regarded as essential to the future prosperity of the nation. They were the cradles of innovation, industry and experiment. They were also centres of cultural and scientific life: locations of the new societies, institutes, private entertainments and public meeting places for polite society. The economic activity of the town, and the rapid pace of urban change also made the town the obvious location for the ambitious young person, offering opportunities for entrepreneurial activity, economic and social independence from family and 'custom', that albatross of the progressive Georgian spirit. On the other hand, the town was, in comparison to the country, morally suspect. Liberality among urban people was widely held to include promiscuity, permissiveness and godlessness. Freed from the traditional 'moral economy' of close-knit rural society, city-dwellers were offered opportunities for unseemliness, drunkenness, rowdiness and loose behaviour. Thus, although people's actual practices are demonstrated in the rapidly increasing proportion of the British population choosing to live in towns, there was a moral imbalance between urban and rural that was not to the town's advantage: 'God made the country; man made the town', wrote William Cowper. Rural life was good, godly, 'natural' in a positive sense. Unsurprisingly, this sentimentalisation of the countryside became more pronounced over the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries: the very period that the real countryside was undergoing extremely rapid change towards a much more commodified landscape organised for efficiency of production and full integration into global economies of capitalism. It is evident in the 'pastoral' dairies of the model farm, and in the grasslands of the landscape park, but in cities too this nostalgia for a (fictitious) sentimental rural existence is also manifest, as we shall see, in the urban parks, squares and walks. Moral salvation as a result of a move from the city

to the country is a recurrent theme in fiction of the period. Lady Delacour in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, for example, attains physical, spiritual and moral health only when she is removed from the corruption of London society to the country air of Yorkshire.

Undoubtedly the agenda of improving the city would need to address its perceived moral weaknesses – an environmentally improved city would have to be a morally improved one. Thus the programme for cleaning up, illuminating and beautifying the town was synonymous with the ultimate eradication of immorality, crime and vice.

Dirt, Disorder and Disease

The relationship between physical pollution and moral uncleanliness was more than metaphorical in the minds of Improvers. One remarkable feature of the period, evident in the writings of numerous reformers is the close identification of physical pollution and medical contagion with moral impurity. 'Cleaning up the streets' was thus a medical, an aesthetic and a moral campaign. The moral improvement of the town could thus be addressed by changing its physical features: first, to make the town more like the (idealised) morally pure countryside; and second, by making it physically clean and light.

Fiat Lux

Streetlights were not common in British cities until the later eighteenth century. Until then the streets, treacherous by day, were almost impossible to negotiate by night, given the ankle-catching grates, steps and cellars, coupled with the mud, refuse and worse on the street. To cap it all, the provision of street lighting was patchy at best, and in many parts of town absent altogether. The later eighteenth century saw systematic attempts to provide illumination for at least the main streets of towns. To begin with, these would be oil lamps, lit, trimmed and tended by a contractor paid for the purpose. Later, in the 1820s and 1830s gas lights began to replace oil as a more reliable form of street lighting. The laying of gas pipes was a major, disruptive undertaking. Worth (2005) has argued that infrastructural networks like gas pipes should be recognised and studied as cultural landscapes in their own right. They show us a different view of the city than the above-ground architecture which was made, in part, to convey discursive meanings about status, value and aspiration and represent what we might call 'deep improvement' – a thorough-going commitment to the betterment of urban conditions – rather than a superficial conformity with 'improved' practice in order to garner social kudos or economic gain. We shall see this distinction more clearly when we consider the improvement of Leamington, later. Whether, and when, and under what compulsion, the poor areas

of town were given proper improved infrastructure like lighting and sanitation is significant in this regard.

The spread of good street lighting contributed to the development of an urban leisure-based 'nightlife'. The pleasure gardens of London offered illuminated entertainments after dark. In other towns the formal or informal curfews that had operated in the seventeenth century came to an end and 'nightwalking' ceased to be regarded as a crime. Fashionable people could now use relatively clean, clear and well-lit pavements to travel to evening entertainments at each others' houses or to theatres, assembly rooms or one of the many kinds of pleasure venues that appeared during the later seventeenth and eighteenth century for those who could afford them. Shops profited from the opportunity offered by the large numbers of relatively well-to-do people walking the streets at night by lighting up attractive window displays to catch the eye of passing consumers. Just as agricultural innovations were used in the countryside to break through the apparent constraints of nature, so the technology of lighting in urban streets could extend the period of social interaction, trade and productivity beyond the hours of natural day. This was one of the features of urban life that gave rise to moral ambivalence: it was possible in the town to live an 'unnatural' life, not subject to the traditional constraints of time and season, distanced from the natural business of food production and most manufacture. The town represented the ultimate triumph of man's ingenuity over nature, tradition and limitation, but the cutting of ties with nature and tradition also provoked a kind of vertigo. One strategy for dealing with this, as we shall see, was through the provision of 'rus in urbe' – the country in the town – to provide moral redemption to urban dwellers in the form of open sky and green grass.

Clean Water

Although the belief that infectious disease was generally transmitted by bad air persisted among most people throughout the period, a supply of clean water and an efficient system for the removal of waste water were important requirements for 'improved' city living. The first was accomplished before the second. Efforts to ensure a clean water supply had begun some time before the eighteenth century in some towns – a wooden pump and associated lead piping excavated in Hull, for example, indicates a seventeenth-century water supply system (Crossley 1990: 96). In London the canalised New River had already been bringing clean water into central London for over 140 years by 1750; a system of pipes took the water from springs in Hertfordshire, to outlets all around north London (Crossley 1990: 96). However, it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that systematic efforts were made in most towns to ensure a supply of clean water. Clean piped water was not widely available to poor urbanites until the second half of the nineteenth, but earlier than this in many towns

clean water had been brought to pumps, and along conduits from which it could be collected for domestic use.

Alongside the improvements to Exeter's city centre in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, including the removal of the old city gates, the opening of two new markets with impressive classical façades, and two new bridges (the New Exe Bridge and the Iron Bridge), went a series of improvements to its water supply and waste water disposal. After South Street was widened, a new, covered water conduit was provided in front of the Hall of the Vicars' Choral. Eventually, in the 1830s, wide iron pipes replaced the narrow lead medieval ones (iron was unusual; in most towns stoneware pipes were used for both water supply and sewage disposal).

By 1800, the homes of wealthier urban families were rapidly acquiring a domestic supply of piped clean water, and an efficient means of removing dirty water from the house in the form of flush toilets connected to sewerage pipes, piped drainage from domestic sinks and so on. This is evident in the vastly intensified production of sanitary ware over the nineteenth century. Excavations at the site of the former Doulton drain pipe works in North Lambeth revealed the rapid nineteenth-century expansion of the site from 'a rather ramshackle patchwork of small industrial sites and domestic housing' (Killock et al 2003: 75) at the start of the nineteenth century, to an area of vast factory complexes by mid century, as the demand for salt-glazed stoneware drainpipes for domestic and urban sewerage grew. The pipes themselves, often recovered from archaeological excavations, though seldom recorded, were made in lengths to fit together by a threaded screw. Later, when the 'miasmatic' theory of disease (that infections were spread by polluted air) was superseded by an awareness of water-borne microbes, the joints between sections were sealed with bitumen or cement (Killock et al 2003: 48). In the second half of the nineteenth century the Doulton factory expanded even further and by the end of the century was producing over thirty five miles of pipes each week (Killock et al 2003: 46).

Clean water was more easily accessible to urban homes, but waste water still had to be taken away. Anyone who has read Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* will remember the dramatic scenes of escape through the labyrinthine underground sewers of Paris. The sewer's potent metaphorical evocations of a dark, corrupt underworld were skilfully exploited in Hugo's story, but discourses of the mid nineteenth century also employed the sewer as a symbol of progress and sanitation (Gandy 1999: 24).

City drainage in the nineteenth century involved both the removal of foul water from houses and factories, and the removal of rain water from the streets, so that pedestrians and wheeled traffic were not impeded by mud or puddles during bad weather. One of the major undertakings in many nineteenth-century towns was the covering of open drains that had formerly run along city streets to carry

away rainwater – and worse. Open storm drains still flank Trumpington Street in Cambridge, for example. Certainly the need for covered drains was not universally recognised: the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter holds a notice recording a meeting of those opposed to any further rate increases consequent on the Improvement Commission's decision to cover the city's drains, for which there was not 'the smallest necessity' in the minds of its opponents. A network of trenches carrying nineteenth century ceramic drainage pipes is a common feature of urban archaeology. This is more than a frustrating truncation of the 'proper' archaeological stratigraphy; it represents, according to Briggs: '[Victorian cities'] outstanding feature . . . hidden from public view – their network of pipes and drains and sewers below the surface of the streets, one of the biggest technical and social achievements of the age, a sanitary "system" more comprehensive than the transport system' (Briggs 1996: 5).

Street Cleaning

Addressing the house of Lords in 1741, Lord Tyrconnel deplored the unseemliness of dirty London streets; he was profoundly conscious that polluted streets were unbecoming and unfit for the development of a culture of 'government', 'delicacy', 'civility and politeness' and 'wealth commerce and plenty' (Ogborn 1998: 75). In the next chapter we shall see how the human debris of the streets – beggars, cripples, criminals and lunatics – were cleared away into clean and ordered institutions, usually away from the city centres where their presence on the streets was regarded as so much 'matter out of place'. Humphry Repton, the famous landscape architect of the early nineteenth century, was best known for his work on the improvement of the rural estate, but some other illustrations are instructive. For example, the 'before' and 'after' pictures of the view from his own house shows an unimproved and an improved view, in the latter of which not only have the butcher's shop and the crowded coach been hidden from view by a screen of climbing roses, but the one-armed, one-legged and one-eyed beggar leaning on the fence has vanished altogether (Fig. 4.3). By the appropriation of a small triangular green adjoining his property (used as common goose pasture in the first picture) and the consequent enlargement of Repton's private garden, a further distanciation of the improved home from the human and actual 'rubbish' is effected.

There was also material disorder to be cleared away. Activities that produced particularly noxious smells or detritus began to be removed altogether from city centres. Businesses related to the butchering and processing of animal carcasses, for example, were increasingly distasteful to the urban public. Robey (1998: 3) points out that sentimental objections to witnessing distressed animals being herded through the city and slaughtered, as well as hygienic objections to filth and blood in the streets and the smell of meat, accelerated the reform of

VIEW FROM MY OWN COTTAGE, IN ESSEX.

VIEW FROM MY OWN COTTAGE, IN ESSEX.

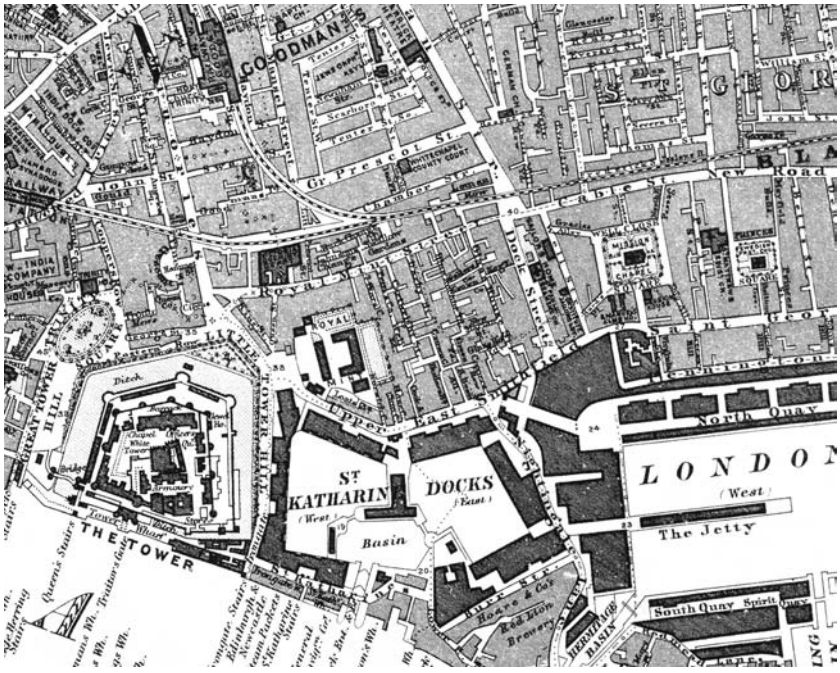
4.3. 'Before' and 'after' views from Humphry Repton's cottage, from Repton's *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816). Improvements would remove or screen from view distasteful aspects of the scene such as the butcher's shop and the crippled beggar.

London's Smithfield market in the nineteenth century. Although standards of cleanliness and procedures for rubbish disposal had been specified in law since the medieval period, thousands of prosecutions brought for infractions of these byelaws (Keene 1982: 26) attest to the inadequacy of systems based on individual responsibility, even in the less populous late medieval period. In the absence of any reliable system for removing domestic rubbish, much that was not given to pigs or deposited in private rubbish pits was simply dumped in the street. There it would probably be eventually scavenged for manure, animal feed or salvage, and many town authorities employed 'scavengers' to do this, though the lax performance of their office was a recurrent cause of grumbling for townspeople. In the meantime, heaps of stinking rubbish were commonly left in the street. These were augmented by animal dung from the numerous domestic, draught and farmed animals that used the city streets, and human faeces from those caught short away from home, or the many people whose home did not provide any regular place for 'night soil'. Georgian sensibilities rejected the lack of care for public open spaces that had characterised the early modern period. As well as beautiful buildings, the streets they sat in should be, it was now felt, attractive prospects to look at and desirable places to walk, shop and associate. The ideal was a broad, open street, flanked by neo-classical façades displaying some uniformity of style and material. The achievement of Bath in this respect was justly famous, but similar streetscapes were also attained, in the first half of the nineteenth century, in parts of Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle, for example, as well as London and Edinburgh, among others. The vista along the street should terminate in an attractive sight – a church, perhaps, or a particularly fine public building. The streets themselves should be free of filth, so that people could walk without getting their clothes and shoes dirty, and paved so that rain did not transform the street into a pool of mud, or drought fill the air with clouds of dust. There should be a level, paved way for pedestrians and some means of separating and protecting them from the wheeled traffic with which the eighteenth century streets were increasingly congested. Gradually, through the later eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, the streets of Britain's cities became brighter, smoother, straighter, safer and more orderly.

As with many of the urban improvements that began in the eighteenth century, a systematic and rational approach towards paving, cleaning and ordering the streets began in London. However, even there the process of persuading people to participate in collective, civic organisation of street maintenance was a slow process, and by 1800 only a handful of streets were in the control of the 'Paving Commission'. The difficulty, according to geographer Miles Ogborn (1998), lay in negotiating the tensions between public and private; individual and collective. The public good demanded the surrender of individual control to a centrally empowered body, who could replace the irregularity of privately maintained stretches of road (in London, as elsewhere, the pattern from the

seventeenth century had been that each householder was responsible for that stretch of road onto which his or her property fronted), with a uniform and regular street landscape. It is interesting to note here that although this period is often represented as one of triumphant individualism, many of the developments of the period actually require a more collective and corporate understanding of social responsibility than in the preceding centuries. In any case, there was by no means universal support for empowering a 'Paving Commission', or for forking out the rates levied on each household to fund it. At the level of local politics urban improvement was complicated by the number of different and often conflicting interest groups in the town. In the case of Dundee, Miskell (2002) has described how the progress of urban improvements such as policing, water and gas supply and the construction of public buildings was impeded by conflicts between the old elite and the new middle classes, working through the incorporated trades guilds. The two powerful factions had different priorities and therefore 'Improvement' became an area of contestation. The resulting unfocused and unco-ordinated approach to urban improvement was not unique to Dundee, but could be observed in other Scottish cities such as Aberdeen, Dunfermline and Edinburgh, and in English and Welsh cities too (Miskell 2002: 371).

The paving commissions and other local authorities around Britain succeeded not only in bringing about even, smooth, bright and comparatively safe streets in many parts of town, but also in promoting or enforcing the display of street names and numbers. This too must have had important consequences for social interactions. House numbers and street names made it possible to locate a person in an unfamiliar part of town using a document – a map – rather than having to become involved in the exchange of information with locals (you did not need to ask where Mr Smith's house was, and Mr Smith was safer from the gossips who would speculate on the character and business of his visitors). Visiting and delivery could now take place with relative anonymity. House deeds and other documentary sources testify to the frequency with which urban houses changed occupier. People's addresses changed frequently; new people were constantly arriving in the larger towns, and any system of locating people which relied on relative continuity of occupancy was doomed to give way to a system which specified the building to which visits and deliveries were to be made. Urban properties in early modern documents are often defined by their relationship to other properties belonging to named people; in the second half of the eighteenth century the ownership, and indeed the boundaries of adjacent properties were no longer sufficiently stable to mark out a property for legal purposes. On the debit side (perhaps), close relationships with neighbours were further undermined by the new impersonal system of addresses. The street names and house numbers fixed to doors and walls, and the terrace names carved into the fabric of new terraces and rows, manifest the new, and more dangerous, moral



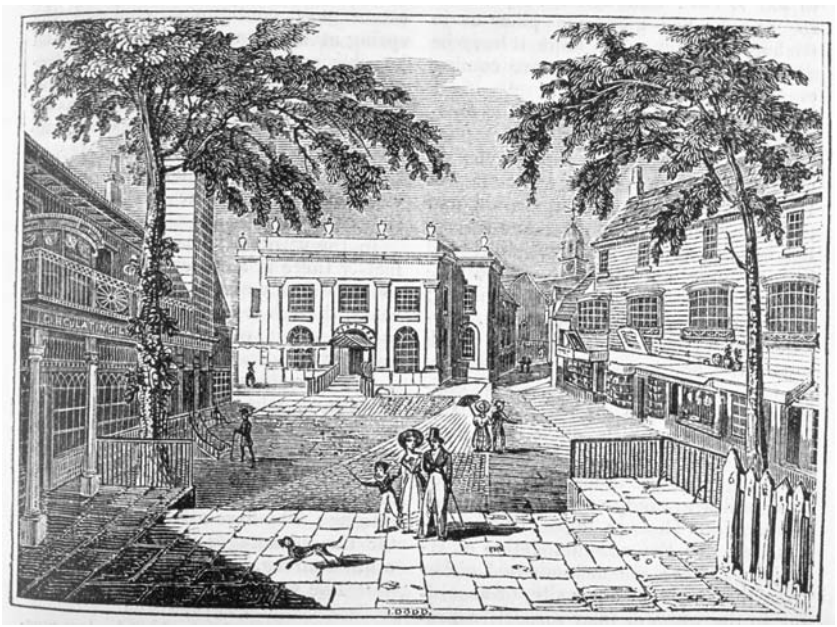
4.4. London's rookeries. The dense network of courts and alleys behind St Katherine Docks between the Royal Mint and Dock Street was the kind of streetscape that particularly distressed moral reformers of the period. From Stamford's Library map of London and its suburbs (1862, corrected to 1869).

economy of the modern town. When houses had become alienable addresses, when even one's name was not necessarily known to one's neighbours, let alone the names and stations of one's kin, the cities provided a cloak of (relative) anonymity and privacy in which moral infringements could occur. The middle classes of the later eighteenth and particularly the nineteenth century were especially anxious about the densely populated working-class areas, lacking the clear organisational structure of the middle-class suburb. Exacerbating this problem was the tight, enclosed arrangement of buildings in the working-class areas of towns (such as the feared 'rookeries' of London) which thwarted the casual surveillance that ensured conformity with the moral law in traditional and rural areas (Fig. 4.4).

A Healthful Breeze

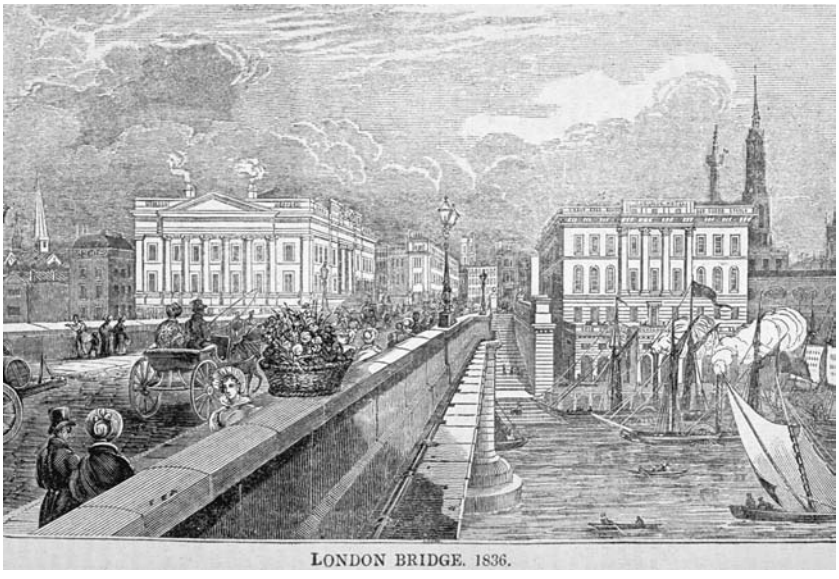
The acknowledged deficiencies of the town in the spheres of health and morality were addressed by adapting the physical environment of the city so that it acquired some of the morally and medically healthy features of the countryside. In particular, cleaning the air and opening up towns to ventilating breezes provided the inhabitants of the town with areas of simulated and idealised rural

space in which they could take healthy exercise. (For well-to-do eighteenth-century men and women, exercise frequently meant being outdoors and breathing the air, rather than anything more physically taxing. Riding around in a carriage could be considered reasonable exercise, for example.) The need for ventilation affected the design of buildings (which should permit the free circulation of air) including houses. Amongst the principle inadequacies of 'back-to-back' housing, according to nineteenth-century reformers, was that the construction style and the dense spacing inhibited the free circulation of air. Old-fashioned town streets, narrow and twisty with overhanging jetties and a higgledy-piggledy accumulation of buildings crowded in behind and around each other were equally inimical to healthy air, and therefore their replacement with broad and straight streets, and the organisation of buildings around an open square came to be the goals of Georgian planners. This ideal answered the needs of health as much as beauty, in an age when disease was mostly held to be transmitted through bad air. Girouard (1990: 89) argues that it was this practicality, mixing the aesthetic with medical, economic and social needs, that particularly characterised British Improvement in the Georgian town. This ideal was not often fully achieved, but some excellent examples survive in towns like Bath, Edinburgh New Town and Tunbridge Wells (Fig. 4.5), which were extensively re-designed and coherently laid out in this period. In London, smart new residential developments were laid out around



4.5. Tunbridge Wells, from *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* vol. 18, p. 225 (1831) (by kind permission of Cambridge University Library).

private squares. Not only did the square provide a more healthy environment for its inhabitants, according to the medical theory of the day, it gave an attractive view from the house and, just as importantly, allowed the whole façade of the building to be appreciated and provided an appropriately elegant and tasteful setting for the architecture. Wide and open roads were complemented by strong, broad bridges which allowed easier access to road transport, and especially to heavy wagons and large coaches. London Bridge was rebuilt in the 1820s to widen the carriageway and to lessen the gradient at either end so that traffic could flow more easily across the Thames (Fig. 4.6). Following an Improvement Act, a new bridge was built in the town of Chester and new roads to serve it. An 1826 plan of the proposed development shows the narrow old streets as about half as wide as the new one, which was also distinctive in being straight and of uniform width (Barnes 2001: 138). The new road not only fitted the aesthetic of the time, with its orderly geometry enhanced by new buildings like the new St Bridget's church, with its smart classical façade; it also opened up the town to the passage of air. In several cities a series of open squares were laid out end to end along the line of a walk. Leicester's New Walk (Fig. 4.7), for example, was laid out in 1785 along the line of an old Roman road. It offered an attractive walk for healthy and fashionable public recreation through a series of small squares from the edge of the town to the head of the London turnpike road. The houses along the walk soon became the most desirable addresses in the city.



4.6. Rennie's London Bridge, opened in 1831, was wide enough at the time of its opening for pedestrians to cross safely and level enough for even heavy wheeled vehicles to pass over the river without inconvenience. From *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* vol. 27, p. 225 (1836) (by kind permission of Cambridge University Library).

4.7. Smart houses and squares along Leicester's New Walk.

Urban walks in the eighteenth century came out of the tradition of polite walks developed in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century which were outdoor leisure spaces for the gentry and upper-middle classes (Borsay 1986), but as the century progressed they also came to assume some of the functions associated later with the public park – in particular providing fresh air and healthy exercise to townspeople, including those from the lower ranks of society (Chadwick 1966).

Urban parks, as we know them today, did not really develop in large numbers until the second half of the nineteenth century, when a wave of 'Victoria Parks' broke over Britain. During the 1830s and 1840s a number of parliamentary enquiries into the problems of towns reported alarming levels of disease, filth and social problems like drunkenness and illegitimacy. In part, these problems were not new, but the perception of such issues as social problems, amenable to social and cultural solutions, rather than individual moral sins whose remedy was not the concern of broader society, was distinctive to later modernity (Roberts 2005). The spread of the public park was a nationwide response to the problems of the Victorian city, as interpreted by middle-class humanistic and religious reformers. Even before the 1830s, however, some public open spaces had appeared. Unlike their successors these were not part of any national or local government directive, but were the result of local private philanthropy, paid for either by prominent individuals or by subscription. 'The Sele', part of the Hexham estate in Hexham, was opened to the public by

Sir Walter Blackett who laid out walks and planted trees in 1753 (Jordan 2003: 3). In 1839, Joseph Strutt, of the Belper mills, paid for the Derby Arboretum, designed by the landscape gardener J. C. Loudon (Chadwick 1966) to be opened as an area for seemly public recreation (Fig. 4.8). In the same year as the Derby Arboretum (and not long after Brighton's improved sea front promenade was completed), Scarborough's Spa Promenade was opened and gardens laid out along the cliff (Jordan 2003: 14). As well as the extensive re-organisation of older seaside towns, new coastal resorts were built, designed to offer opportunities for healthful exercise in well-planned parks, walks, gardens and seafronts, as at James Burton's St Leonard's-on-Sea (Fig. 4.9). The idea that playing games or running around might be a good thing for public health was not common until the later nineteenth century. Instead, breathing fresh air and walking were regarded as the principal means by which improvement of the body in both its physical and moral aspects could occur. The opportunity for instructive improvement was not missed, and every specimen tree was labelled so that strollers along the walks could profit intellectually by the experience. Municipal parks as we know them today, with walks, planted borders, trees, open grassy areas and perhaps a lake were first developed in the large towns. Until the second quarter of the nineteenth century most British towns, apart from London, had been small enough to allow easy access to the countryside anyway. In addition, many towns still had open greens and town commons

4.8. The Derby Arboretum, donated by Joseph Strutt as an amenity for the people of Derby in 1839, may be considered Britain's first public park.

4.9. St Leonard's-on-Sea was a new seaside resort founded by James Burton in the period 1827–1837 adjacent to Hastings, East Sussex. From *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* vol. 16, p. 169 (1830) (by kind permission of Cambridge University Library).

used for games, festivals and popular gatherings, as well as mundane activities like drying clothes and carrying out some craft activities. But as pressure on urban space increased, most of these lands were built over; at the same time the town spread to engulf neighbouring fields, and free daily travel between town and country became harder. Merseyside led the way in public parks with the opening of Princes Park in Liverpool in 1842 and Birkenhead Park in 1844. Both of these were laid out in association with new housing developments but were openly accessible to all. Because of the difficulties attendant on rebuilding city centres – multiple ownership, an established dense network of streets and alleys, a lack of open or undeveloped spaces and so on – much civic improvement occurred in the new suburbs, and it was on the town edge that most parks were laid out. Sometimes, as with the Merseyside parks, the public park was part of a planned housing development which also included public amenities such as schools, churches and shops.

The Suburban Cemetery

By the late eighteenth century the association between dirt and disease was established, although the purity of the air was held to be the primary factor in the spread of infection. Diseases were carried by 'miasmas' – poisonous vapours produced by decay. To reduce disease it was thus necessary to eradicate sources of miasma, and open up dark and enclosed areas to the healthful effects of fresh

air and in particular to breezes that would prevent the miasma festering and spreading. Efforts to reduce disease were also focused on the removal of dirty practices from city centres: abattoirs and tanneries were moved to the suburbs; pig-keeping was discouraged in city centre yards; and most emphatically of all, the smelly, overcrowded and unpleasant city churchyards were replaced by spacious, green, suburban cemeteries.

The nineteenth century suburban cemetery could be read as an example of the later historical ethic of Improvement in all sorts of ways, encompassing improvement of the city, improvement of the people in a physical, moral and intellectual sense and aesthetic improvement. A proper suburban cemetery was perceived as an indicator of a progressive town. The motivations for the foundation of cemeteries are many and complex. They also vary through the main period of their foundation (from the 1820s to the 1850s) and differ in different parts of the country (Rugg 1998).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the state of city centre burial grounds, usually old parish churchyards, was giving cause for concern, especially in London and the largest cities; one pressing factor was concern for the problems of hygiene caused by overburied city churchyards. One contemporary description of a churchyard in London, from George Walker's influential publication *Gatherings from Graveyards* (1839), describes how:

> The soil of the ground is saturated, absolutely saturated, with human putrescence ... The effluvia from this ground, at certain periods, are so offensive, that persons living in the back of Clements Lane are compelled to keep their windows closed; the walls even of the ground which adjoins the yards [of neighbouring houses] are frequently seen reeking with fluid, which diffuses a most offensive smell. (Walker 1839: 150)

People living adjacent to the graveyards were at constant risk of inhaling the 'mephitic vapour' issuing from the ground which, in its undiluted form, was believed to cause instant death (Loudon 1843). Walker recounts numerous cautionary tales about people dropping down dead after inhaling only a single lungful of the fatal miasma. Moreover, the risks from miasmatic graveyards were more than physical. Walker believed that 'burial places in the neighbourhood of the living are ... the harbingers, if not the originators of pestilence; the cause, direct or indirect, of inhumanity, immorality and irreligion' (Walker 1839: ii).

The high mortality and morbidity rates of urban areas promoted improvements in many areas including sewerage and water supply, and the reform of prisons where typhus ('gaol fever') made a custodial sentence in some areas more likely to lead to death within a year than a sentence of execution.

The conflation of physical contagion and moral contagion is also typical of the period; the project of cleaning was more than just a medical one. As discussed above, 'dirt' and pollution had a complex meaning at this time – it was both a sign of and a cause of moral laxity. Cleanliness, ventilation and illumination were connected in people's minds with moral improvement and reform in a way that was more than metaphorical.

The old city centre graveyards were not only inadequate for health reasons, they could not meet the aesthetic, emotional and intellectual needs of the people. I have suggested elsewhere that emotional sensibilities demanded a more beautiful, sentimental landscape in which the bereaved could bury and remember their loved ones (Tarlow 2000). The need for a beautiful landscape was also reinforced by a desire for civic improvement. Just as new buildings, particularly civic buildings, were themselves architecturally distinguished and were supposed to be an ornament to the town as well as to serve their particular function, the suburban cemetery was a project of civic pride, a demonstration of the progressive character of the town and a facility that enabled the centre, including its churchyards, to appear clean and orderly. At the ceremony to mark the laying of the first stones of the cemetery chapels at Leicester's Welford Road cemetery, which took place on the same day as the opening of the town's new museum, the Mayor of Leicester commented that the cemetery would be 'an enduring and everlasting monument of enlightened patriotism and public usefulness' (Smallfield 1849: 9). He noted that the events of the day would in the future be understood as 'evidence of the anxiety of [the people of Leicester's] predecessors of the nineteenth century to leave the place of their nativity . . . in a little better condition than they found it in when they first began to take notice of what was passing round them' (Smallfield 1849: 7).

Turning to the cemetery itself, nineteenth-century townspeople saw not only a beautiful landscape and an innovation benefiting the health of the townspeople, but also a landscape of moral and intellectual improvement. The cemetery was a place to bury and visit the dead, certainly, but it was also a place of resort for the living. There they would be morally improved by the encounter with natural beauty – nature and the rural having superior moral qualities to the urban. Also by reading the religious and moral lessons inscribed on the stones, and by reflecting on their own mortality, religious sentiments would be encouraged and improved; they would be intellectually improved by reading the labels on the specimen trees; and their taste would be osmotically improved by the action of regarding the style of the most expensive memorials, positioned along the meandering paths. Considering the Glasgow Necropolis, George Blair wrote in his guidebook to the site that 'we go to epitaphs for useful lessons, and we meditate amid the tombs for improvement' (Blair 1857: 6). Cemeteries were among the first urban environments to be laid out with walks which were freely accessible to all. Where the early eighteenth century pleasure garden was a place for the

fashionable to see and be seen, and invariably had some sort of entrance charge to keep out the less desirable sort, the nineteenth century cemetery walk, like the walk through the arboretum, was intended for serious improvement of plebeian health, morality and taste, as well as offering an improving Sunday afternoon activity for the better sort. In the case of St James's cemetery in Liverpool, the walk through the former quarry site that later became the cemetery, was the first landscape element to be completed, before the site's function as a burial place was developed (Faulkner 2000).

Walking in the cemetery provided an opportunity for seemly exercise, away from the smells and pollutions – moral as well as physical – of the city centre. For paternalistic nineteenth-century Improvers, the cemetery, like the church, the Mechanics' Institute and the Sunday school, the latter two of which were also innovations of the period, provided the working man with an alternative place of resort to the pub. Unlike the pub, the visit to the cemetery was a family affair and promoted in many ways the 'improved' values that the middle classes sought to propagate.

Local and National

The eighteenth to nineteenth century saw the death of vernacular architecture across most of Britain. Of course, there are exceptions to this vast generalisation: the houses of the rural poor, especially in Scotland and Wales, often continued to be constructed in local styles (e.g. Peate 1946; Wiliam 1982), and in many areas, local materials were still used in building construction. But for middle-class and much working-class housing the Georgian house plan or something similar became almost ubiquitous (Newman 2001: 64). By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was very little regional distinctiveness in comparison with earlier periods. Looking back at the nineteenth century from an age of Barratt estates, such regional differences as exist in architectural style are immediately noticeable to us, but to anyone from the seventeenth century visiting nineteenth-century Britain, the repetition of town plans and building styles would have been striking, and that homogeneity would have been particularly marked in towns.

Royal Leamington Spa

Leamington Priors, which in 1838 took the name Royal Leamington Spa, 'emerged from its obscurity at the close of the eighteenth century, successively scaled every gradation of local government, and ere the meridian of the nineteenth was passed, gratified its noblest ambition by reaching the summit of municipal pomp and authority' (Dudley 1896: 23).

In 1801 the Warwickshire town of Leamington Priors had a population of 315 people; fifty years later the census recorded 15,723. Even at a time of rapid population increase, especially in urban areas, the transformation of Leamington Priors from small rural village to the broad-boulevarded resort of royalty was astonishing. The growth of the town was due to the medical reputation of its natural spring waters, given freely to the poor since at least the thirteenth century (Morley 1887–9: 2), but in 1784 the discovery of a new spring by entrepreneurial shoemaker Benjamin Satchwell and local publican William Abbott transformed the development of this otherwise unremarkable village.

The Enclosure Act for Leamington Priors was passed in 1767 and the award was made the following year. The preamble to the Act notes that the parish lands were 'capable of great improvement', and the Act itself specified not only the ownership of the new fields, and ruled that they should be 'hedged, ditched and fenced', but also detailed the establishment of new footpaths and roads, which were to have a minimum width of sixty feet (Dudley 1896: 30–2). The improvement of the rural landscape of Leamington Priors was typical of a Midlands parish at the time and enclosure seems to have proceeded without significant dissent. Nevertheless, the process of making roads, hedging fields and digging ditches took several years, and, says Dudley (1896: 47) 'by the time the work [of enclosure] was finished, visitors were beginning to arrive'. For if the history of Leamington's rural landscape was typical of many Midlands agricultural parishes, the development of the village was not, and the enclosure of its fields played only a minor part in the fortunes of the parish.

The natural spring water of Leamington Priors was beginning to draw more visitors even before Satchwell and Abbott's discovery of the second source. A Dr Kerr of Northampton regularly sent his patients to drink and bathe in Leamington's waters (Cave 1988: 12), even though when they arrived they had to bathe in an old tub belonging to the village pig keeper, filled with cold water and screened off by a clothes horse hung with a blanket. In 1794 a very favourable assessment of Leamington water was published in the *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* by a man called Lambe, which gave a further fillip to the transformation of an undistinguished agricultural village into the fashionable resort of Leamington Spa.

Abbott's Well and Bath House were constructed in 1786, replacing the tub and blanket with proper facilities for private bathing in warm water. Curtis's Baths were opened a few years later; Robbins's Baths in 1806 and Smart's Baths in 1806. These baths were successively more elaborate and substantial, but all were eclipsed by the grand Pump Room and Baths which opened in 1814 (Drew 1978: 18–21). A spacious Pump Room was surrounded on three sides by a colonnade supported by Doric pillars; this was flanked on both sides by bath houses. In the new Royal Pump Room and Baths visitors could take their cure in luxurious and fashionable surroundings.

Within a few years of the development of the first bath house, the number of visitors to Leamington was greater than the resident population, and finding accommodation for such numbers was becoming problematic. Most visitors had to stay in neighbouring Warwick and drive or ride down to Leamington on a daily basis. The New Inn (later the Bath Hotel) opened in the old town in 1793 and provided a small augmentation to the accommodation provided by the two village pubs, the Black Dog (of which William Abbott was the landlord) and the Old Bowling Green. In 1807 the Satchwell Buildings (Fig. 4.10) were erected behind the old post office to provide rooms for visitors, but they were far from adequate to the amount of additional space needed. Therefore Benjamin Satchwell and others decided to undertake a radical expansion of the town on the northern side of the Leam, and in 1808 the construction of the New Town began. With a self-conscious sense of historical occasion, the laying of the first stones was accompanied by church bells at a cost, recorded the parish clerk, of £1, 16s.

The development of Leamington New Town shows the confidence, ambition and civic sense of the town in the early nineteenth century. A place that twenty years before had only two roads and probably fewer than thirty thatched houses, could now lay out an avenue on a scale that would not be out of place in London or Edinburgh. The new road, the Parade, was the spine of a new plan

4.10. The Satchwell Buildings, constructed in 1807, were an early attempt to accommodate the rising visitor numbers at Leamington Spa, but were far from adequate. Extensive development subsequently took place on the other side of the River Leam from the old village.

of gridded streets laid out with substantial private houses, hotels, shops and amenities. The old and new towns were linked by a new, wide bridge completed in 1809. New buildings rapidly went up in both the old and the new town, many of them financed with the aid of the Leamington Building Society (Dudley 1896: 136), and although the buildings were privately designed and erected, they commonly used the same materials (stone, or white-painted stucco over brick). The buildings on the main streets were mostly tall (at least three storeys) and imposing. Symmetrical façades, front doors elaborated with steps, porticos and pediments, decorative 'scrolled' corbels supporting window sills and lintels and so on signal the universal adherence to some sort of a neo-classical style.

There was a limit to how much time any visitor could spend bathing in or drinking the salty waters. Very soon other leisure amenities began to appear to fill the hours and empty the purses of visitors. In 1811, new Assembly rooms were opened, and then eclipsed by the grand Pump Room of the Royal Baths a few years after, which acted as a social space as well as housing the drinking fountain. In 1819 the Parthenon opened on Bath Street, with reading rooms on the ground floor and a ballroom above (Clarke 1947: 35–6; Fig. 4.11). Five years earlier Leamington's first theatre, somewhat bombastically named 'The Temple of Drama', had opened nearby and held numerous concerts and theatrical performances over the ensuing years. In fine weather visitors could walk in the gardens laid out adjacent to most of the baths, or stroll down the Holly Walk

4.11. The Parthenon, Leamington Spa, 1819 combined reading rooms and a ballroom.

(presented to the town in 1829) or along the banks of the Leam, where a proper walk was constructed in 1821.

In the evenings, the hotels, houses and places of amusement were illuminated, at first by oil lamps and candles and later by gas. Mr Dawkes, the parish clerk records; 'Lamps lighted for the first time by gas from Warwick was [sic] on the 29th day of October, 1823, in the New Town; in number 18 [The Parade] that evening.' Dudley (1896: 177) also dates the first appearance of public gas lighting to 1823 when eighteen gas lamps were erected on the Parade. However, Clarke (1947) cites papers relating to the construction of a gas works in Leamington itself in 1819, and letters to show that the gas works was soliciting guarantees of payment for lights in Clemens St, Bath St and High St at that time. In any case, certainly by the mid 1820s, Leamington had lighting in the streets as well as in the hotels, institutions of entertainment and the better private homes. By 1850 the town had 412 public gas lamps (Clark 1850: 23). In this, Leamington was typical of British provincial towns. Although there had been public gas lighting in central London since 1807, only fifteen cities had gas plants by 1820. By 1850, however, most major towns and cities had piped gas supplying street lamps, public buildings and the houses of the rich (Watt 1999: 27). Gas lighting was still too expensive for most private homes until the later nineteenth century (1999: 27).

Leamington New Town was constructed with broad, paved central streets and flagged footways, but the streets of the old town were erratically surfaced. In 1825 an Improvement Act (the Leamington Act) was passed for 'paving, or flagging, lighting, cleansing, watching, and improving the town of Leamington Priors'. Typically the provision for town policing ('watching') was not separated from the enhancement of the material aspects of town planning. Streets and open areas should be clean, light and safe. As discussed earlier, darkness, dirtiness and crime were closely associated, and treated as connected problems. Even several years later the state of Leamington's streets was not universally admired: a flyer produced in 1847 by one Thomas Tompson and now in the County Record Office demands that the Committee of 21 (Commissioners responsible for town planning and improvement) be hanged until '*quite dead*', and demands answers to a number of questions about the state of the town, including: 'What sort of doctor is to be introduced into the Town, to render the walk over this new flagging comfortable and easy to Visitors and the Public at Large? N.B. It has been suggested *the shortening of one leg*! But then it becomes a question – how will *the return* walk be performed?' However, Tompson seems to have been in a minority: the general consensus of both residents and visitors was that in point of paving, illumination, cleanliness and elegance, the main streets of Leamington were a source of civic pride.

A survey from 1850 provides an interesting insight into the disparity between the conditions of the wealthy and public parts of Leamington and the

back streets inhabited by its poor tenants. George Clark's *Report to the General Board of Health* contains the results of his inspection of the town with particular regard to the need for hygienic reform. By the middle of the nineteenth century most of the main streets had sewers both for foul waste and storm drainage, although the drains had been laid at different times and were not part of a co-ordinated town plan for waste disposal (Clark 1850: 17). Fresh water from wells was piped to some houses from 1832–3, and by 1850 some seven miles of pipe ran through nineteen streets in the old town and twenty-nine streets in the new. However, this supplied only 170 houses with running water, a tiny proportion of the total population of Leamington. Most houses still had to collect water from wells and public fountains, or even directly from the River Leam which, despite having been cleaned, widened and straightened by the Board of Health in 1840, was soon polluted and smelly again.

In the vicinity of the best houses were also many of the worst; the poor hygiene appalled the visiting inspector. In 1850 there were eighteen 'undrained privies with cesspools and accumulations of refuse' in Guy Street; sixteen in Tavistock Street; thirty-one in the Market Place; seventeen in Lansdowne Street; forty in King Street and thirty in Queen Street. Moreover, these back streets and courts were 'ill-arranged, blocked up with cross walls and fences' (thus impeding proper ventilation, still considered essential to the prevention of disease). Slaughter-houses and pig sties were frequent among the residential courts; Clark lists 34 slaughter houses in town and estimates 800 pig sties at private houses. In addition the churchyard was over-full and situated in an 'objectionable' position surrounded by houses and should be closed down and replaced by a proper public cemetery. All of these things would be considered dangerous to health as well as offensive smelling and aesthetically damaging. As discussed earlier, there was an effort in improved towns to relocate noxious industries and activities outside the town. Clark's survey reveals that by the mid nineteenth century Leamington was not far advanced in that process. The problems associated with the presence among the houses of the poor of offensive activities like pig-keeping and the burial of the dead, and with the absence of proper facilities for the disposal of waste were not only physical: 'The unfailing effect of the state of things above described' wrote Clark (1850: 27) 'is to foster epidemic diseases, and thus to induce pauperism and a low condition, both moral and physical, among the labouring classes'. Nevertheless, their relocation had to wait until the second half of the nineteenth century.

The history of civic improvement in Leamington reveals a split between those who saw the aesthetic improvement of the town as a means to encourage visitors and make money, and those who saw it as the outward manifestation of an ideological position. Benjamin Satchwell, one of the founders of modern Leamington Spa, not only discovered and developed, with William Abbott, Abbott's well, but also instigated a number of social and cultural reforms

and improvements. He established Leamington's first Friendly Society, 'The Fountain of Hospitality', in 1777. Their *Book of Rules* describes their mission, in terms that would have been familiar to medieval benefactors, 'to glorify God, to comfort and assist each other as Christian Brethren to provide for the sick, the Lame, the Blind, the Prisoners, the Widows, the Orphans, the Infirmities of old age and to Bury the dead' (Dudley 1896: 84). Satchwell went on in 1806 to found the Leamington Spa charity which eventually became the Warneford Hospital in 1832 (Dudley 1896: 197). The charity provided free hospital beds, medical attention, access to the baths and a small stipend to poor invalids for residential stays of up to a month in Leamington. Interestingly, no distinction was made by the Fountain of Hospitality between deserving victims of misfortune and culpable prisoners: all are listed as recipients of charity. Nor is the charity offered to the poor of an ameliorative type, instead it is closer to the old-fashioned aim of relieving distress than to the modern goal of reforming society. Indeed, charitable foundations like Satchwell's flourished throughout the eighteenth and particularly the nineteenth centuries, commonly with a religious purpose, alongside initiatives aimed at transforming the world rather than attending to its victims. But in his vision for the town of Leamington, Satchwell was an expansive and imaginative Improver. Like Robert Owen, he was neither born nor educated into what is generally thought of as the 'improving' middle class. His father was a shoemaker, although as holders of a front pew in the church the Satchwells had been one of the better families in Leamington village.

The possibility of effecting a permanent change in the condition of the poor was not explored in Leamington until long after Satchwell's death. A new parish Poor House of the reforming kind was opened in 1830, but operated as a workhouse for only nine years before the parish joined the Warwick Union and sent all its paupers to the new Warwick workhouse. The improving work of the poorhouse building, however, continued as it became the premises of the National School for the children of the poor. Satchwell and most of his contemporaries directed their improving energies at the physical environment (and at self-improvement: Satchwell was a great autodidact and amateur poet). The improvement of Leamington was directed at the places, amenities and institutions of the wealthy middle class and the areas frequented by visitors to the town. However, despite the school, workhouse and hospital, the poor of Leamington benefited little from the town's improvements.

Clark's report recognises the high standards of order and construction in the principal streets of the town:

> The main streets are broad, straight, and composed of handsome private dwellings, shops, hotels, and public buildings. The roadways are well-maintained and clean, the footways broad and properly

> flagged, and the crossings and gutters neatly made, and in all respects in good order. (1850: 4–5)

However:

> The praise due to the public streets cannot be extended to the alleys, courts, and back premises of houses under *10l.* rental. These are almost invariably unpaved or very badly pitched without proper gutters or drains, and in a very filthy state. (1850: 22)

The case of Leamington illustrates that urban improvement did not necessarily involve philanthropy; if the appearance of an 'improved' town could be generated by appropriate attention to the 'front' parts of the town – its hotels, main shopping streets, leisure amenities and public facilities, walks, parks and so on, the real conditions in the streets unseen by visitors and most middle-class residents were not much considered by many residents. 'Improvement' was an aesthetic as well as a philosophy, and there was cultural capital to be gained from appearing to be an improving sort of person or place without necessarily embracing all the philosophical and moral aspects that striving for profound 'Improvement' might really entail. Most landlords were simply not prepared to meet the capital expenditure involved in supplying cheap rental properties with running water and proper sewerage, and the authorities were powerless to compel them. Even if some public nuisance resulted, such as offensive smells or foul water emanating from these properties, only the tenants would be liable. Clark was not surprised by this neglect: in every town he had inspected where water works existed landlords had refused to lay service pipes for either water supply or mains drainage to the houses of the poor (1850: 26). The frustration felt by more philanthropic reformers at the selfish failure of many capitalist developers to embrace the larger spirit of Improvement on a voluntary basis prompted the more far-reaching powers of state and local government to compel adherence to certain minimum standards in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

By the time of Clark's inspection, the passing in 1848 of a Nuisance Removal Act had already begun to have an effect on the town: 'Everywhere I found evidences of recent cleanliness; privies patched up and cleansed out, gutters swept, and ashpits emptied' (Clark 1850: 12) The Nuisance Removal Act itself is evidence of growing state regulation of private conduct and the subordination of the individual freedom so highly valued by Enlightenment philosophers, to civic or communal good. At the same time the standardisation of service provision by the local authority in place of individual and private arrangements that had begun in the levying of rates for improvements in the early nineteenth century, was further strengthened. Amendments to the Leamington Priors Act in 1829 specified new by-laws to regulate the conduct of individuals in the public spaces of

Leamington, and in 1850 added to the powers of the local authority, enabling the construction of reservoirs and waterworks, new drains and sewers, a new cemetery and the acquisition of the Leamington Priors Gas-light and Coke Company by the Leamington Priors Improvement Commissioners for public use.

Royal Leamington Spa was in some ways exceptional, although its development has similarities with other spa resort towns such as Buxton and Harrogate. Nevertheless, the vision, ambition and pace of improvement was typical of many towns and cities of the period. In Leamington it is clear that the physical improvement of the town environment was also connected to the moral and social improvement of its citizens. However, efforts directed specifically at transforming the conditions of the poor had barely started, even by 1850 (although the second half of the nineteenth century saw strenuous efforts in this direction, mostly co-ordinated by national or local government). This was not the case everywhere, however, and even in Leamington, the foundation of improving institutions such as the workhouse and school indicated some desire to raise the conditions of the working people. The period 1750–1850, particularly the second half of that period, was crucial in the development of truly radical attempts to improve and transform that most intractable of social problems: the poor.

FIVE:

IMPROVING THE PEOPLE

As we have seen, attempts to improve the city were rarely limited to the material substance of buildings, roads and bridges. A central and often explicit aim of urban reform was the transformation of the people. That this could be accomplished through alteration of living environments was an important belief of the period and a necessary foundation for the reform of housing, and the urban scene more generally in the nineteenth century.

Since an improved people was fundamental to any project of improving the nation, a number of strategies for reducing and containing social problems, and for raising the material and moral conditions of the people, were developed. One rather passive strategy was to concentrate on improving the middle classes and their manufactures, environments and behaviours, in the belief that the provision of a model for emulation would encourage all the social orders to pursue the same ends, or that members of an improved middle class would assume responsibility for reforming the conditions and practices of their employees. But other, more active and paternalistic strategies were also pursued.

In the eighteenth century improvement at an individual level was accomplished through attention to the self and owed nothing to intervention by other people. Numerous texts provided advice and precepts by which the reader (usually assumed to be middle class) could work at their own improvement (see the table in Chapter One). The self might be improved through the development of skills and accomplishments, or through disciplining their own character and behaviour.

The reform of the other is a different matter. From the last decades of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth is a fascinating period in the history of what has been called 'moral reform'. Voluntary and charitable organisations were the dominant force in instituting improvements intended to better the conditions of the poor, the criminal, the morally lax and the disenfranchised. However, these organisations did not share a common philosophy, course of action or political position and, as Roberts (2005) has recently demonstrated, different organisational philosophies prevailed at different times over the period.

Before 1795 the most successful organisations were social, secular and often, like the Philanthropic Society founded in 1788, concerned with moulding the children of 'vicious and dishonest' poor families into respectable skilled workers (Roberts 2005: 55). During the war years of the early nineteenth century, religious and conservative moralists predominated. Organisations promoted an evangelical view of virtue and vice often through bringing prosecutions on individual infractors. Nineteenth-century reformers differed from their predecessors both in paying attention to whole groups instead of 'random individual members of sin-afflicted humanity' (2005: 57), and in their interest in 'professional expertise and "businesslike" techniques of social management' (2005: 95) rather than acts of individual charity. This tendency to look to more programmatic and sociological solutions blossomed fully after the 1870s, but can be seen to grow throughout the century. Indeed after the Napoleonic wars more power was given to secular state authorities in matters of public morality (Roberts 2005: 97). Alongside attempts to control morality went liberal and compassionate causes like the anti-slavery campaign, Catholic emancipation and early animal rights movements. Roberts outlines the rise of experts and professionals in the mid century, that accompanied the success of more socially inclusive associations such as temperance societies. Gradually moral reform became less paternalistic, more impersonal and eventually a belief in the empowerment of individuals even at the lower end of the social scale.

This chapter considers two of the main approaches to the improvement of the labouring classes. The first approach is housing reform, mostly a nineteenth-century phenomenon. The reformers were particularly concerned about the sanitary conditions of working-class places, and with overcrowding, particularly when it meant that children and adults of different sexes slept in the same rooms, a direct cause of immorality and vice. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the things that the middle class most wanted to change about the conditions of the poor were not the things that most upset the working classes themselves. The second development, also a predominantly nineteenth-century one, is the foundation and growth of reforming institutions. This chapter considers three of them: the workhouse, the prison and the Mechanics' Institute.

Improving the People

Social science, understood as the attempt not only to describe and understand human society but to change it, developed in Britain in the early nineteenth century. It was built upon Enlightenment progressivism and belief in rational change, allied with environmentalism, 'i.e. the belief that the environment in which people live constitutes a set of interrelated influences which shape their opportunities and experiences' (Driver 1988: 276). Unlike divinely ordained

stations, or inborn psychological factors, the environment was something that humans could reasonably expect to change.

Later in the nineteenth century, working-class problems such as drunkenness, crime and immorality were frequently understood as the result of 'bad character' – an inherent problem that certain individuals had criminality and anti-social tendencies in their make-up. This approach fuelled the development of racist anthropologies and sociologies, which saw characteristics as inborn rather than cultural. It also underlay approaches to social deviance that relied on phrenology or physiognomy to detect criminal or deviant 'types' (Cowling 1989) and ultimately to 'solutions' such as eugenics. But in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the dominant approach to social deviancy related social problems to cultural, and thus mutable, factors.

Whereas middle-class improvement could be addressed through books and facilitated by local societies, such as the flourishing Literary and Philosophical Societies, and the responsibility for improvement could be assumed by the individual, the improvement of the poor was assumed to require more coercive and strategic intervention. If social problems were believed to be produced by an unsuitable environment, either directly or because a bad environment promoted sin, changes to the people could be brought about by alterations to that unsuitable environment. This chapter will consider the environmentalist approaches to the problems of pauperism and crime through the highly controlled, closed environments of the workhouse and prison or reformatory. (Admittedly prisons and workhouses were not always seen as places of reform; they also functioned as, and were sometimes seen as, places of retribution or deterrence.) Bringing problematic members of the labouring classes into these places was a solution that was also used to address delinquency and degeneracy. However, trying to rehabilitate those whose bad environments had led to their moral failure was an imperfect solution. The preferable course of action was to eradicate the bad environment that bred these problems in the first place and replace it with one designed to produce the kind of men and women who would constitute an improved society. Such was the intention of the housing reformers, and often, also, the indirect or secondary aim of the reformers of rural and urban environments more generally, since physical cleanliness and beauty was related, as we have seen, to moral health.

The problems with the environments of the labouring poor were many. They involved the living and particularly sleeping places of the poor; overcrowding; lack of light and ventilation; inadequate segregation of activities such as work and home and especially a promiscuous mingling of male and female, adult and child in the home. Implicit in urban housing reform was an ideal type of housing which resembled normal middle-class dwellings of the time. The middle-class home was separate from the workplace (although this separation was never absolute, and sometimes merely notional – see Davidoff and Hall 1987). Within it there was spatial and social segregation between adults and

children and the interaction of men and boys with women and girls was controlled spatially (through separate bedrooms) and through rules of etiquette (requiring for example the withdrawal of women from male company at particular moments, and establishing female-dominated rules of visiting). The middle-class home-owner aspired to a dwelling that was clean, light and airy. Reforming the homes of the working class meant bringing them more closely into line with established middle-class ideals.

Driver identifies two main prongs to environmental attempts at reformation of the urban poor: first, efforts to rid the city of its 'rookeries' – dense agglomerations of narrow winding streets, courts and alleys which were hard for an outsider to penetrate or navigate; and second, intervention in the working class household. Both the rookery and the interior of the working-class home were normally beyond the control and in fact beyond the supervision of the middle class. The middle classes, consequently, displayed great anxiety about the uncontrolled evils that could be breeding in those places, 'indeed, their obsession with hidden recesses, narrow turnings, dark alleys and shadowy corners was quite overwhelming' (Driver 1988: 281).

In the previous chapter we have seen how urban street layouts, even in poorer areas, were altered at this time to open up dwelling places to breezes and to organise homes by number and street name. How much workers' housing was provided by employers and how much by slum landlords is disputed. Belford (2004) points out that a disproportionate amount of attention in the literature is paid to philanthropic, rural settlements like Saltaire and New Lanark. In fact, he argues, most workers lived in privately built accommodation owned by exploitative landlords and developed organically in the expanding cities. However, an assessment of the workers' housing provided for those employed in the Swansea copper industry has suggested that about half of workers were accommodated in reasonably good quality employer-provided housing and half in (as a rule, poorer quality and more expensive) private tenancies (Hughes 2004).

Encouragement of, or coercion into, morally and culturally improved ways of living did not stop at the front door. Merely relocating the homes of the people into straight, well-ventilated streets, and reshaping the urban environment by introducing healthy open spaces and facilities for respectable recreation was not enough. Changes in working practices towards a factory system meant that for many employees the daily face-to-face contact with an employer that could occur in a small workshop, or on a farm, no longer took place. For most factory workers and labourers, the relationship between employer and employee was increasingly distant and anonymous. This presented a problem for those employers who considered the moral, spiritual and social welfare of their employees to be part of their duty, as had traditionally been the case with the estate farm or small-scale workshop. Various attempts were made by employers to supervise their employees, even outside of working hours, and enjoin upon them

a moral and improved life. The siting of workers' housing within view of the owner's or overseer's house was one way to do this, as at Belper, Cromford and Styal (Palmer and Neaverson 1998: 6–7), although it is easy to overstate the frequency and the efficacy of this sort of planning. Some reformers also tried to ensure that the internal organisation of their tenants' homes contributed towards an improved moral climate. The same principles that guided the housing of paupers and prisoners in workhouses and penitentiaries were also invoked in the construction of domestic dwellings for the labouring poor. Segregation, cleanliness and seemliness were the dominant principles. Many middle-class reformers were shocked by the sleeping arrangements in traditional homes of the poor, characterised by over-crowding and a lack of segregation. Here adults and children slept in the same room, and even sometimes in the same bed. Even worse, in rural areas, people and animals might share the same building, and in parts of Scotland and Wales this was the norm. Overcrowding in Scottish homes was particularly bad, and this including rural as well as urban homes. A survey of traditional Hebridean 'blackhouses' on the island of Barra suggests that in the early nineteenth century households averaging around eight people, according to migration records of the period, were living in houses of only 28 m^2 (Branigan and Merrony 2000: 10). This, notes the authors, is 'gross overcrowding' even in comparison with other peasant societies, where 10 m^2 per person is a widely acknowledged 'norm' (2000: 10). Some Hebridean blackhouses housed the family's animals as well as the people.

All the business of family life, including sickness, sexual congress, death and even giving birth thus happened in the presence of other family members. Visiting Wales in the 1770s, Nathaniel Kent wrote: 'It is shocking ... that the wife should have no private place to be brought to bed in'. (Cited in Lowe 1977: 22.)

Therefore when the tiny two-room houses of Nantygwenith Lane, Georgetown, Merthyr Tydfil, were constructed in 1841, the socially minded builders included a recessed area which could be curtained off to give a degree of privacy to the adult inhabitants (Lowe 1977: 22). Nevertheless, such provision was not always made, and even well into the nineteenth century, new houses were being constructed for the poor which made no provision for privacy. That the conditions Kent observed were still common seventy years later is attested by the common practice of poor women to seek admission to the workhouse when approaching the end of their pregnancies, where designated 'lying-in' rooms and medical attention could be obtained.

The Rural Workforce

The unsatisfactory living conditions of the labouring poor were not limited to urban areas. The reforms in agricultural practice documented in Chapters Two

and Three required a great deal of work. The construction of new walls, laying new hedges, clearing scrub and trees, digging drains, spreading marl and manure, building roads, farmhouses and outbuildings and keeping fields weed-free all took a great deal of time and effort. The traditional view of the Agricultural Revolution, that animal power and automation displaced human labour on the land and thus generated a proletariat who formed the basis for the Industrial Revolution, is both right and wrong. The number of people working on the land actually increased over this period, as absolute yields also increased. However, as a *proportion* of the total population the rural workforce declined, as the total population of Britain increased rapidly. Nevertheless, not all those who were displaced from secure positions on farms or from the cultivation of their own small holdings went to the cities. For the remaining workforce there was a change to their traditional terms of employment. The improving landlord required a 'flexible' workforce, who could be hired, often by the day or for a particular job, to carry out his schemes. By hiring labour for less than a year the number of potential claimants of parish relief, eligibility for which required that a person be resident in the parish for a minimum period of one year, could also be kept down. Since the costs of relief were met by poor rates paid by the farmer, short-term hire appealed to his financial self-interest in more ways than one.

The conditions of the rural poor varied greatly and depended on a number of factors. Agricultural workers in northern England were, mostly, better paid and better supplied with work than those in southern England, while those in parts of Wales and northern Scotland were terribly short of work and often lived in appalling conditions and wretched poverty. British rural society contained many gradations of social position, so the 'rural workforce' was not a homogenous group: established tenants, small landowners, rural artisan and professional classes, skilled and unskilled labourers, 'respectable' poor and less respectable paupers stood in complicated relationships with each other and would have had different experiences of social relations as well as actual wealth (Snell 1985). The lives of the rural poor would also be affected by whether they lived in an 'open' or 'close' parish. The latter was one which was entirely owned by a single family; the former one which was in the ownership of a number of individuals and families. The owner of a close parish might exercise a high degree of control over the lives of the parishioners. The thriving growth of open parishes, in comparison to the relative stagnation of close ones in this period (Mingay 1994: 33–4), suggests that the lower and middle classes valued the freedom to change their conditions and follow their own convictions as well as making their own decisions about their economic activities. By the late eighteenth century the traditional deference of the rural social order was neither so widespread nor so complete as is sometimes claimed, and dependence on the patronage of a landowner had become irksome to many from the traditionally

servant classes. Snell notes that the possibility of acquiring ownership of land and escaping subservience, for example, was greatly valued by rural workers, according to the letters that emigrants sent back to their families still in England (Snell 1985: 9–14). This kind of autonomy, hard for the poor man to achieve anywhere in Britain, was impossible in close parishes.

Neither is it clear what constitutes either an improvement or a deterioration of standards of living for the rural poor. In his study of the changing conditions and experiences of the rural poor of southern England, Keith Snell argues from letters and documents produced by the workers themselves that lack of security was of greater concern to the labouring poor than 'real' wage levels. As we shall see, privacy and segregation seem to have been less desirable improvements for the poor than for middle-class reformers. The second half of this chapter will consider in more detail the provisions of the various poor laws, but it was important throughout the period for the poor to be able to demonstrate continued residence or 'settlement' in a parish in order to be eligible for poor relief in times of need. If they were hired by the week or by the day, workers often lacked the security of 'belonging' to a parish for welfare purposes. Although this was not necessarily important when fit and in work, the labouring classes valued the assistance of the parish in old age, sickness and unemployment, as well as for widows or abandoned wives. Security, and freedom from dependence on the capricious and ephemeral patronage of a landowner, was a central concern of most of those in the lower part of the economic pile. There is also evidence that agricultural workers regretted the social distanciation involved in the transformation of employment practice from 'living-in' with the farmer's family to a more alienated relationship of waged day-labour or piece work. William Cobbett, interestingly, laments this change in terms of material culture, noting ruefully that the long table at which an extended household including resident farm servants would share meat and pudding has given way to symbols of class aspiration: 'Many wine-decanters and wine-glasses and a "dinner-set", and a "breakfast-set", and "desert-knives" [sic] . . . That long table could not share in the work of the decanters and the dinner set'. (Cobbett 1967 (1830): 226–9.) Cobbett, a Tory polemicist, was convinced that the social aspirations of the new kind of farmer were affecting traditional relationships since the money saved by employing workers on casual rates and paying them in (meagre) cash wages was used in accumulating the material belongings required by their pretensions to gentility.

From the mid eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century there were a number of episodes of significant rural unemployment; this was subject to much local and regional variation. The shortage of work went largely unrecognised by social commentators of the time, who chose instead to blame the poor themselves for their own poverty, attributing it to laziness, lack of intelligence or aspiration or failure to embrace the economic and technological changes of the

period (all rhetorical strategies which have continued long after the nineteenth century and are still sometimes deployed for political ends).

Contemporary commentators rarely distinguished between what was good for the countryside and what was good for its people: Improvement was Improvement. Especially in the earlier part of the period under study here, before about 1800, improving the productivity of the land and improving the conditions of those who work it amounted to the same thing. For 'improving' writers it was axiomatic that agricultural reforms would benefit everyone in the rural world, for who could fail to benefit if their labour were made more productive, the land they worked consolidated, and they themselves liberated from the ignorant conservatism of their communities and the squalor of their habitations? Nevertheless, from the late eighteenth century, the conditions of country-dwellers began to attract notice and publications lamenting their poverty, ignorance, perceived failure to take advantage of the possibilities to better themselves and, sometimes, moral depravity began to appear (Mingay 1994: 94).

The housing of the rural poor is probably the last place that vernacular architecture persisted in Britain, with distinctive styles, materials and layouts employed in country areas until the twentieth century. Nevertheless, in most parts of Britain the living conditions of the labouring rural population as well as those of their urban neighbours, was of concern to reformers. The tiny, overcrowded rooms, frequent presence of animals, inadequate sanitation, earth floors, shoddiness and scarcity of furnishings are regular observations from all over Britain by the authors of the General Views and Statistical Accounts.

Poverty in the Town

In towns, by contrast, despite the smallness of most workers' houses, and the shoddiness of their construction, especially in the 'back-to-back' urban terraces where even external walls were sometimes only one brick thick, even the cheapest housing usually made provision for some specialisation of living space, with two, three or even four separate rooms the norm. In fact, back-to-back houses have probably had a worse press than they deserve, mostly because of Victorian reformers' horror at their lack of through-ventilation. However, back-to-backs may have related to earlier local traditions in the north of England (Newman 2001: 94), and were not necessarily worse than other workers' housing (Girouard 1990).

The problem was that back-to-backs, like other workers' houses, were designed for a notional household of two married adults with a small number of dependent children. In practice, however, the composition of working-class households only rarely fitted that model. Commonly, dependent older relatives, various children, not necessarily the offspring of the tenant, and frequently lodgers as well occupied these houses. The 1841 census returns for the inhabitants of

Upper New Rank, Blaenavon, for example, show that these three-roomed houses were occupied by anything between two and twelve people, including lodgers. As Lowe notes, 'the three-room house could not be adequate for such a diversity of age, sex and family relationship' (1977: 31). Thus, although the house builders might have had ideas about what constituted a decent house, the ways in which these buildings were inhabited in practice thwarted the expectations or ambitions of their designers. This is clearly demonstrated in the case of the housing provided for the mill workers at Egerton and New Eagley mills near Bolton in the first half of the nineteenth century (Timmins 2000). The Ashworth brothers, the mill-owners, owned and built much of the housing for their workforce, and it has often been regarded as of particularly high quality of its type and period. In fact, the Ashworths provided a range of houses, from simple two-up, two-down houses with a small back kitchen, to four-bedroom houses with at least two downstairs rooms, a backyard with privy and ash pit and a kitchen with a water boiler, an oven and a slopstone for washing. Additionally, some of them might have had gas lighting and even piped water from the 1820s and 30s, although there are doubts about the extent and date of such provision (Timmins 2000: 23, 29). Nevertheless, both field observations and rate values confirm that the biggest and best houses in Egerton were Ashworth ones, although at least a half of the Ashworth cottages were of a comparable standard to other, speculatively or privately built ones there. What is interesting is first the paternalistic concerns of the Ashworths, and second the degree to which their values failed to coincide with those of their employees.

Henry Ashworth explained in 1842 that he and his brother had, since an epidemic of 'fever' among the cottagers in 1830, undertaken periodic inspections of their cottages to ensure that standards of cleanliness were being maintained. Their concern for cleanliness is not surprising at this time, nor was the intrusiveness of house inspections uncommon, especially for the tenants of employer-built housing. During these inspections the Ashworths were concerned to note that the provision of only two bedrooms meant that unmarried children of both sexes had to share a bedroom. Struck by the 'indelicacy' of such a situation, they resolved to build larger houses, with three or four bedrooms. The Ashworths' worries about cleanliness and sexual decency, for them inextricable from the provision of private and segregated, gendered spaces, are typical of their age and class. However, they were not widely shared by their tenants. A visitor to the millworkers' communities in the 1840s observed that even in the larger houses, boys and girls did not generally sleep in separate rooms. Further enquiries by Timmins suggest that even families with relatively large incomes did not necessarily choose to live in bigger houses or, if they did, to use the space to ensure gender segregation (2000: 34–5). He suggests that cultural attitudes towards space and privacy differed between the middle and working classes. In fact, for the tenants, the heterogeneity and crowdedness of a house was not

necessarily unpleasant; nor were spaciousness and gender segregation sufficiently important to them that they would willingly bear the extra cost. Bigger houses were no more in demand than small ones, and where they were, the extra room or rooms were likely to have been used to accommodate a lodger and generate some extra income, while the family still slept together in one or two rooms. 'A clash of contemporary attitudes between social classes on the desirability of privacy within households', notes Timmins (2000: 34), 'is only too evident'.

Keith Matthews's (1999) archaeological analysis of a nineteenth-century slum 'court' in Chester demonstrates the disjuncture between middle-class values of cleanliness, privacy and segregation and the lived experience of the inhabitants of Hamilton Place. Here, women and children participated, sometimes informally, in 'work'. Their workplace was not necessarily separate from the home; tiny forges found in the yard attest to informal child labour in the domestic context. The houses had few rooms, but were inhabited by large numbers of adults and children (including illegitimate offspring), some of whom were related and others lodgers. Despite the moral and religious valorisation of cleanliness, houses were not connected to foul water drains until the early twentieth century, and there was no supply of piped water until some time around 1870: standpipes in the yards (as well as a privy block) are marked on the 1874 Ordnance Survey map. As Matthews observes, under such conditions the opportunities for modest bathing (or indeed privacy in any activity) must have been limited and we should imagine that different attitudes to privacy, the body, and 'seemly' relationships would probably have prevailed among the poor.

By the mid nineteenth century, many moral reformers had come to be particularly occupied by the question of sobriety. As well as reform proceeding from the Enlightenment humanism that had characterised most of the reforms of the eighteenth century, by the middle of the nineteenth century, an equally great force for change was the religious 'moral' reform, expressed particularly through the missionary campaigns of evangelical Christianity. In the temperance movement reformers from both the secular humanist and the evangelical Christian wings of the reform movement, who might not otherwise agree on very much, were joined in the attempt to eradicate drunkenness among the working classes. 'Ideal' workers' communities of the nineteenth century were therefore often designed to include an institute, a church, a school, perhaps even a small park or a space for wholesome family recreation, but no pub. This is the case at Bourneville in Birmingham for example, planned by the Quaker Cadburys. However, reformers' ideas of what would be best for the working classes did not always match with working-class people's own preferences, as Matthews's work in Chester demonstrates.

A similar tension between middle-class ideas of civic and residential propriety and working-class ways of using spaces was observable in the notorious

'Crofts' district of central Sheffield (Belford 2001, 2004). As the name suggests, the crofts were some of the earliest bits of agricultural land to be laid out as streets when Sheffield began its expansion in the seventeenth century. By the late eighteenth century the Crofts was a very populous area, crowded with houses, industrial buildings and shops. By the 1830s middle-class commentators were united in their condemnation of what they believed to be (sometimes without having personally visited the area) the dirt, immorality, high crime and poor housing and sanitation of the Crofts. Maps showed the Crofts' streets to be narrow and crooked, in distinction to newer suburbs, like Alsop Fields on the south-east of Sheffield which had been laid out with straight and regular streets. As Belford comments, by the middle of the nineteenth century, '[t]he "crofts" . . . became an easy target for middle-class reformers keen to identify slum areas ripe for improvement' (2001: 107–8). However, Belford suggests that the middle-class reading of the 'Crofts' as slum was partial and rested on particular 'improved' preconceptions about what decent urban spaces should be like. The inhabitants of the Crofts, being for the most part temporary residents, immigrants from rural Hallamshire or further afield (the area had a substantial Irish population in the nineteenth century), did not share those ideas, he argues. Instead the space of the streets and yards, around which domestic and industrial structures were built was organised into social, familial and industrial locales where work, leisure and surveillance were carried out. Unlike the regular plans and uniform plots of new buildings, built along wide and straight streets in smart parts of town, new houses and industrial structures, such as furnaces, were built in the Crofts by filling in spaces behind and between the streets, opening onto yards accessed from the street. Belford's arguments makes sense in the context of an increasingly specialised urban space in the nineteenth century. The profound separation between city centre (work, male) and suburb (home, family, female) as described by DiZerega Wall with reference to New York, reached its extreme in the century following 1850 (although the 'separate spheres' gender ideology was never as pronounced in Britain as in the States), but by the early nineteenth century, with the construction of middle-class suburbs around Sheffield, as around other large cities, the promiscuous mingling of work, home, family and stranger that occurred in areas like the Crofts would already appear indecent.

Middle-class notions about the organisation of space in the town involved, in addition to the removal of work from the home, the provision of clean, light and wide streets, individual bounded plots facing onto the street, and a clear overall 'plan' for organisational layout. But away from the smart parts of the centre, and from the new suburbs, areas like the Crofts did not appear to share those aspirations. Of course, it could be the case that the inhabitants of the Crofts did aspire to the condition of their richer neighbours, but were simply too poor to realise them. Undoubtedly that was sometimes the case, but the presence of some relatively affluent owners in smart houses which they had chosen to build

in the Crofts in the late eighteenth century suggests that the relationship between class, values and aspirations might have been more complicated.

Sheffield had, and still has, a reputation as a radical city, but Belford suggests that middle-class values were resisted in more subtle and everyday ways than the overt performative resistance of trade unions and socialists. He notes evidence of covert smoking, drinking and gaming from archaeological sites around Sheffield: fragments of wine bottles and clay pipes recovered in large number from a building at a rural grinding works south of Sheffield, apparently in a position from which anyone approaching could be seen well in advance so that illicit activity could be halted and work resumed, if necessary, before any confrontation took place. Similarly a mid nineteenth-century cutlery factory had a cribbage board drilled into one of its workbenches – presumably for secret card games during work hours (Belford 2001).

Despite class-based differences in experience and expectation of housing, over the course of the nineteenth century, housing for the working people of Britain did get, objectively, larger and better in terms of utilities and construction. In the second half of the nineteenth century certain minimum standards of housing were specified by law and became enforceable under a series of local by-laws. Nevertheless, as Dewhurst (1989: 133–4) indicates, by-laws tended to enforce existing good practice rather than introduce totally new requirements. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the best housing practice was generally exemplified by philanthropic employers, who thus helped to raise housing standards generally. Although employers might provide accommodation for their workers for all kinds of reasons, including their own need to attract and retain labour, especially in remote locations, a desire to turn a profit from rental income, or to exercise control over the lives of their workers, a genuine philanthropic desire to ameliorate the conditions of the workers, albeit in paternalistic way, was also an evident motivating factor (Dewhurst 1989: 125–6). As well as opening schools for their employees' children (1989: 126), by providing spacious and well-serviced accommodation, employers hoped to accomplish a wider social purpose, evident in the statement of the Halifax Building Society, who financed purchase of the ideal workers' houses built at Akroydon, Halifax by Robert Akroyd in the mid nineteenth century: 'We have sought to improve the home of the working man and, by improving his home to improve his health, his habits, his tastes and his character and altogether to raise him in the social scale'. (Cited in Dewhurst 1989: 126.)

Institutions

Improving the people sometimes required more specialised environments than a reformed place of habitation. In cases where a great deal of improvement was

required, either because the people were so far below the level of 'civilization' at which reformers aimed, or in order for them to effect social progress, particular institutions were established. Institutions pursued the aims of containment and reduction (of poverty and criminality), reform (of moral and legal malefactors) and improvement (of the character and accomplishment of the people). This section will consider some of them: workhouses, prisons and Mechanics' Institutes. The first two were, by 1850, state-organised institutions, the third usually philanthropic and voluntary.

Public buildings had been important in British urban and rural landscapes for many centuries before the fluorescence of schools, workhouses, hospitals, prisons and other institutions examined here. Giles (1999) has argued that in late medieval and early modern contexts, public buildings such as guildhalls represent crucial loci in the power strategies of the emerging 'middling sort', strategies which nevertheless change from ostentatious 'charity' to a more individualistic expectation that the 'problem' of poverty be dealt with by coercing the poor into adopting the norms and values of modernity. However, until the seventeenth century at least, most 'public' or institutional architecture was ecclesiastical, with the exception of places of leisure like theatres and inns and early places of civic authority like the first town halls. The secularisation of building types such as the school, hospital and college is a particular process of modernity. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, new kinds of 'public' buildings (access to which was nevertheless restricted by wealth and class) such as assembly rooms and baths encouraged the development of new class relationships of friendship at the upper end of the social scale. At the same time, poor, sick, criminal, immature and deviant members of society were subject to an institutional regime very different from the personal and corporate charity that had tried to alleviate their suffering in the late middle ages. The modern understanding of individuals as malleable – improvable – generated several new or substantially reinvented building types such as the prison, workhouse, asylum and school, directed at the control, improvement and reform of those members of society who failed to conform to the behaviour expected of modern individuals. In his survey of modern building types, Markus (1993) identifies the period from 1750 to 1850 as the heart of this development.

Since our concern in this chapter is with the improvement of the labouring classes, this section will concentrate on the institutions designed by the middle classes to order and reform (predominantly working class) 'deviants' – i.e. paupers, criminals, the sick, the insane – and improve the respectable working classes. The middle class also established institutions for their own improvement, primarily educational institutions such as museums, schools and universities and Literary and Philosophical Institutes. To some extent the labouring classes also developed their own 'improving' institutions such as mutual, co-operative or friendly societies, and the reading rooms and Mechanics' Institutes discussed below.

There was usually some middle-class input into the establishment of such bodies, but middle-class expectations could be thwarted by working class pursuit of different aims, as we shall see in the case of Mechanics' Institutes.

Published discussion of the architecture of institutional buildings usually draws attention to the way in which the form and style of the building expresses the ideological beliefs of its architect and patron, and conforms to emerging social and philosophical ideas about the proper shape of society. These are the factors that lie 'behind' the creation of the new institutions of modernity and are important to the cultural history of Britain and to the themes of this book. But there are also practical and ideological effects 'in front of' the architecture, in the ways in which the building actively shaped the experience of the people who experienced it. Sometimes the effects were not what had been predicted: in the case of prisons, for example, the strict isolation of inmates which was supposed to lead to their repentance proved in some cases to be psychologically intolerable and resulted in prisoners going mad rather than repenting. The spatial organisation of prisons was therefore adapted in the decades after their foundation as part of a dialectical process by which buildings and their inhabitants continually shaped one another.

The division between public architecture (this section) and the organisation of residential space (the preceding section) is not entirely clear-cut. Some people lived in institutional buildings like workhouses, asylums or utopian communities; equally many domestic buildings were designed as part of paternalistic or philanthropic schemes to promote particular social organisations or cultural values, as we have seen.

There are numerous types of institutional buildings and this chapter cannot cover them all. Therefore it gives particular attention to three building types: workhouses, prisons and Mechanics' Institutes. The first two are coercive institutions of containment and reform. It would be appropriate to see either of them as pursuing improvement at the level of society as a whole, as well as aiming to improve the deviant individual. The Mechanics' Institute was a voluntaristic organisation and aimed at facilitating improvement primarily at the level of the individual. It should be noted, however, that in the eighteenth century the distinction between improving the self and improving society was not commonly drawn. The improvement of the nation as a whole was widely believed to be the product of the accumulation of improved individuals separately pursuing the betterment of their own enterprises and interests.

Workhouses

I was born in a workhouse and so were two of my children. The workhouse in which I was born, by the time of my birth in the 1960s had become

Barnet General Hospital, and that in which my children were born is now St Mary's Hospital, Melton Mowbray, so my own birth and my sons' were qualitatively different to Oliver Twist's, but stripped of their modern fittings and decorations, the buildings were the same. As workhouses fell from favour in the early twentieth century, they met with a range of fates. Some were converted into flats or private houses, or were sold to businesses for office accommodation; some became schools or public institutions; many were demolished and their sites sold for redevelopment. But perhaps the majority of surviving workhouse buildings were taken over by the local hospitals whose origins are closely related to the workhouse.

Around a third of the population of Britain was poor in the nineteenth century, perhaps more depending on what one considers to be 'poor' (Fraser 1976: 14). The alleviation of poverty was the aim of many charitable and philanthropic foundations, particularly those with a religious aspect. From the second quarter of the nineteenth century the state, with its Board Schools, new housing developments and other civic initiatives, some of which are discussed elsewhere in this volume, took increasing responsibility for ameliorating the conditions of the poor.

But to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mind, the problem of poverty was distinct from the problem of pauperism. Pauperism – that is to say, utter destitution – was not merely one end of a scale from wealth to starvation, but a qualitatively different phenomenon; just as the pauper was qualitatively different from the poor (Fraser 1976: 21). Whereas the conditions of poor individuals or poor families could be eased by voluntary charity (which was not seen as a way to eradicate poverty, but only to make some poor people more comfortable), the existence of pauperism was a problem for society and was addressed by central political and social initiatives. In this period, the coming of the New Poor Law in 1834 was the logical outcome of a view of pauperism which blamed paupers for their own fate, and saw their very existence as a problem for society as a whole. It aimed to remove pauperism from British society by, first, forcing paupers to raise themselves above their conditions and enter the ranks of paid labour. If this was unsuccessful, then the removal of paupers and their shanties from the streets and environs of 'respectable' society and into highly controlled, separate and segregated environments would at least 'tidy' the landscape of Britain by containing its human mess. Finally, the workhouse environment would aim to reform the unfortunate pauper who entered its gates. However, as we shall see, the 'unit of improvement' in the case of workhouses was not primarily the person of the pauper, who was often too old, young, or unfit to be moulded into a productive worker, but the local, and ultimately the national social and physical environment of Britain. Just as it is hard to study the improvement of the urban environment without considering the improvement of its people, so it is hard to address

the function of the workhouse without thinking about its role in improving the town.

There were workhouses before the New Poor Law of 1834. Often known as 'Houses of Industry' or 'Houses of Correction', workhouses and poorhouses had existed in Britain since at least the sixteenth century. In addition, medieval institutions such as hospitals and almshouses had an even longer tradition of housing the poor and sick. Pre-Poor Law poorhouses and almshouses offered accommodation and food to the sick, old and poor, especially in cases where family support was not available. This was generally provided by the parish and was known as 'indoor relief'. However, the majority of parish poor funds was given as 'outdoor relief', that is to say, a dole of money, food, fuel or a combination of those, to the needy for use in their own homes, however inadequate those homes might be. The Poor Relief Act of 1723 empowered parishes to set up 'poorhouses' and refuse outdoor relief to those who refused to enter them, but for most parishes, the establishment of a staffed institution to house the very poor and provide work for the unemployed and idle was beyond their means. In the later eighteenth century, many new workhouses were founded in the wake of Gilbert's Act of 1782 which permitted parishes to group together to provide a workhouse serving the whole 'union' of parishes. Despite a few leviathans, such as the St Marylebone workhouse which could hold 1,000 people by 1776 (Neate 1967), pre-1834 workhouses tend to be small, as the vast majority of paupers were taking outdoor relief. Nevertheless, 'Gilberts' poorhouses commonly formed the core of nineteenth-century workhouses. Bedford Union workhouse, for example, was built by a Gilberts Union in 1796, but was adapted and enlarged after 1836 when it became the workhouse for most of north Bedfordshire (Cashman 1988).

Under the 'Old Poor Law', which prevailed from the sixteenth century until 1834, the functions of providing work for the parish poor, punishing the idle and wilfully vagrant, training poor children, care of orphans, tending the sick, controlling the insane, and looking after the elderly and disabled were frequently mingled and confused. The layout of the building frequently reflected these confused aims. In many ways the changes between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries represent a series of steps by which those functions were distinguished and removed as hospitals, asylums, care homes and old people's homes came into existence as independent institutions. In the Leeds workhouse between its foundation in 1638 and the rebuilding of 1740 the rooms were used flexibly for a variety of tasks; in 1740 purpose-specific additional buildings were constructed and the process of fixing spaces to particular uses accelerated (Anderson 1980: 78). Separation of function necessitated segregation and categorisation of inmates. In the 'Gilbert' workhouses segregation was minimal: the sexes were kept apart most of the time, although they might share workrooms, yards and dining areas, and the children were generally separated from the adults,

at least some of the time. Often, however, married couples were allowed to sleep together, and the inmates were generally free to come and go as they pleased. The low level of segregation was, naturally, a cause of concern for reformers.

Although there was no national policy on workhouses until 1834, the period from 1750 to 1834 has been characterised as one of increasing discontent with the old system (Morrison 1999: 21). Some local initiatives began independently to put into practice the principles that were eventually to shape the New Poor Law. In East Anglia for example, new 'Houses of Industry' were constructed by unions of Hundreds. This anticipated the unions of parishes specified by the New Poor Law, but the workhouses established still had an essentially charitable remit. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the charitable purpose of relief had begun to be eclipsed by the principle of deterrence which was to underlie so much of nineteenth-century policy towards the destitute. 'Deterrent' workhouses were built in Nottinghamshire, for example, including the much-publicised (at the time) Southwell Parish workhouse completed in 1808 (Morrison 1999: 36–7). At Southwell the withdrawal of outdoor relief accompanied the opening of the new workhouse. The building itself was much smaller than the later Union workhouses (housing only eighty-four inmates, as opposed to the several hundred of a typical New Poor Law Union workhouse), but in other ways adumbrated the New Poor Law. Inmates were more strictly controlled and contained. Nobody could leave without permission and the whole premises were surrounded by high walls. The sexes were segregated more strictly, and the Master retained supervisory control through the positioning of his own quarters at the 'hub' of the building, allowing him easy inspection of the yards and workrooms.

The less humanitarian regime at Southwell parish was the consequence of a philosophy that held it within the power of every able-bodied person to engage in paid labour and to lay by some security against times of unemployment or sickness. Pauperism was thus regarded not as a misfortune, but as the just desserts of idleness, improvidence, profligacy or immorality (such as drinking too much or engendering too many children). The deterrent function of the workhouse was therefore to provide no more than an absolute 'last resort', so that paupers would be encouraged to do all they could to avoid 'going to the parish'. Under the New Poor Law, this idea became crystallised as the principle of 'less eligibility': that is to say that the conditions of the workhouse should be 'less eligible' than those of the poorest independent labourer outside its walls. Given the appalling conditions in which many poor people lived, in both rural and urban areas, this presented a considerable challenge, especially with regard to medical care and education, when the purpose of reform and the basic requirements of humane treatment conflicted with the ideological drive to provide a 'less eligible' alternative. In general workhouse conditions were rendered 'less eligible' by their tedious routine, long hours of work, plain and monotonous

food and most of all by the emotional pain of separation from family and of social stigma (in the 1830s and 1840s, certain categories of inmate, particularly unmarried mothers, were subject to institutional stigmatisation, through being forced to wear special marks or badges on their clothes, like the puritanical censure inflicted upon Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, and perhaps separated from both their children and the other able-bodied women). Only the truly desperate, with no other alternative, would voluntarily enter the workhouse; but no relief was available unless admission was sought. This became known as the 'workhouse test' and essentially held that anyone refusing indoor relief could not be really needy. There was much opposition, both political and popular, to the New Poor Law on the grounds of its lack of compassion. In the north of England, many parishes failed to implement the workhouse test and continued to offer outdoor relief. But violent opposition was limited. Despite some outspoken critics, including the editor of *The Times*, the New Poor Law had widespread support among the voting (and thus rate-paying) classes, not only for ideological reasons but also because it aimed to reduce the financial burden on the ratepayers who met the costs of parish relief.

The Poor Law Amendment Act (or New Poor Law) of 1834 had the greatest transformative effect on the treatment of paupers in England and Wales in many centuries (Scotland had its own Poor Law, enacted eleven years later and differing in principle and provision from the English one). The Law was the result of years of discontent in the parishes about the escalation of rates paid by property owners to maintain and relieve the poor. Not only were the poor an economic burden on the well-to-do, it was also considered backward and unattractive to have the hovels of the poor defacing the new, aesthetically improved towns, and to have the wide, clean streets blighted by beggars, cripples, vagrants and pauper children who might turn to crime and who would almost certainly importune respectable members of society as they went about their business. The workhouses were thus designed to reduce the size of the pauper problem, by forcing into work all those who could do it, through the principle of less-eligibility, and to remove from sight the troublesome leftovers. Workhouses were not regarded as civic ornaments and were thus often located on the edge of town, or out in the countryside. Hospitals, asylums and prisons were also frequently positioned away from town centres, along with abattoirs, noxious industries, cemeteries and all other 'dirty' establishments. This was important both for the prevention of actual medical contagion, when the workhouse also acted as a hospital, and for protection from figurative social and moral contagion. Even when urban development later surrounded these locations, as expanding towns came to envelop previously rural locations, a 'bubble' of empty space nearly always isolated the potentially polluting institution from surrounding buildings (Markus 1993: 101). Northwich Union workhouse, for example, was built on the edge of town, in the usual way, so that the sight of inmates in the

yards would not 'discommode or prove offensive to the citizens' (Hogg 1998: 3). Bedford workhouse scored a double success by employing workhouse inmates in the early nineteenth century to clean the pavements and carriageways of the town (Cashman 1988) before removing them to the supervision of the workhouse, thus both inducting the pauper into the habits of labour and maintaining the aesthetic order of the town.

The Architecture of the Workhouse

By the time of the New Poor Law in 1834, some parishes or Gilbert unions already had a workhouse which could be used directly or easily adapted to meet the requirements of classification and control specified by the Act and enforced by the national panel of Commissioners. Gressenhall workhouse in Norfolk, for example had existed since 1777 as a House of Industry, and needed only to be extended and adapted for the stricter enforcement of the rules of classification and segregation (Reid 1994). Other parishes already had a suitable building that could be used as a workhouse: Eastbourne workhouse was a converted barracks; Coventry and Leominster augmented old monastic buildings (Morrison 1999: 44, 80). At Christchurch and Bournemouth Union, a barn that had been converted in the 1740s or 1750s formed the nucleus of the new T-shape workhouse (Newman 2000: 14–15). However, most unions had to build new workhouses from scratch. The plans for the new building had to be approved by the Commissioners in London and there was therefore a high degree of central control. Over the next few years, a small group of architects came to specialise in workhouses, and touted their designs round the Boards of Guardians in each union. By the end of 1838 the Commission reported that there were nearly 600 union workhouses in England and Wales (Anstruther 1973: 107). It is noticeable that, despite considerable variety in size and a number of local adaptations, the centralised control of the commissioners and the nationwide reach of the architects promoted considerable conformity to the spatial principles of the Act, and many workhouses display very similar plans; most share certain key features, described below. In the case of Dore workhouse (Herefordshire), the Poor Law Commissioners had certain expectations about what constituted a proper workhouse and when they were sent the plans for approval noted the absence of what they believed to be standard components: workrooms, a mill room, bake house, washing place and a dead house (Elliott n.d.). Ultimately, however, complete conformity does not appear to have been compulsory: the plans of the Dore Board of Guardians were approved even without those elements.

The main features which unite nearly all workhouses of the New Poor Law are symmetry, corresponding to gender segregation, a high degree of specialisation and segregation in the allocation of space and central positioning of

the Master's quarters in a situation of privileged and often panoramic views. The façades of union workhouses were plain and forbidding, as befits 'deterrent' buildings. Some were virtually indistinguishable from prisons, like the courtyard-style workhouses designed by Sir Francis Head and built at Blean Union, Bridge Union and Gravesend and Milton Union, all in Kent (Morrison 1999: 57). These have few or no windows on the outer walls, and numerous, tightly packed cells accessible by means of external iron galleries. At the other end of the style spectrum were those (few) workhouses that resembled Elizabethan alms houses, or otherwise adopted pastiche historical styles which gave them, misleadingly perhaps, a rather benevolent air. Most workhouses, however, did not resemble either 'a prison or a palace' (Morrison 1999: 53). In terms of architectural style, workhouses usually have little detailing, because of the cost, and for the same reason they are often built of brick rather than stone, although at Alcester workhouse a façade of ashlars donated by a philanthropic supporter of the New Poor Law fronts an otherwise brick construction (Morrison 1999: 48). The radicalism of the workhouse is more apparent in planning than style. Apart from some of the early courtyard plans, mentioned above, most workhouse designs from the period before 1850 provide for a high degree of classification and surveillance. The radial plans are a good example. Comprising often either a square with a central cross or a hexagon with a central Y, as at Retford, Notts (Clark 1969) or Winchester (Moxley 1987), these workhouses incorporate a number of visually isolated yards, workrooms and sleeping quarters. This prevents different classes of prisoners from interacting, or even seeing each other. In this way, the moral contagion of the sturdy vagrant or unmarried mother could be contained and would not spread to the children or the 'impotent poor' (the elderly and disabled unable to work). Doors were kept locked and windows frequently barred to prevent unauthorised contact or absence without leave, as at Ely workhouse, for example (Denton 1986). Nearly all workhouses were planned to incorporate a number of yards, separated either by high walls or by the buildings of the workhouse itself. Thus, T-shape plans, as at Barnet, H-shapes, E-shapes, as at Hayfield, Derbyshire (Powell 1999) and square or oblong arrangements (e.g. Portsea (Norman 1988), or St Marylebone (Neate 1967)) were all popular designs.

Once admitted to the union workhouse, inmates were subject to strict discipline and routine and must remain within the workhouse for the duration of their stay, unless permitted to leave. While inside, the pauper was to wear workhouse uniform and had to surrender any clothes and personal possessions on entry (the possession of more than the most trivial of personal possessions would in any case disqualify the individual from the right to poor relief). Able-bodied adults had to engage in labour for around twelve hours a day. Children were to receive schooling for some part of the day and would work the rest of the time. Times of rising, retiring, prayers and meals were specified. Dull 'dietaries'

specified the exact quantities of bread, meat, soup, pudding and gruel with which the various categories of pauper were to be fed.

The process of classification took place sequentially through the space of the workhouse. On arrival, men and women would be sent to a receiving room, or perhaps to one of two gender-specific receiving rooms where they would be given a medical examination and classified. They would be washed and have their clothes and any personal possessions removed and their hair would be cut. The men would be shaved. Subsequently all new inmates would be required to dress in the workhouse uniform and to proceed to the space allocated to their category. In this way, old, external identities, as spouse, parent or child were removed as were marks of personal distinctiveness in clothing, hairstyle or material possessions. Physical bathing of the body removed the pollution of their degradation and also represented the first step of moral cleansing that would be achieved in the workhouse. The new classificatory identities of the workhouse, as for example, 'able-bodied adult woman' would replace old identities such as 'mother' or 'widow' and be marked with new clothes and a space shared with others belonging to that category. A person's classification and relationships inside the workhouse might have little in common with a person's relationships and identities outside it. The graveyard at Lampeter, Wales, retains an area used for parish burials, mostly those of workhouse inmates (Fig. 5.1). Unusually, the workhouse graves are marked, but unlike the other monuments in the

5.1. Parish burial ground, St Peter's Church, Lampeter, contains the graves of many former workhouse inmates. Unusually these graves are marked.

churchyard, they are not marked with names, dates and personal information, but only with the number of the individual buried there. Personal relational identities of workhouse inmates were replaced by the authorities with bureaucratic identifications. Unsurprisingly, the descendants of some of those buried there have replaced the original marker with a traditional gravestone with a name.

The concern with classifying and segregating inmates grew over the period. The First Annual Report of the Commissioners in 1835 specified seven classes of pauper: old and infirm men, old and infirm women, able-bodied women, able-bodied men, girls between seven and sixteen, boys between seven and thirteen and children under seven. All these categories were given their own rooms for night and day, as well as their own areas of chapel and dining hall. In addition, workhouses usually incorporated 'refractory cells' for the isolation of those guilty of unruliness or disobedience, dead houses for the laying out of those who died in the institution and laying-in rooms for labouring and post-partum women and newborn infants. The Master and Matron, of course, had their own quarters. As time passed, further subdivisions were felt to be necessary. First, cripples and the handicapped were often removed to specific institutions, sometimes well outside the area; and those with a mental handicap or mental illness (the 'idiot' and the 'lunatic' to use the contemporary terms) might be removed to asylums (the distinction between congenital mental impairment and ephemeral psychological illness was not always clearly made). As the nineteenth century progressed, some workhouses felt it necessary to distinguish between the able-bodied poor of good character and the 'incorrigibles'. The City of London workhouse separated the unruly from the other able-bodied adults; and the Greenwich workhouse had a special yard for 'bad women' but not, apparently, for bad men (Morrison 1999: 90, 88). This represents a mid nineteenth-century modification to the optimistic eighteenth-century view of human amelioration, which held that all humans were capable of improvement. Quite soon after 1834, workhouses began to build special overnight accommodation for vagrants, at a distance from the long-term inhabitants of the workhouse, usually in a detached outbuilding; one assumes that, as in the case of the Bad Women's Yard, this was to prevent disruption to or moral contamination of the other residents. The original workhouse at Portsea, for example was soon supplemented by separate infirmary, children's home, 'imbecile' blocks and vagrant wards (Norman 1988).

In addition to segregation, the paupers were to be subject to surveillance. The principle of the 'hub' which had been introduced at Southwell Parish workhouse was developed into a more complete and effective surveillance device – the Master's core. Typically taller than the rest of the building, the office and living quarters of the Master and Matron were almost always situated at the centre of the workhouse, with windows overlooking all the yards, and doors and corridors communicating with the main living and working areas of the

workhouse (Morrison 1999; Markus 1993: 141–5). As the nineteenth century progressed, the concern with surveillance became less evident as most new workhouses were being built to a corridor plan, which was far less effective for the purposes of inspection than a radial one. Surveillance was probably becoming less relevant as the composition of the workhouse population was changing. Although workhouses were primarily designed to set work-shy idlers to work, able-bodied adults constituted a smaller and smaller proportion of the total number of inmates (Reid 1994: 4). Either the workhouse had been effective in encouraging the poor to find work elsewhere, or the original founders of the New Poor Law had failed to identify the problem correctly in the first place. In fact, as Lucas (1999) showed in his study of St Mary's workhouse in Southampton, what began as provision for the able-bodied poor ended up housing an assortment of the long-term sick and disabled, the elderly, and orphaned or abandoned children. Eventually, these groups were removed: the elderly and long-term sick to hospices and care homes; children to orphanages, foster families or technical schools. (Shortly after the New Poor Law, the Leeds Board of Guardians removed the children in their care from the corrupting and demoralising environment of the general workhouse, to a purpose-built institution they called the Leeds Moral and Industrial Training School. Similar pauper schools were founded in Manchester, and at Atcham near Shrewsbury and Quatt, Staffs (Pennock 1986).) In many case, when all these groups of people had been removed, the workhouse building reformed itself in line with its remaining function, as a hospital.

There is no doubt that life in the workhouse must have been monotonous and depressing. There were also abuses by local staff, most notoriously at Andover, where a tyrannical Master physically and sexually abused the inmates and stole their food, starving them to the point that the men fought over scraps of foetid meat hanging from the bones they were supposed to be crushing (Anstruther 1973). This scandal eventually brought down the first Poor Law Commissioners and saw them replaced by a Board; other outrages were also reported. But ultimately it was the psychological rather than the physical deprivation which made the workhouse so hard to endure. As the Second Report of the Poor Law Commissioners (1836) claimed, perhaps overstating the case a little:

> [The] effect of our rules . . . is to supply inmates with wholesome food and sufficient clothing, a better bed than they are used to lie upon, a cleaner and better ventilated room, immediate supply of medical attendance in case of illness, and to establish a degree of order and cleanliness unknown in a labourer's cottage. . . . It is owing mainly to the effect produced by classification, . . . and to rules of order and restraint . . . that the workhouse principle [of less eligibility] is rendered really effective. (Cited in Moxley 1987: 6)

The workhouse's place in history has also been in large measure determined by its literary depictions in such influential works as Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838), and the sentimental poem *Christmas Day in the Workhouse*, written by George R. Sims in 1879 and much parodied since. But these depictions are exaggerated campaign pieces: no workhouse dietary was so meagre as the regime of 'three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll on Sundays' which Oliver Twist endured. Though perhaps deficient in vitamins and low in protein, and undoubtedly boring, the workhouse dietary of bread, cheese, gruel, soup, potatoes, meat and pudding was probably adequate calorifically and differed little from the diet of the poor outside the workhouse. Similarly, the scenario of *Christmas Eve in the Workhouse* – that an old woman starved to death because she was not given out-relief and would not endure separation from her husband – was possible but not representative of the New Poor Law in practice in many parishes. Digby (1976: 162) calculated that in Norfolk at any time between 1840 and the end of the nineteenth century at least 66 per cent of able-bodied paupers were still receiving outdoor rather than indoor relief, and sometimes as much as 86 per cent. Thus the Guardians chose to circumvent the workhouse test and exercise their discretion in continuing traditional charitable practice. Especially in the north of England, and in rural parishes, outdoor relief was far more frequently offered than indoor, but even in urban Merthyr Tydfil, only 7–11 per cent of paupers received indoor relief (Fraser 1976). Moreover, the principle of strict segregation of the sexes was often relaxed in the case of old married couples who were allowed to remain together.

In Scotland the situation was somewhat different. The Scottish Poor Law was not passed until 1845 and differed from the English one in several important respects. Most of all, the able-bodied poor had no right to parish relief at all (Paterson 1976: 178). Thus poorhouses, and out-relief which remained the major way of dealing with need, were for the use of the 'impotent poor' only and did not entail any requirement to work. The role of charities and voluntary societies was also greater and more formalised in Scotland. However, Paterson (1976) points out that in practice there was considerable convergence between the Scottish and the English systems. Although strictly speaking Scottish claimants had to be 'destitute and disabled', in practice outdoor relief was awarded to the able-bodied unemployed and to single parents too. Similarly in England, the 'workhouse test' was hardly ever strictly enforced, and the workhouses themselves came increasingly to resemble to poorhouses of Scotland, as their labour function dwindled in significance.

In the case of English and Welsh workhouses, the architectural planning related to an unrealistic expectation of what the inmates would be like. Despite the New Poor Law's assumption that poverty was caused by 'improvidence and vice', in fact it was the great number of impotent poor that made

the highest demands on the workhouse. Adaptations of the workhouse space – further segregation, new rooms for vagrants, and enlarged or separate infirmaries – were all reactions to the unanticipated demands on the Boards of Guardians, and demonstrate, in this case, the failure of a project of social engineering and national Improvement.

Prisons

Criminality, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was not seen as an essential quality inhering in the individual, but a response to circumstances. The individual was thus capable of being transformed by changes in his or her environment and circumstances. Institutions of punishment of the period were thus charged with the creation of an environment in which this process of reform might take place. The names employed demonstrate this changing concern. As well as bridewells, gaols and prisons, which had existed for some time, prisons were known as Houses of Correction or Reform, stressing their transformative potential. Markus (1993: 96) distinguishes between the pathology of the individual, requiring medical attention to the individual body, and pathology of society, requiring the surveillance and reform of the social body. Hospitals addressed the first of these; prisons the second.

Up until the middle of the eighteenth century it is hard to distinguish different kinds of carceral institutions (Markus 1993). Even those that were recognisably prisons rather than asylums or workhouses might contain a variety of categories of people: debtors and those awaiting trial or execution as well as people serving sentences. They were usually highly permeable, with visitors communicating and trading freely with inmates. Treatment varied according to the amount of money at the disposal of the inmate and his or her family and friends. The prison was essentially a temporary accommodation for criminals which they were not allowed to leave, but from which their normal daily business and relationships – including sexual ones with people both inside and outside the institution – could be continued.

In 1750 it was very unusual to sentence a criminal to serve a term in prison. Even as late as 1770–1774, only 2.3 per cent of convicts sentenced at the Old Bailey were given a custodial term (Ignatieff 1978: 15). As a consequence there were very few prisons at all in Britain; there were gaols which acted as temporary secure holding depots for those awaiting trial, or for those awaiting the execution of a sentence of corporal or capital punishment and those awaiting transportation and, in some unfortunate cases, for those summoned to appear as witnesses at judicial hearings. The majority of people held in prisons for more than a brief period were debtors, but there was not usually much separation between criminals and debtors until well into the eighteenth century. Little food was

supplied as of right, and inmates were expected to pay the gaoler for food, space and any other privileges. In addition, other prisoners usually extracted 'garnish' – a combination of protection money and an involuntary contribution to a communal kitty.

Gaols were generally tiny: frequently little more than cells in other buildings. It was not uncommon for a local innkeeper to double as the gaoler, in which case the gaol would be part of or adjacent to the inn, like the two rooms at the back of the keeper's inn which constituted Kettering bridewell (Markham 1885: 27–30), giving the innkeeper, literally, a captive market for his ale. In larger towns they were often incorporated into a town gate, as in London's Newgate prison (Markus 1993: 118) or Exeter's Southgate. Markus notes that this location was symbolically significant, acting as a 'filter' for impurities, trapping undesirable and unknown elements (including the temporary detention of 'strangers') at the edge of town. There is thus little to distinguish early modern gaols architecturally; usually all that was required was a lockable door and a place where the gaol keeper might lodge.

However, all this was to change in the later eighteenth century, for reasons both ideological and contingent. Changing ideas about the nature and purpose of punishment in the modern era have been delineated most famously by Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et punir* (1975), although in a British context, a more historically rigorous and equally insightful account is Ignatieff's (1978). Both authors describe the change from a medieval type of punishment, retributive, public and corporeal, to a modern one, reformatory, sequestered and psychological. Until the later eighteenth century the dominant forms of punishment in Britain involved doing something to the body of the convict. In the most serious cases, the criminal was executed; for lesser crimes she or he might be transported overseas (usually to America) or humiliated by whipping or pillorying. In the case of execution and pillorying, the public enactment of the sentence was an essential part of the punishment. Even transportees usually faced a humiliating public ride from the gaol to the transport ships. These formal punishments operated alongside a rich tradition of popular justice, including 'rough music' (ordeals of ridicule and minor physical abuse known 'skimmingtons' in south-west England, 'riding the stang' in northern England, and 'ceffyl pren' in Wales), or the imposition of other physical and social humiliations on the malefactor. Sometimes a pantomime or parody law court would be involved in the conviction of a local criminal by his or her peers; often merely local knowledge would be enough to indict and sentence the unfortunate accused.

In the last few decades of the eighteenth century a number of factors challenged the existing criminal justice system. The transportation of convicts was effectively ended (temporarily, as it turned out) by the outbreak of the War of American Independence. Sentences of transportation continued to be passed with the expectation that the American dispute would be resolved and

transportation of convicts could continue, although their number gradually reduced. By the 1790s, transportation was the sentence for less then half of all convictions, which compares with 70 per cent in the period before 1775 (Ignatieff 1978: 92), but there were still large numbers of convicts awaiting transportation by the time of the first shipments to Botany Bay in 1787. In the meantime, gaols became overcrowded and 'prison hulks', floating gaols, were brought into service. The problem of overcrowding was exacerbated by the rising numbers of crimes. New criminal acts were being added to the statutes at a huge rate; mostly they relate to the protection of private property and capital and reflect the spreading values of liberal capitalism. Many new crimes were in fact traditional prerogatives of the poor – rights to collect small game or to glean the fields were redefined as poaching or theft. These acts were intended to coerce the poor into participation in systems of wage-labour, through the criminalisation of their customary practices.

The overcrowding consequent upon the cessation of transport ships and the numbers of newly criminalised people, combined with very poor sanitation, led to epidemics of typhus, 'gaol fever'. In some places, particularly on the hulks, gaol fever was so virulent that even a year's incarceration was likely to be a death sentence. In the early eighteenth century, for every person hanged at Tyburn, four died of gaol fever in Newgate prison (Rumbelow 1982: 30). The specific crises thrown up by disease and overcrowding exacerbated general dissatisfaction with the old 'bloody code' of retributive justice through bodily punishment. A small number of influential men had been campaigning for years for prison reform. The best known was, and is, John Howard. Howard's belief was that the criminal should be reclaimed for society, through contrition and reform. Thus pillories, public gibbets, transportation ships and especially old and insanitary gaols and hulks, should be replaced by clean, orderly, impersonal, scientifically run 'penitentiaries'.

An Act was passed in 1779 specifying the establishment of two national penitentiaries in the London area, and detailing a regime of solitary confinement at night and collective labour by day, enforcement of a plain and unappetising dietary and a uniform, but the national penitentiaries were never constructed. Nevertheless, during the 1770s and 1780s, there was some local experimentation in prison building. In 1775 a new prison was constructed at Horsham in Sussex. Unlike earlier gaols it emphasised the difference between the prison and the surrounding town by a high boundary wall, although the 'bubble' of empty space around the building that Markus notes as characteristic of urban institutional buildings was not present at that time. Inmates were segregated according to category. A regime of cleanliness and order was instituted, assured by a programme of external inspection (McConville 1981: 89–90). In Northampton the old gaol, an ordinary house fronting onto the street, was replaced between 1792 and 1794 by a new prison, set back from the road and incorporating seventy

individual cells in place of the undivided dormitory space of the old building (Markham 1885: 19). Important new prisons incorporating much Howardite thinking were founded at a number of other towns, including Salford (1787) and Preston (1792), but the most influential of the new provincial prisons were the Gloucester penitentiaries, the work of the County Justice, George Onesiphorus Paul. There, prisoners were kept in individual cells both day and night and were subject to a strict impersonal discipline. An eighteen foot high wall surrounded the main penitentiary building and intrusions of the outside world were severely curtailed.

The early nineteenth century saw significant prison reforms associated with voluntary activity by the rich. Foremost among the early nineteenth-century voluntary prison reformers was the Quaker Elizabeth Fry who began a programme of reform at Newgate women's prison in 1816 (Ignatieff 1978: 143). However, Fry's reforms, like Paul's were essentially local in character, and her new programme eventually lapsed without having ever been fully institutionalised. It was only in the 1830s and 1840s that prison reform was treated as an urgent national concern, rather than an act of private charity or individual utopianism. In 1835 a National Prison Inspectorate was founded.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the compassion of Howard's original work and of Fry's reforms came to be seen as indulging and cosseting the prisoners and a threat to the 'less eligibility' of the prison (a familiar argument even today). Consequently, diets were reduced to starvation levels, and labour became much harder. Treadmills and crank handles were introduced to prisons and daily labour requirements specified. Eventually any attempt at achieving a self-sustaining prison incorporated into the market economy finally collapsed as the mills and cranks ceased to be attached to any machinery. Labour for the sake of its reformatory potential alone was the rule. At Exeter, for example, the treadmills which beat straw and hemp in the 1820s were replaced in 1850 with individual crank handles attached to nothing (Forsythe 1983: 25, 63).

The Principles of the Penitentiary

The penitentiary favoured by Howard and his successors was geared to the reform of criminals. This was to be accomplished by first breaking down their old character and then building a new one through penitence, and learning habits of discipline, hard work and, essentially, conformity. The philosophy underlying all attempts at prison reforms was that people are malleable. An individual had been made into a criminal through bad upbringing and a corrupt environment, but with the right environmental influences could be made into something else. For Howard and others, cleanliness was one of the basic characteristics of the good environment, and they 'regarded the hygienic reform of institutions as a moral, no less than a medical crusade' (Ignatieff 1978: 60). Prisoners were subject to

disease because they were not clean, and their uncleanliness was both cause and manifestation of their lack of proper moral sentiments.

Beyond cleanliness, prisoners had to be removed from the pernicious influence of criminal society. This was a problem in institutions which were necessarily full of criminals. Two strategies were pursued in order to isolate the prisoner from his or her fellows: the 'silent' system and the system of segregation. The silent system, particularly favoured in America (at the influential new prison of Sing Sing for example), allowed prisoners to work, and perhaps also to eat and exercise communally in the daytime, although they slept in separate cells at night. However, during the daytime a rule of silence was strictly kept. There was to be no communication between prisoners, and the contagion of criminality was thus to be restricted. Alternatively, a system of strict segregation was to be implemented. Prisoners not only slept in individual cells, but also ate and laboured alone in the daytime and took exercise in small individual yards. There was to be no sight of other prisoners. Even chapels were fitted with individual booths so that prisoners could see only the chaplain and not each other (Fig. 5.2). On occasions that prisoners were unavoidably intervisible, they were to wear masks or full hoods. Most British prisons opted for the segregated system at first, although its extreme psychological harshness, and a high rate of insanity, persuaded prison officials to make some modifications and to reduce the time spent in such strict quarantine.

5.2. The chapel at Lincoln gaol is one of the only surviving remains of the 'separate system' by which prisoners were prevented from interacting with one another or even catching sight of each other.

Most reformers believed that in addition to the private religious reflection promoted by the silent or segregation system, convicts should acquire the habits of industry through a disciplined regime of hard labour. While Jeremy Bentham had promoted the idea that the prison could be a labour force for private industry, this never proved possible and indeed it was felt that enlisting prisoners in the service of private manufacture was an illegitimate dilution of and distraction from the proper purpose of the penitentiary. By the mid nineteenth century pure labour for its own sake and without any product was the rule at most prisons.

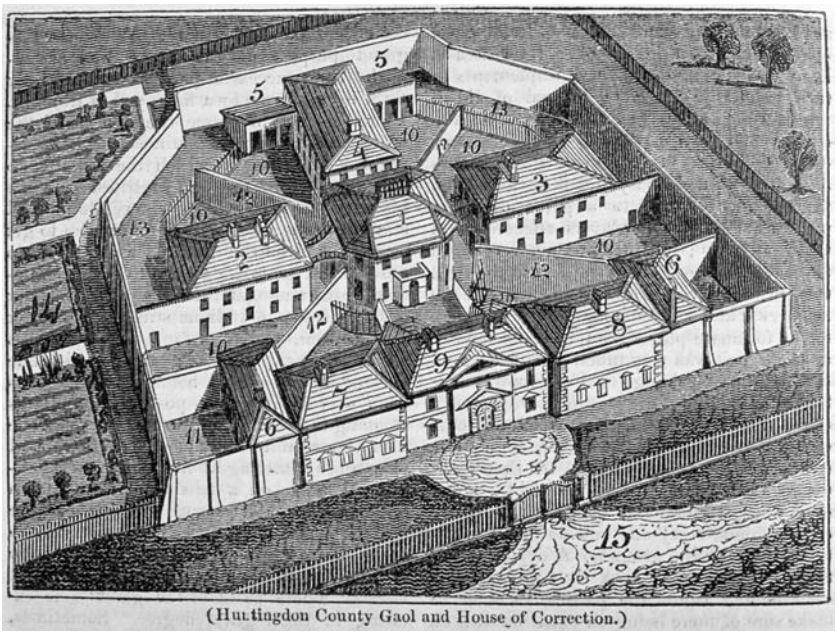
Reformers generally agreed also that punishment should be carried out impersonally and equally. There was to be no favouritism and no abuse. Prison officers would offer neither friendship nor brutality to the prisoners, but simply enforce the discipline in an impersonal way. The wealth of the prisoner should not affect his or her treatment. All prisoners' cells were the same size, all diets the same, prisoners were to wear uniforms and the only distinctions to be made were consequent upon the category in which the prisoner found him- or herself (e.g. as an adult female without children).

Finally, silence, segregation, labour and the process of reform would all be enforced and promoted by a system of surveillance. Prisoners should be inspectable at all times; so too should the guards and officials, of whom high standards of impartiality and incorruptibility were expected.

All these principles informed the design, adaptation and use of prison buildings.

The Buildings

In 1819 the new Exeter borough prison opened, replacing the old gaol at Southgate, an insanitary holding pen where prisoners were expected to pay the gaoler and had 'garnish' taken by their fellows (Forsythe 1983: 13). The new prison separated eight classes of prisoner by combinations of sex, age (adult or juvenile) and seriousness of crime (felony or misdemeanour). Each class had its own yard, individual cells and day room for work, all arranged in a three-winged radial layout, with the governor's house at the centre. The new County Gaol and House of Correction at Huntingdon had a similar system of segregation by category, where separate yards surrounded the keeper's quarters at the hub (Fig. 5.3). Although inspected by visiting magistrates, the prison was a locally run institution which gave considerable discretion to the governor. The governor could decide whether internal punishment should be served or waived and was able to provide material and other help to prisoners on discharge. He did not try to enforce either a segregated or a silent system. It was only in the period after 1835 that Exeter prison came increasingly under the control of national authorities and the regime, in consequence became harsher and less flexible



5.3. Huntingdon County Gaol and House of Correction, built 1828–9, includes separate wings and yards for different categories of prisoner. All would be visible from the central hub. From *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* vol. 28, p. 376 (1836) (by kind permission of Cambridge University Library).

and the routine more strictly enforced. Uniforms and haircuts were introduced together with a punitive dietary regime. The radial plan of Exeter was probably the most characteristic form of early prison. As in the case of workhouses, prison surveillance was facilitated by long, straight corridors and central vantage points and consequently the 'ideal' prison nearly always had a radial layout of some sort (Markus 1993: 120); prisons with such a layout were built in Britain from the later decades of the eighteenth century (for example Ipswich in 1786; Edinburgh in 1791; Liverpool in 1795). As well as ordering the life of the villain inside, the prison also had to ensure strict security and maintain separation between the prisoner and the outside world. Thus, obviously, boundary walls and gates were formidable. Boundaries needed to provide inspection towers from which the walls and gates could be kept in constant view, and may incorporate gun emplacements to deal with riots, like the Gordon riots which caused Newgate prison to be burned down in 1780.

Sometimes the prison shared space with other elements of the criminal justice process: Glasgow Justiciary buildings were organised according to a spatial principle which was both 'chronology and cosmology' (Markus 1993). Immediately past the main entrance were the law courts. Next followed the

felons' and debtors' yards, with the keeper's quarters having a view into both, and a chapel above it (Markus 1982: 53).

The model and pride of new prisons was Pentonville, opened in 1842. By 1850, ten new prisons in the style of Pentonville had been opened, and a further ten older prisons had been converted to the Pentonville type (Ignatieff 1978: 194). On a huge site, insulated from the surrounding city by a space bubble and high walls, Pentonville incorporated the reformatory 'separate' system at its height. Prisoners spent all their time in individual cells, where they slept, worked and ate. Only prayer and exercise happened outside the cell, and for these the prisoner was hooded or masked, and, in a belt-and-braces approach to the prevention of criminal contagion, screened from others as well. Like the workhouse, the prison made no concession to individual personalities. Prisoners were processed on arrival in exactly the same way as at the contemporary workhouse: clothes and possessions were removed; the body of the prisoner was washed and their head shaved. A medical examination informed the detailed record keeping. Thereafter the prisoner was issued with a uniform and a prison number which replaced their name. Pentonville took isolation and anonymity for prisoners to its extreme. The prisoner was allowed only one visit every six months. Under these conditions, psychological and emotional disturbance was common, and the prison authorities quickly reduced the amount of time spent under the most severe restrictions, from eighteen, to twelve and finally to nine months (Ignatieff 1978: 199–200).

Between the 1770s and the 1850s, incarceration had gone from being a temporary measure before a sentence could be properly carried out, or a sort of quarantine for debtors, strangers and those whose place in society was temporarily compromised, to the most common criminal sentence; punishment had changed from being community-based, retributive and enacted upon the body, to reformative, state-controlled and focused upon the mind. Like workhouses and other institutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the penitentiary was informed by a particular post-Enlightenment view of society and the possibility of Improvement. As Ignatieff comments:

> The new psychological assumptions that inspired Condorcet's and Helvetius's faith in human perfectibility, served, when applied to questions of punishment, to validate the notion that criminals were defective mechanisms whose consciences could be remoulded in the sensory quarantine of a total environment. The social anxieties of the middle class in the 1790s ensured that this hard faith in human malleability soon received operational formulation at the hands of the medical profession, in asylums for the insane, Houses of Industry for paupers, hospitals for the sick and penitentiaries for the criminal.

> In each environment, the poor were to be 'cured' of immorality, disease, insanity or crime, as well as related defects of body and mind, by isolation, exhortations, and regimens of obedience and training. (1978: 213)

However, it is easy to overestimate the degree to which the general population believed in the possibility of reform. While reformatory principles were profoundly influential in the new prisons and workhouses, they existed alongside old-fashioned vengefulness. Public executions continued until 1868 and capital punishment in private until 1965. Many people, even campaigners for moral reform, were less optimistic than Condorcet and Helvetius; reformers on the evangelical wing often proceeded from quite the opposite direction, believing in man's inherent sinfulness. Their belief in the potential of Improvement related more perhaps to the possibility that individuals might be lifted from their low conditions than the ideal that the masses generally might be improved – at least until the middle of the nineteenth century.

The crimes of the new criminals – theft or damage to their employers' equipment, embezzling materials belonging to their employers, poaching and trespass, or bearing illegitimate children in the case of the women, illustrate the norms and values that the middle class tried to enforce. Sequestration of the poor, mad and deviant, certainly suggests the nineteenth-century institution represented 'Improvement' to the middle classes, both in their attempts to reform the individual and because of their role in the rational ordering of society. However, the question of class and the extent to which institutions of Improvement served middle class interests is made more complex by the growth around the same time of other types of institution, devoted to the improvement of the individual through education and the acquisition and development of skills. Schools, colleges, public libraries, museums, botanical and zoological gardens all had their period of greatest development around the same time as prisons and workhouses and, like them, transformed the urban environment. In this chapter we shall consider one of these 'self-improving' institutions, and one that was not designed to serve the middle class: the Mechanics' Institute.

Mechanics' Institutes

In the modern west literacy is generally held to be self-evidently a good thing. Development organisations give priority to the expansion of education in the third world, seeing high levels of popular literacy as an essential prerequisite to economic success. The ability to access education is almost universally regarded as empowering and a human good. However, other interpretations are possible. As Markus (1993: 172) points out 'literacy is both a tool for the extension of

knowledge and for domination'. A literate culture is one where class cultures are more similar to one another and where a certain set of values can be effectively promulgated throughout society. The illusion that knowledge and skills are being actively sought and acquired by the motivated individual rather than imposed upon one class by another can mask one of the almost universal consequences of the process of education: the suppression of non-dominant cultural traditions. The nineteenth-century fluorescence of libraries, reading rooms and lecture theatres can thus be interpreted either as part of the emancipation and empowerment of the working class, or part of the middle-class war on traditional culture. The history of the Mechanics' Institute lies in this disputed territory; at issue is whether the Mechanics' Institute represents ideological colonisation of the working class, or a working-class appropriation of middle-class means of effecting self-improvement and social change.

By 1800, circulating libraries, generally private organisations set up by booksellers, had in many parts of Britain been augmented by new Literary and Philosophical Societies (sometimes given stronger classical associations by being known as Athenaeums or Lyceums – the Leamington Spa Reading Room was called the Parthenon). These societies usually constructed their own new buildings, combining the functions of gentleman's club, library, reading room and lecture theatre. Particularly in the affluent cities of northern England these new institutions sprung up. They were prestigious institutions, and often obtained prime locations in city centres, where they were unambiguously understood as civic ornaments. Invariably they adopted a classical style, to accompany their classical name and to invoke cultural descent from, and affiliation to, the world of Greeks and Romans. They thus eschewed both British vernacular style and alternative polite registers, such as Gothic or Italianate. The classical world, with its associations of enlightened and benevolent political domination, scientific and cultural achievement and rational progressivism was chosen over the historical European world, which stood for religious belief, conservatism and foreignness, in a way that the Ancient world somehow escaped. Sometimes the classical aspirations of the membership exceeded the funds or possibilities for the actual building, so in the case of Chichester, for example, a classical-style façade is surmounted not by the dome that was envisaged in the original plans, but by a sloping, tiled roof with dormer windows and projecting gables (Steer 1962: plate 11).

The Literary and Philosophical Institute was a wholly upper-middle-class movement. Working-class people, usually called 'artisans' or 'mechanics' were often excluded altogether from membership of the Society, or their participation was limited to constituting part of the audience for public lectures and demonstrations. The internal space of the Institutes was organised so as to segregate 'mechanics' from middle-class members. They would have their own entrance, which was never the same as the grand public entrance, and a gallery or another

defined and limited space indoors (Markus 1993: 180–4). However, since the foundation of the Spitalfields Mathematical Society in 1717, providing lectures, library and laboratory facilities for silk weavers, the Literary and Philosophical Society was paralleled by an educational movement directed at 'mechanics' – artisans of the upper working class. During the eighteenth century a small number of other working-class institutions were established, such as Birmingham's 'Sunday Society', established in 1789 for male graduates of the Sunday School, another working-class institution whose political tendency is hotly debated (Markus 1993: 241). By the 1820s the movement to establish Mechanics' Institutes had gathered real momentum. The Edinburgh School of Arts, founded in 1821, offered much the same as the Literary and Philosophical Institutes did, but to a different class of people. Other Scottish towns were among the earliest to have proper Mechanics' Institutes, including Greenock and Kilmarnock in 1823. The cities of northern England also founded Mechanics' Institutes in the 1820s and were soon accommodating them in purpose-built institutions. Two years after its foundation, the Liverpool Mechanics' Institute moved to specially designed accommodation including, like the Literary and Philosophical Institute, a lecture theatre, laboratory and library in addition to fourteen classrooms. Like many other Mechanics' Institutes, by the end of the twentieth century it would become a university: the building now forms the core of Liverpool John Moores University. Strathclyde University, UMIST, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Surrey, Heriot-Watt University, the University of Nottingham and Birkbeck College of London University, named after one of the fathers of Mechanics' Institutes, all have their origins in Mechanics' Institutes of the early nineteenth century. By 1851 about 700 Mechanics' Institutes had been set up by private initiative around Britain.

Most Mechanics' Institutes were founded by middle-class philanthropists rather than being an authentic expression of working-class aspiration. Where purpose-built institutes were constructed, inevitably they were funded by, and matched the design specifications of, well-to-do benefactors. The middle class was by no means uniformly convinced of the benefits of working-class education. While for many education was the means by which the values of sobriety, religion, discipline and hard work were to be propagated among the working classes, for others, encouraging literacy among the masses was risking the spread of dangerous and subversive beliefs and threatened a treasured social order. For a small number of middle-class radicals, education was the means by which the choking weed of traditional social order might at last be cut and a new and better society grow up in its place. These conflicting views inform the founding of Mechanics' Institutes. Most Institutes prohibited or tried to limit the possibility of free discussion of political, religious or social topics, and censored the library accordingly. Initially, classes and lectures tended to concentrate on science

and technical skills which, it was hoped, would have a direct or indirect value for the work of the individual and have a positive effect on the economy of the nation, without risking any radical disruption of the social order. Unsurprisingly, however, the mechanics themselves frequently found these restrictions irksome. In the case of Manchester, the membership forced changes to the governance of the Institute towards self-direction, but not before a splinter group, the 'New Mechanics Institute' had formed with an explicitly radical political agenda, to discuss political and social questions as well as scientific ones. As Tylecote (1974) points out, records of library usage suggest that what the membership wanted was a general education, including history, politics and similarly dangerous knowledge, rather than specific knowledge to be used instrumentally for economic purposes.

The Mechanics' Institutes, however, were not used primarily by mechanics. At the Manchester Mechanics' Institutes, in 1831, of 451 members only 52 were mechanics, machinists or millwrights; 55 were listed as warehousemen and 83 as clerks; the rest followed a variety of occupations (Tylecote 1974: 63–4). In 1844 the proportions were similar (Tylecote 1974: 64). Rather than labourers, the institutions were mainly drawing members of the upwardly mobile lower middle class. It is likely that the subscription costs, although much cheaper than the rates for the 'Lit & Phils.', were still too high for low-paid factory operatives, and that the long shifts they worked were not compatible with evening classes. Until the systematic development of elementary education at a national level in the second half of the nineteenth century, many inhabitants of the large towns were simply at too low a level of education to benefit from lectures and classes on chemistry or engineering. Moreover, as Tylecote has written (1974: 65), 'those who wrote "the sacred thirst for science is becoming epidemic", forgot the prevailing thirst for porter and gin'. Although one of the avowed purposes of the Mechanics' Institute was to provide for the working-class man an alternative place of resort to the pub, given the long shifts, small income and other pressures on working-class people, the pub offered a far more attractive and immediate respite from working life than the lecture hall.

As far as the architecture is concerned, Mechanics' Institutes are not so readily interpretable as the Lit. and Phils. For a start, and reflecting their reduced access to capital and power, many Mechanics' Institutes were accommodated in other buildings rather than in purpose-built Institutions. The Leicester Mechanics Institute, for example, used various rooms in the city centre, but did not have library, reading room and classrooms all under the same roof until sixteen years after its foundation, when it was given space vacated by the Literary and Philosophical Society in Wellington Street (Lott 1935). Second, because they were built by a board of well-to-do middle-class patrons, the Mechanics' Institute buildings that do survive are not representative of the aspirations of

the ordinary members, but are informed by the ideologies and fears of (usually) capitalist industrialists and local gentry.

Formally, some Mechanics' Institutes differed little from the Literary and Philosophical Societies whose functions they largely echoed. In the case of Chichester, for example, the Mechanics' Institute soon merged with the Literary and Philosophical Society and the amalgamated society shared the same building (Steer 1962: 4). Mechanics' Institutes were, however, built on a cheaper scale and although they had urban situations, they were not usually the plum positions afforded by their middle-class counterparts. Stylistically, the neo-classical appearance of these buildings is similar to the Lit. and Phil. The internal space of the building was specialised according to activity, so that separate classrooms, laboratories and other spaces such as libraries, reading rooms and conversation rooms permitted different activities to go on concurrently without disturbance. However, there was no spatial segregation by class. Women's classes were taught apart from the men's, and a classroom might be temporarily designated for women's use for a particular class, but no spaces were permanently defined as female.

Mechanics' Institutes, like other educational establishments were voluntaristic institutions of self-improvement and ultimately of social reform. The contestation of the curriculum at many Mechanics' Institutes demonstrates the differences in ideas of what constitutes an 'improved' society. A coarse reading of these conflicts could depict them as class differences and relate them to developing class consciousness over the first half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the question of class affiliation in Mechanics' Institutes was quite complicated. What can be said, however, is that many of the terms and issues of modern political debate took shape through arguments centred on the role and remit of these potentially radical places of Improvement.

Taking Stock

A problem is emerging, not just in our interpretation of Mechanics' Institutes, but in the search for an archaeology of Improvement more widely, and that is the problem of class. In this chapter we have seen that the kinds of improvement the middle classes attempted to make with regard to the homes of the working classes were often subverted, circumvented or ignored by their inhabitants. In other cases, such as Mechanics' Institutes, working-class institutions were taken over by middle-class people, or used differently to the vision of their founders. Coercive institutions like prisons and workhouses tried to remould their inhabitants in line with a particular set of values: personal improvement; segregation; order; cleanliness; sobriety; hard work; and adherence to a new code of law which was individualistic and capitalistic.

To what extent is Improvement a middle-class value, or even a tool of ideological oppression, enacted upon the working classes? It is hard to come up with an unambiguous answer, for several reasons:

1. To speak of 'the working classes' is to homogenise many different groups with different interests, backgrounds and aspirations. Moreover, much of the time when we think we're looking at the working classes, we're actually seeing the lower middle class; in the case of Mechanics' Institutes, for example, typically only about a tenth of their membership comprised mechanics or factory labourers; the dominant groups in the membership were clerks, warehousemen and shopkeepers.
2. Related to this, looking for the aspirations of working-class people in the material traces left by their lives is hard. Often their material and architectural remains are actually produced on their behalf by the upper middle classes. The Mechanics' Institutes were mostly founded and frequently governed and organised by affluent local industrialists. The material remains of the very poor are extremely scanty unless you include things like workhouses constructed for them by middle-class reformers.
3. Moreover, the landscapes, buildings and things of the poor are far less likely to survive into the present or to have been subject to the archaeological processes of collection and record (there are some noteworthy exceptions, and this is starting to change).
4. Most challenging of all, it is hard, in the case of comparatively powerless people, to distinguish 'Improvement' as a general philosophy, from simple social climbing. Although one can find evidence of the working poor building houses, and working either alone or co-operatively to carry out agricultural or technical production, is this part of the distinctively eighteenth-to-nineteenth century ethos of Improvement, or is it the same measures to increase their personal wealth and wellbeing that their forebears would have taken 500 years earlier? It's easier to see 'Improvement' in large-scale and collective projects, but because of differential access to power and resources the poor had no role in originating or shaping these.
5. Similarly, because Improvement is an abstract value, it is hard to know whether the apparent rejection of some middle class 'improvements' by the working classes are really rejections of the idea of Improvement itself, or merely differing tastes about what constitutes an improvement and what is most valuable. Perhaps for the working-class householder, the extra income from having one or two lodgers in the house was a more desirable 'improvement' than having separate bedrooms for your sons and daughters.

It is a commonplace in the archaeology of historical periods that archaeologists can play a part in making visible the subaltern groups of history – women, the poor, slaves. But it remains frustratingly true that in archaeology, as much as in history, the evidence of marginal groups is under-represented, or its interpretation very ambiguous. Perhaps also we have not yet become clever enough at looking in the right places or asking the right questions. This is an issue to which we will return.

SIX:

THE RIGHT STUFF

An increase in the quantity of material goods consumed in Britain, the so-called 'consumer revolution', has been identified in various periods of early modern and modern history from the sixteenth century onwards, but particular emphasis has been placed on the rapid increase in manufacture and ownership during the eighteenth century (the classic work on the subject is MacKendrick, Brewer and Plumb's 1982 volume *The birth of a consumer society: the commercialisation of eighteenth century England*). The precise characteristics of this 'revolution', and indeed whether the term is appropriate at all, have been disputed, but a few uncontroversial points can be made: the quantity of goods manufactured and exchanged in Britain per head of population increased dramatically between about the sixteenth century and the present day. The main growth in production was in 'luxury' goods: things like toys, ornaments and mirrors, jewellery, books, baubles and fripperies, or in more luxurious and varied versions of 'essentials': more fashionable clothes, finer and more varied ceramics, luxury foods like chocolate, spirits, liqueurs, sweets, drugs like tobacco and so on. Although the wealthier classes were responsible for the highest proportion of this increase, consumption of material goods increased throughout society. The consumption of 'luxurious' imports like tobacco and tea soon came to be considered staples and necessities, even by the poor. Many of the new goods required the importation of raw materials which strengthened global aspects of the capitalist economy; plantations in the Caribbean and America produced coffee, tobacco, sugar, cocoa and cotton; south Asia and Indonesia produced tea, hardwoods, silk, dyes and spices. Imports from Africa and Asia were also necessary to the manufacture of many luxuries, some of which were re-exported for trade abroad. 'Fashion' (itself a complex term and far from self-explanatory) plays a large role in modern consumption practices: new goods are always required as new needs and desires are born, sometimes nurtured by the nascent advertising industry. Improvements to the processes of extraction, refinement, and transport of raw materials and the industrial techniques of manufacture, along with improved transport in the form of roads, canals and eventually railways,

facilitated dramatic expansion of the British economy. Many writers of the time were conscious of the rapid pace of change in manufacturing, and attributed the general improvement of the nation to this as frequently as to the expansion and intensification of agricultural production.

The improvements made to manufacturing processes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are central to the discipline of industrial archaeology and have formed one of its main foci since its inception. Given that the changes in the technology of extraction, manufacture and transportation of material goods in this period has been extensively and authoritatively written about elsewhere (see Nevell 2004; Cossons 2000 for some recent reviews of the literature) this chapter will develop a few examples of how particular artefacts, and the sites and features of their manufacture and disposal, relate to the contemporary ethic of Improvement.

This chapter will consider some of the archaeological remains and materials which are frequently encountered in Britain. I have deliberately chosen common and mundane types of artefact, site and feature in order to ask not only how technologies were refined, and goods were improved in point of manufacture, but also what were the projects of Improvement in which they were involved, and how did they reflect and promote particular ideological/cultural understandings. Why, in short, were white textiles or large window panes desirable? Bleach works, window glass, transfer-printed ceramics and rubbish pits are all common in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and have a national distribution. However, there is surprisingly little critical or interpretive discourse on any of these. Even the most inherently interesting and ostensibly discursive artefacts, such as transfer-printed wares, are rarely interpreted in a broad cultural context. Instead ceramics have been used as indices of economic status or social aspiration, or interpreted within a closed trajectory of technological development. Admittedly, window glass or bleach baths are minimally thrilling discoveries for the field archaeologist, but both were involved in complex cultural and ideological processes of the period. In researching this chapter it has become clear how little overlap presently exists between the study of technology (by industrial archaeologists) and contexts of consumption (by historians and some later historical archaeologists).

For example, in the case of window glass, there is a solid body of work on glass manufacture, focusing on glass houses and changing technologies. However, there is virtually no published research relating to the use of window glass. Site reports occasionally note the presence of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century window glass but it is rarely quantified and never (to my knowledge) interpreted. Similarly, despite some examination of the industrial archaeology of bleaching (although not nearly as much as there is on spinning or weaving), the consumption of bleach and bleached goods, and analysis of demand is ignored in the archaeological literature. The limited ambitions of most archaeologists working

in this period to interpret their work in terms of wider social and cultural change leave much scope for the development of interpretive historical archaeologies of Britain in future years.

Bleachworks

Until the late eighteenth century bleaching textiles was a laborious, time-consuming and imperfect process involving repeated immersion of the cloth in water, urine, sour milk and ashes (Chapman et al 1970: 160), and long periods of exposure to the sun. The process required access to water and to plenty of outdoor space where fabric could be stretched on tenter poles. 'Bleach fields' were therefore often situated in rural areas along the banks of rivers, where there was plenty of water at hand and space to stretch the cloth in the sun. In the 1780s and 90s, however, chemical bleaching techniques revolutionised the later stages of textile manufacture. A process that might have taken several months could now be completed in a few days. Moreover, needs for space were greatly reduced. These changes were effected by the availability of chemically produced bleaching powder, a solid compound of chlorine and lime, patented by Charles Tennant of Glasgow, whose St Rollox chemical works sold the powder at £140 per ton in 1800 (Cossons 1993: 208). Earlier eighteenth-century attempts at chemical bleaches, which produced chlorine in aqueous solution by mixing sulphuric acid with common salt and manganese dioxide, were very corrosive and dangerous to the bleachers; Tennant's powder was safer and easier to use. The production of bleaching powder was part of a process called the 'LeBlanc system', a set of chemical processes that produced alkalis for various industrial uses, including the manufacture of soap and glass, as well as bleaching powder, from salt, limestone and brimstone (pyrites). Factories of the LeBlanc system existed around the UK, but were especially concentrated in the north-east of England and south Lancashire, as well as Glasgow. By 1862, the entire UK LeBlanc industry produced about quarter of a million tons of products annually and employed about 10,000 workers (Hardie and Davidson Pratt 1966: 35).

In 1819 Abraham Rees, the author of Rees's *Cyclopedia*, described the bleaching process of the age in considerable detail, including stages of steeping, bucking, souring and washing (Rees 1819: 'Bleaching'). Nevell et al (2004) describe processes for cotton yarn involving boiling in soda, bleaching in chloride of lime ('bleaching powder'), souring in hydrochloric or sulphuric acid, washing and blueing (compensating for any remaining 'dirtiness' in colour by a very dilute indigo wash to impart a bluish tone to the white). The procedure for woven cotton fabric was even more complicated. As adjustments to the procedure were made, both in the machinery used and the chemical process, the price of

bleaching came down and the volume of production increased, especially after about 1820 (Hardie and Davidson Pratt 1966: 30–1).

Effective and relatively cheap chemical bleach meant that bleach fields were replaced by bleach works. Sometimes these were elaborate works like the Stormontfield bleaching house at Scone near Perth, a classical-style three-storey building dating from about 1820 (Bracegirdle 1973: 196); sometimes bleaching houses were attached to or adjacent to other finishing buildings on the sites of textile mills. Nevell et al (2004) describe two bleaching works, both associated with dyeing and printing works in Lancashire: the Hodge Bleach and Print Works near Broadbottom, and Wallsuches near Bolton. The Hodge Works was converted from a cotton mill to a bleachworks in 1804 (Nevell et al 2004: 95), and a printworks was added in the 1820s. The site demonstrates some typical features of bleachworks: first it is adjacent to a river, the River Etherow in Mottram. Three reservoirs on the north side of the site assured a plentiful water supply. The remains of the bleaching baths are still there and were excavated in the 1980s. Three groups of bleaching baths (two of twenty baths and one of ten) were recorded. Each bath measured 1.6 m by 1.8 m in plan and 1.6 m deep and was constructed of stone slabs. Rows of baths were arranged along a central drainage channel the water from which passed to a settling tank and then discharged into the river (the effects on local river ecology must have been apocalyptic). At Wallsuches, which is still standing, the bleaching 'crofts' (a term now used to refer to the buildings where bleaching took place, rather than the open spaces used for stretching cloth in the sun under the old method) were only some of many buildings associated with textile finishing, printing and dyeing. Again, the site had a ready and constant supply of water since a stream, later culverted, ran through it and a series of reservoirs had been constructed along its length. By the end of the nineteenth century, a number of larger reservoirs had been added to the north of the site. Inside the typically long, narrow bleaching crofts were cisterns for bleaching cotton yarn, now represented by sunken stone tanks, and sealed vats called 'kiers' for bleaching cloth. The kiers would have been two storeys high and made of metal, but now all that remains are the footings and brackets that show where they once stood (2004: 99). Troughs indicate the bases of washing machines which would have been powered by steam engines in the mid to late nineteenth century. Wallsuches was a highly mechanised works, at least in the mid nineteenth century, using steam engines to power its machinery. The first steam-powered bleach works opened at Sunnyside Print Works in Crawshawbooth in 1845, using a pulley sytem to pull ropes of cloth through all the stages of the bleaching process, through glazed brick holes in the walls called 'pot eyes' (2004: 92).

Bunting (1998) describes a bleachworks on the Bentley Brook at Lumsdale near Matlock in Derbyshire which operated from the 1810s. In the early years of the works, the process required many large vats; later, it was largely automated

using steam engines, including steam pumps attached to the kiers to make a vacuum so that the bleach penetrated every fibre of the cotton. Most of the eleven bleachworks around Barnsley which serviced the town's linen industry in 1841 have left little trace in the modern landscape (Taylor 1993). However, the reservoirs and canals dug to supply the works are still evident at Cudworth, Greenfoot and Swithen, for example.

With warehouses to store many tons of cloth and yarn, transport facilities and offices, and in particular the elaborate water systems of reservoirs and leats, bleaching and finishing works could cover many hectares and have a massive impact on their landscapes, observe Nevell et al (2004: 93), adding that the impact of works associated with the textile finishing trade 'was probably greater in the century from 1750 to 1850 than at any other period during the industrial revolution' (2004: 100).

Why did textiles need to be bleached? Sometimes all that was required was to lighten the material sufficiently for it to take a dye, either a plain colour or a patterned print. However, there was also a demand over this period for textiles of all fabrics to have a white finish. The processes described above were capable of producing white cottons; the use of bleaching powder, however, was not suitable for wool, which still had to be degreased in a solution of stale urine and water. This process lightened the wool enough to take a dye, but to produce white woollens required further bleaching. This was accomplished by 'stoving', sealing the wool in a chamber with burning brimstone. The damp and sulpherous steam would bleach the wool, but the process was dangerous to the health of the workers and could also damage the wool if concentrated condensation dripped onto it. The whole process was more laborious and expensive than commercial cotton bleaching, and eventually white woollen cloth was largely replaced by cheap white cottons for most purposes.

Although the vast majority of bleach produced was used for textiles, bleach was also increasingly used in the production of other goods, such as paper. The 1858 lease of the Wookey Hole paper mill in Devon specifies that the property includes a bleaching house, so bleaching as a separate stage in paper manufacture was evidently established by the middle of the century (Chitty 1976). It may be that changes in the manufacture of paper necessitated the greater use of bleach. Until the 1850s, nearly all paper produced in Britain was made from rags. Fine linens went to make the best quality of paper; coarser cloths were turned into brownish paper suitable for wrapping or packaging. However, the demand for paper increased rapidly with the expansion of publishing in books, periodicals and newspapers in the early nineteenth century. Rags were imported to meet the need and extreme measures taken, such as the imposition of a legal obligation to bury the dead in wool, rather than cotton or linen, to prevent valuable rags going out of circulation. Only from the 1850s did the use of wood pulp and esparto grass come to represent a sizeable proportion of paper production.

These vegetable materials produced a brownish paper unless bleached. In the days when paper was made from rags, the colour of the paper depended on the colour of the rags (Thomson 1974: 36), but since white paper was considered the best kind, the fine rags used for paper-making might be bleached before pulping. By 1795 at least nine papermakers in Scotland were using chlorine bleaches on their rags (Thomson 1974: 37) and the use of chemical bleach appears to be well established in the papermaking trade by the beginning of the nineteenth century. As early as 1819, Rees records that several patents had been granted in Britain for bleaching paper pulp (Rees 1819; 'Bleaching').

Rees also mentions the bleaching of wax for candles, and certainly the use of dazzlingly white candles and white table linens for domestic interiors would have appealed to contemporary aesthetic sensibilities, especially when they were illuminated by the triumphs of the British glass making industry in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries – crystal chandeliers and mirrors.

The development of bleach had significant implications for the efficient and speedy production of textiles, particularly cottons, which were in great demand in the early eighteenth century, but the demand for bleach, or for bleached products, has a social meaning as well. There is no purely functional reason why cloth needs to be bleached, any more than there is for ceramics to be made of a white fabric, but in both cases the technological developments answered a social and cultural hunger for products that were white.

The meaning of whiteness in 'Georgianised' contexts in America has been explored by, among others, Deetz (1988) and Yentsch (1991). Deetz (1988: 222–4) identifies an underlying structural change evident in the material culture of New England from the late eighteenth century involving a switch in colour preferences from a range of colours, including 'natural', earth-toned colours, to white. This change is noticeable in architecture, ceramics and gravestones (in the replacement of local stones by imported white marble), among other things. Deetz argues that, because the preference for whiteness is observable in so many areas of material expression at the same time, explanations of the change in material culture in terms of transport, technology or exchange may be 'particularistic, weak, and possibly off the mark' (1988: 224). Instead, he argues, a wider cultural preference is manifested in these particular choices. Beyond associating it with other flips in cultural polarity such as a preference for artifice over nature, and individual over collective, however, Deetz does not take much account of historical particularity in his discussion, a criticism which has often been applied to structuralist archaeology such as his.

Anne Yentsch (1991), also looking at American material and observing an emerging preference in eighteenth century sites for white-bodied ceramics, adds a gender dimension to Deetz's dualistic association between whiteness (as an attribute of artefacts) and artificiality (culture), opposed to earth-tones and nature. Yentsch adds that nature and culture were associated with femininity

and masculinity respectively, and thus that earth-toned vessels were associated with the feminine domain and therefore they occur in the more private areas of the house, such as the kitchen and bedroom. The white-wares were, by contrast, associated with the masculine domain of public display, social consumption and the more formal areas of the house, such as the dining room. For Yentsch, the structural oppositions of the eighteenth-century household, as manifest in their use of pottery, reflect and reinforce gender ideologies and inequalities in society at the time. Tea wares and dinner wares, she argues, were masculine and related to the status display of the whole household, despite their frequent deployment by women. Yentsch's work depends on a set of oppositions: not only those between masculine and feminine, public and private, white and brown, as mentioned, but also, though less explicitly, between 'traditional' and 'modern'.

The conflict between 'nature' and 'culture' in modernity, and the West's belief in the superiority of culture over nature has perhaps been overstated, especially for the early nineteenth century, when the Enlightenment valorisation of rational human intervention operated alongside a romantic and ultimately sentimental belief in the moral superiority and authenticity of nature and the rural. However, in the first half of the nineteenth century what one might call the folkloric past was not valorised at all. Undyed or unbleached cloths, unglazed and earth-toned ceramics were all associated with the recent and parochial past, with traditional or conservative peasants who were looking backwards rather than forwards. In contrast, bright, shiny and unmistakably *cultural* finishes to goods represented freedom from the bonds of tradition. Thus, the obvious artifice of bleached textiles, as well as the association of whiteness with hygiene, signalled allegiance to the progressive forces of Improvement and change.

Neither Deetz nor Yentsch explore another important meaning of whiteness in the eighteenth century: that of cleanliness and purity. As a visual symbol in art and increasingly in dress, white meant purity, innocence and even virginity. By the mid eighteenth century white wedding dresses were becoming fashionable (Cunnington and Lucas 1972: 60) and became increasingly *de rigueur* over the next 200 years. Children's clothes, and especially babies' clothes, were often white, for its associations of purity and innocence. By the early nineteenth century, children's funerals were distinguished from those of married adults by the use of white coffins, and white accessories by the mourners, a custom which was also sometimes extended to unmarried (i.e. sexually pure) young men and women (Cunnington and Lucas 1972: 260). At the table, a 'taste' for white foods was also evident: old-fashioned brownish salt was replaced in the eighteenth century by a pure, white refined salt (Cranstone 2001: 205–7), and other food demonstrated the same transformation. White, refined, sugar was more highly prized than brown sugar for table use: 'The idea that the finest and purest sucrose would also be the whitest is probably a symbolically

potent aspect of sugar's early European history' reflects Mintz (1985: 22). In wealthier households, white bread was preferred to brown. In his epistolatory novel *Humphrey Clinker*, Smollett has Matthew Bramble complain about London bread:

> a deleterious paste, mixed up with chalk, alum, and bone-ashes; insipid to the taste, and destructive to the constitution. The good people are not ignorant of this adulteration; but they perfer it to wholesome bread, because it is whiter than the meal of corn . . . The same monstrous depravity appears in their veal, which is bleached by repeated bleedings, and other villainous arts, till there is not a drop of juice left in the body . . . so void of all taste, nourishment, and savour, that a man might dine as comfortably on a white fricassee of kid-skin gloves; or chip hats from Leghorn. (Smollett 1967 [1771]: 152)

The developing desire for whiteness relates to a need to be, and be seen to be, clean. Physical cleanliness was strongly associated with moral propriety, as we have seen in previous chapters. White shows the dirt and therefore wearing white, especially spotless, bleached bright white is the mark of a person with a high level of personal cleanliness, someone who changes clothes and bathes frequently and who lives in a place where their clothes are unlikely to be dirtied. Whiteness indicates good household economy (a trope still used in adverts for washing powder). White is, moreover, a highly 'cultural' colour as a finish for artefacts. Unlike the browns and greys of undyed wools, linens and cottons, white stands at a greater distance from 'nature' (like that other colour so beloved of the eighteenth and nineteenth century smart set, in ceramics and elsewhere: blue). It indicates self-cultivation; care in the presentation of self and moral, social and physical refinement.

White ceramics in eighteenth-century Britain, as in colonial America, are very much associated with table wares, i.e. with the more 'public' and communicative aspects of food preparation and consumption. Cumberpatch comments:

> While tablewares are white, the vessels used for food preparation and storage stay in the colours that appeared with the post-medieval 'ceramic revolution' i.e. brown, black, red and sometimes yellow; Brown Glazed Coarsewares, Yellow Glazed Coarsewares, Redwares etc. Slipwares and mottled wares also continue throughout the eighteenth century along with brown stoneware – A real distinction between the kitchen and informal drinking contexts and the formal table, I assume. (Cumberpatch pers. com.)

Cumberpatch makes an important point, here and in Cumberpatch 2004, that in fact whiteness in ceramics is principally valued in 'front-of-house' contexts such as social dining, while activities of less public visibility such as food preparation, or of 'traditional' non-elite activity such as ale-drinking, continue to make use of older fabrics, darker colours and coarser wares. The difference between kitchen and dining room could be because white ceramics were for display to those outside the family, or that, as Yentsch suggests, the folkloric and feminine aspects of earth-toned ceramics were felt to be appropriate to the feminine realm of the kitchen, or that those involved with the preparation of food were less concerned with purity, cleanliness and so on than those consuming it. The difference between the wares used in a labourers' ale-house (until around 1800 anyway) and those from an inn catering to the middle classes might relate to economics (older style wares being cheaper than white wares) or to a real class-related difference of taste and value. It may be that whiteness was less important or desirable to the labouring poor than to the aspirant and improving middle classes.

Window Glass

When the East Indiaman the *Earl of Abergavenny* sank just out of harbour off Portland Bill in 1805 it carried with it a full load of cargo bound for India, including ceramics, textiles and other artefacts typical of the broader processes underway at the time. There were tens of thousands of gunflints, for example, probably for the use of the East India Company, whose army at the time was larger than that of the British king. Attracting less attention, however, there was also a large consignment of window glass, destined for use in building projects in Calcutta or the other growing cities of British India.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century window glass comes close to the top of most field archaeologists' lists of unexciting finds. While bottle glass and glass tableware is usually described and analysed in archaeological reports, sometimes quite extensively, window glass from later historical sites rarely gets more than a quantifying note, and that is not surprising. Unless etched or painted, there is apparently very little to engage with. Most of it, especially when only small fragments are recovered, displays little individual variation, and without laboratory analysis, differences in origin, style or manufacture are not very obvious since the production of window glass from the late eighteenth century onwards used standardised industrial techniques of a national distribution. But the production and consumption of window glass, and the cultural attitudes associated with it, are highly informative about the period. The kinds of windows enabled by flat glass technology of the time were instrumental in the development of modern concepts of self, place and light, among other things.

Manufacture

There was over the period a gradual improvement in techniques of manufacture, but 'no spectacular innovation' (Charleston 1984: 194). Improvements to the process of glass manufacture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant that new window styles, with larger panes, became possible and increasingly affordable. In the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century, most window glass was produced by either the crown method, or by the broadsheet or cylinder blown method.

The window glass of choice in the eighteenth to nineteenth century was generally 'crown glass', made by spinning the balloon of glass until it formed a flat disc, and then cutting panes from the outside of the disc (because a 'bulls-eye' was left in the centre where the blob of blown glass had been attached to the 'punty' rod on which it had been spun). Crown glass is known to have been produced in Britain from the mid sixteenth century at least (Vose 1980: 136–7), and by the late eighteenth century this technique was producing very high quality glass, in larger sizes than the small lead lites made by traditional broad sheet production. Because the disc could be up to about 1.2 m across, panes cut from the side, and avoiding the central bull's-eye, could be of about 50 × 30 cm. The glassworks at Bolsterstone near Sheffield, by contrast, had been producing crown glass panes with a side of only about 8 cm from discs of around 90 cm across until the mid eighteenth century (Ashurst 1987: 192). The evenness of the best late eighteenth-century window glass meant also that there was little distortion in looking through it, so as well as admitting light, a fairly clear view of the outside was possible, as was, of course, a view of the inside.

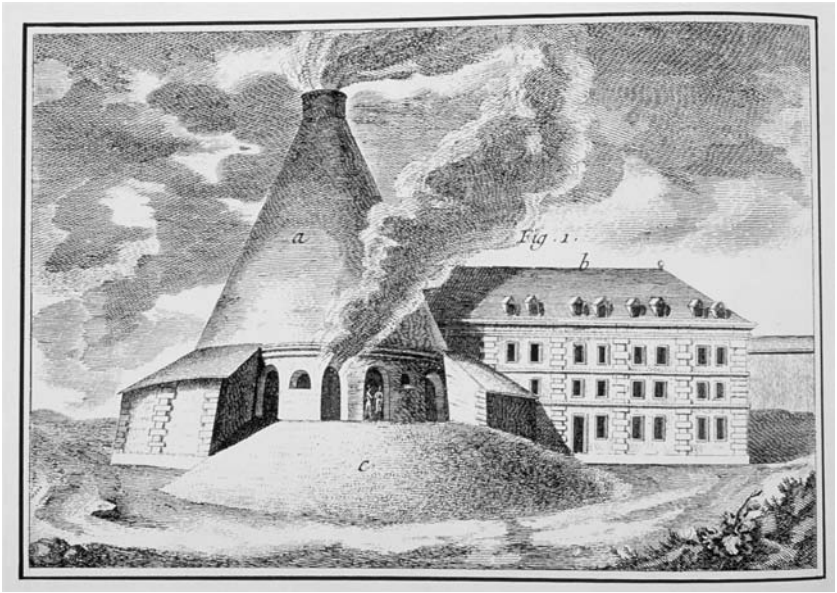
The oldest technology, producing the cheapest and lowest quality glass was broad sheet production. Broad sheet glass was made by blowing a balloon of glass and then cutting it so that it could be opened out and hardened into a flat sheet. The basic process produced only small panes of glass and they were not of good quality, being of irregular thickness and flawed by 'seeds' – tiny air bubbles. Broad sheet glass was, in the eighteenth century, inferior in quality to crown glass. Production of the former was centred on Newcastle, and it was therefore often called 'Newcastle glass' and characterised by its blemishes and its ashy colour (Charleston 1984: 195). Crown glass, the finest of which was reputed to come from London, was far superior; a price guide of 1741 quotes Newcastle glass at 6d a foot and crown glass at 11d. While prices fluctuated from year to year, the price of crown glass was always considerably higher than Newcastle glass, sometimes more than double.

In the nineteenth century, crown glass remained a popular and widely produced choice for window glazing, but innovations in the production of blown cylinder glass enabled bigger panes to be made than the broad sheets of the previous century. Cylinder-blown glass, developed in the nineteenth

century, used a trench to accommodate a much larger sausage of glass, and employed compressed air technology to blow more evenly and smoothly than the human mouth. Cylinder-blown glass was less prone to seeding or irregularity in thickness. By swinging the sausage of glass inside a trench, huge cylinders could be blown which could then be cut to produce very large pieces of glass. This technology culminated in the Crystal Palace, built for the Great Exhibition of 1851 and itself showcasing the abilities of British manufacturers. All 299,655 panes of glass were produced by the blown cylinder method, by Chance Brothers of Smethwick, Birmingham (Dodsworth 1982: 20). Each pane, moreover, measured about 1200 × 240 mm, a size beyond the capacity of crown production.

Sheets of glass produced by the blown cylinder method might then be ground and polished to produce plate glass, which had an even and high quality finish and was preferred for high status buildings. Plate glass of quite large dimensions first appeared in one or two very high status buildings in England in the seventeenth century. Plate glass, and polished plate which involved casting the glass on a table, was mostly imported from France and was very expensive. Plate glass was, however, produced in Britain at the Ravenhead casting hall in St Helens from 1776 (Vose 1980: 154). The first piece made there is said to be a mirror at Osterley Park measuring 2.44 m by 1.52 m, far larger than earlier looking-glasses. Mirrors, as well as windows, were increasingly used in the later eighteenth century to make interiors seem lighter and more spacious. Charleston (1984: 196) comments that '[t]his increase in the size of looking-glasses contributed greatly to lightening interiors, an effect accentuated by candle light'. From the mid nineteenth century, plate glass was manufactured in larger quantities in Britain and was coming down in price, in part because of the use of steam engines to power the grinding and polishing parts of the process.

Glassworks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are characterised by high brick cones, which enclose not only the furnace, but also much of the glassmakers' working area (Dodsworth 1982: 13). The furnace was enclosed in a central cone containing an iron grate for the fire with an air supply from below and a stoking window, and in the upper part a number of clay pots for melting the glass. After extracting the molten glass it would be worked by teams or 'chairs' of about four glassmakers in the area between the furnace wall and the outer wall of the cone. After the glass had been shaped it required 'annealing' – controlled cooling to prevent cracking. The glass furnace at Ballycastle in Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, built in the 1750s and used until 1771, produced crown glass as well as bottles and fine flagons (Vose 1980: 148–9). Excavation at the site found the circular foundations of the furnace of an 18 m diameter which must have supported a cone about 27 m high. The annealing house was adjacent to the cone, a typical position since it had to provide a range of temperature zones from just below melting point to air temperature. In plan it is very similar to the



6.1. An English glasshouse, from Diderot and D'Alembert (eds.) *Encyclopedie*. The circular shape and conical chimney are typical of British glassmaking and different from contemporary French and German styles of glasshouse (by kind permission of Cambridge University Library).

'Verrerie Angloise' shown in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopedie* (Fig. 6.1). Indeed, the cone type of glasshouse seems to show relatively little local variation: the glasshouse at Gawber near Barnsley also conforms closely to Diderot and D'Alembert's plan (Vose 1980: 153), as do the Dudley Flint Glassworks, excavated recently at Stone Street, Dudley. Not all eighteenth-century glasshouses were of the cone design however. The glasshouse at Bolsterstone in Yorkshire produced glass goods including crown window glass until 1758, but housed its furnace in a low building with arched walls and a complex system of airways (Ashurst 1987).

It is not always easy to tell from archaeology alone whether window glass was produced at any particular site. The production of crown glass at a glasshouse is not always evident, since the characteristic waste parts of the 'bull's-eye' and rim trimmings are more likely to be discarded near the site at which the glazing took place. Glass found at glasshouses was in any case not necessarily produced there; glass manufacture requires the incorporation of some old glass ('cullet') in the mixture, and this could come from anywhere.

The main factors in the siting of glasshouses was access to fuel, with ease of access to other materials such as sand, alkalis and fireclay of secondary importance, along with proximity to markets and transport networks (Vose 1980: 111). Indeed Vose's map of major glassworking sites of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries shows a national distribution of glass manufacturing sites, but with particular

concentrations in Lancashire, Cheshire, Staffordshire, South Yorkshire and the English midlands.

The availability of larger, more transparent panes of glass for less money made possible a number of developments in architecture, related to the aspirations and attitudes of the people. One of the most startling developments at the time was the rapid change in shop fronts. At the start of the eighteenth century, a retail shop was barely distinguishable from other buildings; a counter might separate the shopkeeper from the street, but often the shop was simply the front room of the house, whose doors and windows resembled those of any other domestic frontage. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, glazed shop-fronts were appearing even in rural towns. Around 1800, glazed shop windows still had small panes, often filling the spaces between classical style pillars. However, some shops, especially those in London, were beginning to include much larger panes of plate glass. By 1850 huge plates of glass adorned shop windows in all big towns, and the small multi-paned shop window was generally limited to small towns and back streets (Girouard 1990: 227). In the early nineteenth century, then, increases in the size of window and in the transparency of the glass, combined with the availability of gas lighting, made the window display a valuable opportunity for business promotion. The shopkeeper Francis Place recognised the importance of good-quality glazing in marketing when he carried out work on his shop:

> I pulled out the shop front, closed the doors in front under the shop to the vaults and paved the places where there were wooden flaps in the footpath in front of the shop. I put in a new front as elegant as the place would permit, each of the panes of glass cost me three pounds, and two in the door, four pounds each. (Place 1972: 215)

He used the shop window to display goods suitable for impulsive purchase: gloves, ribbons, handkerchiefs, waistcoats and so on, and kept it lit at night with argand lamps (oil lamps of great brightness invented in 1784). A German visitor to London in the 1790s was particularly struck by the attractive and glittering shop window displays of crystal, fruit, cake, beautiful draperies and other brightly coloured or shiny goods that 'the merchants show to the public behind large plate glass windows' (Schopenhauer 1988: 138–9, cited in Cox and Walsh 2000: 97).

These developments also occurred at a time of increasing commercial competition and with the birth of the modern, aggressive advertising industry. Goods displayed in the window fuelled desires for consumption, particularly the consumption of luxury goods. But the relationship between advertising and consumption is not straightforward. If certain goods were pushed by window display (as well as by other means: printed notices and posters for example) they were also pulled by a society that was increasingly hungry to acquire.

In an innovative and influential study of the origins of modern consumer practice, Colin Campbell (1987) suggests that the rise of modern consumerism in the later eighteenth century is inseparable from the development of romantic imagination at the time. Goods were consumed, he argues, because they were necessary to a project of realising a self already pleasurably experienced in the creative imagination. Thus consumerism, he proposes, is a result of trying to remake the self in some way. The irony is, of course, that the actual experience of being the new self never quite lives up to the anticipation, and consequently new selves, needing new material accessories, are constantly necessary in an endless cycle of unfulfilled hopes. Campbell's link between 'the Romantic Ethic and the spirit of Modern Consumerism', as his book is titled, echoing Weber's great work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), details a convincing link between the undisputed growth in consumption represented in this period, evident in almost all archaeological and historical sources, and what I have been calling 'Improvement', in this case the improvement of the self. Self-improvement, although the most introspective manifestation of the Improvement ethic, nevertheless has material corralates. Campbell argues that modern consumption patterns relate to a desire to realise a potential self already experienced in the romantic imagination. This is, in essence, a pattern that we can recognise today. My own consumption practices, particularly those of luxury goods, are related, in part, to an imaginary version of a future, 'improved' me: more stylish in that new jacket; more competent with that fancy digital camera; more satisfactory as a partner and parent preparing (organic, exotic) dinner in that fitted kitchen. The shop window display in the early nineteenth century did more than inform the customer what sort of shop it was, and it provided more than information: it was a venue to stimulate the imagination, an engine of the consumer revolution and a generator of desire.

Seeing in, Seeing out, Lighting up the Gloom

Windows have several purposes. Clear and relatively undistorting glass makes it possible to see in and this, combined with good artificial light, makes the shop window display worthwhile. 'Window-shopping', a characteristic pastime of modernity, becomes possible. Windows can also be places to look out from. Of course, this was not new in the eighteenth century, but well-finished cylinder-blown or plate glass which was now affordable for the well-to-do made the view through the window correspond more closely to the uninterrupted view. The preference in the eighteenth century was also overwhelmingly for clear glass rather than coloured, unlike the late-medieval and early modern taste for yellow tinted glass. The window glass recovered from the St Ebbe's area of Oxford shows a general trend in the post-medieval period 'from darker to lighter colours' (Hassal et al 1984: 246). All this facilitated a naturalistic

appreciation of the street, square, garden or park that lay beyond. Unlike most other consumer goods, the ideal of high quality window glass is that it should not be seen. Although material, it should be as little visible as possible, but improve on the open view by protecting the viewer from the less aesthetically appealing qualities of nature – cold, wind, rain or insects. By imperceptibly protecting the viewer from physical discomfort, a more romantic and picturesque appreciation of view was enabled. Views, in this period, were not free. Not only were windows taxable from 1696 until 1851, so that a house liberally supplied with windows would have to pay more, but good quality glass that could be easily gazed through was too pricey for many people. Moreover, large and plentiful windows compromised the insulation of the house and made it more expensive to heat. The poor often had to make do with small panes of seeded and reamed (irregular) broad sheet glass, grey or yellowy-brown in colour assembled to make small numbers of small windows. So in many ways, a room with a view was a mark of privilege, even before the nature of the outlook was distinguished. But those houses with an outlook over attractive scenery had an advantage. Beautiful views, for the middle classes between 1750 and 1850, usually included greenery: parks, woods and fields in the countryside, squares, walks or gardens in town. This was another reason for the growing popularity of the burgeoning suburbs: it was hard to pastiche the idyllic rural view in the centre of old towns, but in laying out new residential areas, the trees and grassy areas that characterised pleasing vistas could be planned in.

The developing awareness and enjoyment of vistas, evident in the landscaping of gardens as well as in art and literature, coincided with the spread of new, larger windows, mostly of the sash form in Britain. Sash windows incorporated a built-in counter weight so that the lower part of the window could be raised flat against the upper half and would stay in position at whatever level it was lifted to. They were developed towards the end of the seventeenth century and grew in popularity throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Louw 1993) and were most popular in Britain, Holland and colonial America.

Views out from the window were complemented by views in. By the early eighteenth century, women displaying themselves at large windows were already a subject of satirical comment (Louw 1993: 303–4). This display of self appears at odds with the desire for privacy suggested by the segregation and ordering of internal architectural space as well as by the use of anonymous street addresses, but there is no necessary contradiction. What seems to have been important to the eighteenth-century middle classes (but not at all to the labouring classes) was not privacy in the sense of absolute seclusion, but control over the presentation of the self. The importance of the imagined and presented self has already been discussed with reference to consumption, but the deliberate presentation of self to others in a way which is above all conscious of the impression formed in others' minds also makes use of a range of 'framing' props and scenery (Goffman 1959).

The sash window literally frames the person, who can carefully pose themselves, prepare costume and make-up and orchestrate their appearance.

Windows have and had great symbolic and metaphorical resonance in the eighteenth century not only because they can be looked out of or in through, thus constituting a means of knowing the world ('a window on') but also because they are sources of light. Large sash windows with big panes meant that less of the window area was taken up by leading, mullions and transomes, so more light entered the room. Through the window comes illumination, the central metaphor of the enlightenment. Large and numerous windows, chandeliers, mirrors and, later, gaslight, all contributed to the illumination of the interior in this period. Of course, all this light was of practical assistance to the 'enlightened' middle-class family who spent much of their time on needlework, or reading, but the light house had, like the clean house, the well-organised house and the airy house, moral and philosophical value as well as a practical function. Being enlightened meant more than being physically well-lit, but the metaphor of illumination acted back to influence fashions and beliefs about lighting.

Transfer-Printed Wares

Along with glass, building materials and animal bone, ceramics are among the most frequent artefactual categories of evidence recovered from post-medieval sites. Eighteenth-century ceramics were produced in increasingly standardised fashions and generally with national or even international patterns of distribution. The retrieval of standardised, industrially-produced ceramics from even remote locations like the island of St Kilda in the nineteenth century demonstrates for Howard-Davies (2001) that by then a 'uniform British culture' had achieved a 'partial triumph' over local identities. (It might be more accurate to say that different contextual identities were not primarily created through the use of ceramics. One must be wary of reading the consumption of material culture as a simple index of identity; using pottery from Shropshire did not necessarily make the St Kildans 'British', any more than the use in London of imported oriental ceramics made their purchasers Chinese.) Characteristic table wares of the period include imported Chinese wares, and British ceramics of a more delicate appearance, paler colour (as discussed above) and finer material than the wares of the preceding century. Dominant shapes were the dinner plate, serving dishes and platters and tea wares (the latter especially in imported oriental ceramics). Kitchen and cooking wares did not follow the same fashions as serving wares, and earth-toned glazes in the seventeenth-century style remained popular. In addition to the plain glazed and unglazed wares of kitchen and table, the later eighteenth century and the nineteenth century saw an increase in the popularity of transfer printed wares.

By the latter part of the eighteenth century, British potters were producing 'bone china', a fine white ware, in emulation of the Chinese porcelain which had been exported from China around the world for some time. The fine, white and even surface of this good quality porcelain was suitable for fine decoration, and that decoration could be achieved relatively cheaply using transfer-printing technology. Designs were hand etched onto copper plates, which were then covered with oil-based pigment. The design was transferred onto paper and positioned on the vessel. The paper was removed in water to leave the design on the surface of the vessel, which was then returned to the kiln to fix the colour. In the case of monochromatic transfer-prints, the glaze was usually applied on top of the transfer and before the final firing. More complex polychromatic designs were normally applied on top of the glaze.

Transfer-printing allowed a whole range of patterns and representational art to be easily and cheaply reproduced on plates, cups and other wares. The variety of designs was huge and ranged from Chinese scenery, to overt political propaganda, taking in portraiture, landscapes, natural history and numerous other subjects. Lucas (2003) notes that transfer printed wares were used not only for the service and consumption of food and drink, but as decorative items in their own right. Favourite plates might be displayed on a wall or ranges of crockery stored in full view in a dresser or sideboard. However, the serving and sharing of food and drink was in itself a social and communicative event, and the 'display' of ceramics also took place in the context of social use.

Motifs, designs and pictures on transfer-printed ceramics provided an unusually discursive medium for the communication of social meaning. Political views, aesthetic tastes, interests and knowledge could all be signalled subtly or overtly through the use of particular designs. A couple of recent studies consider two kinds of design featured on transfer-printed ware in Britain. Brookes discusses designs featuring British scenery, and Lucas the consumption of ceramics with literary scenes on them.

Brooks (1999) sees transfer-printed ceramics as evidence and agents of a growing sense of 'Britishness' in the later eighteenth century. The 'Titled Seats' series of designs produced by the Careys between about 1823 and 1842 (1999: 54), featured pictures of houses and castles from Ireland, Scotland and England, for example, and the 'British History' series, produced by Jones and Son from 1826 to 1828, referred to episodes in the national histories of Britain's constituent countries. These can be read as either attempts to integrate national histories into a single 'British' identity or, depending on your point of view, attempts by the English to appropriate and make safe the national histories of Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Romanticised versions of a 'Celtic' past were eagerly consumed by the English and indeed consumers of Staffordshire pottery around the world (Brooks 1997). Similarly, designs which were distinctly Welsh or Scottish in character were consumed both by the Welsh and Scots themselves

in a way which, Brooks argues, reinforced their national identity, and by the English and other foreigners overseas as part of a romantic interest in and perhaps appropriation of 'Celtic' history, myth and landscape (Brooks 1999). Brooks suggests that the consumption of ceramics bearing designs based on the novels of Sir Walter Scott could be seen in this way as part of the creation of an attractive but toothless 'Balmoralised' version of Scotland in the nineteenth century.

Interestingly, Lucas (2003) offers an alternative interpretation of the appearance of scenes from Walter Scott's novels on ceramics in England. Unlike Brooks, whose sources were primarily pattern books, Lucas's analysis centres on the interpretation of one particular assemblage recovered from a dump of domestic rubbish outside a farmhouse on the edge of High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. The material recovered dates to the period between the 1780s and the 1840s and includes glassware, ceramics and other domestic material. Most of the transfer-printed ware from the site shows Chinese scenes, but there were also a number of vessels decorated with literary themes, namely scenes from Scott's *Old Mortality* (Fig. 6.2) and *Legend of Montrose*, from Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Thomson's *Seasons*. Lucas's interpretation of the presence of these pieces of transfer-printed ware considers the changes that took place in and around

6.2. Ceramics with a design inspired by Scott's 'Old Mortality' demonstrated the middle-class aspirations, and the conventionality, of the inhabitants of Temple End Farm, Buckinghamshire (by kind permission of Gavin Lucas).

the house from which they came in the early nineteenth century. During the 1830s and 1840s the farmhouse underwent considerable alterations including the construction of a new 'Georgian' style façade which disguised its three-cell lobby house origins, and the building was reoriented to face the town. These changes reflected the social aims of the occupants who now aspired to be part of local 'polite society'.

Membership of polite society in the nineteenth century was no longer based primarily on birth and blood, but on subscription to a set of shared values, and tastes which could be demonstrated in daily material practice. A belief in, and active participation in various projects of Improvement constituted a key value and an essential practice in that respect, and literacy was a central part of the package. A familiarity with books could be demonstrated not only in conversation but also through the possession and display of books themselves and of, for example, ceramics printed with scenes from novels. However, the choice of books to exhibit was also significant. At this period, especially among a conservative rural population, attitudes to novels were ambivalent. On the one hand they could be improving, and an acquaintance with published fiction was necessary in order to participate in polite conversation; on the other, novels were potentially sources of moral corruption, especially for the impressionable and unworldly girls and women who were believed to constitute their main readership. Reading was, until the mid nineteenth century, still a fairly restricted activity in social terms. Although book prices had come down considerably since fifty years earlier, and libraries had made access to fiction easier, readers of literature were still only a small part of the literate public. But by the 1830s and 1840s suspicion of novels was beginning to abate and fiction was becoming 'domesticated' (Lucas 2003). However, Lucas notes that the novels drawn on for transfer-printed ceramics were the uncontentious classics and the safe and popular Scott. The scenes used were relatively static landscapes or moments; by contrast, the satirical and occasionally grotesque novels of Charles Dickens were not drawn upon for ceramic decoration. Scott, like Thomson, was a conservative choice quite appropriate for an aspiring small-town family to display to local middle-class families.

In this context it is interesting to note that transfer-printed wares, although much cheaper than hand-painted fine wares, were still considerably more expensive than their undecorated counterparts (Miller 1991: 14). The possession of transfer-printed ware itself signalled a degree of wealth. It is in circumstances like this that the significance of wealth in nineteenth-century class formation was significant. Although money was not in itself sufficient qualification for admittance to the ranks of the middle classes, a reasonable income was necessary in order to acquire and demonstrate the tastes, values and abilities that were. Thus, crude financial status is not the primary signification of transfer-printed ware, or of any material possession at the time, but without access to financial

resources the 'cultural capital' necessary to belong to 'polite society' would not be easy to accrue. This is a subtle point about modern consumption practices, and one that is ignored by some ceramic analysts who have tried to use the value of recovered ceramics to infer the socio-economic status of a household. As Klein discovered after undertaking a comparative study of ceramics from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century in the Eastern United States, ceramics do not relate in any predictable way to either the wealth of the family or their proximity to markets: 'Given the heterogeneity of nineteenth-century society' she concludes, 'this jump from ceramic vessels to the behaviour of social or economic groups has no solid basis' (Klein 1991: 88). This conclusion needs some modification, in that Klein's research questions addressed how a household's status and composition might be inferred from ceramic evidence, rather than its values or 'behaviour' in a cultural sense. Moreover, the ceramics were analysed purely in terms of their economic worth, and not in terms of the cultural meanings of ware types or vessel form. Thus it was social position of a fairly static nature, rather than cultural behaviour of a meaningful and ideological nature that could not be linked to the prices of ceramics. Mrozowski et al (1996) found that the constitution and organisation of the household was more significant in determining the range and type of ceramics than its wealth, and Blinkhorn (2002: 323) found the same to be true of eighteenth-century ceramic assemblages from Oxford.

The great strength of work such as Lucas's or Brooks's on the designs of transfer-printed wares, or Yentsch's or, with reference to a slightly earlier period, Cumberpatch's (2003) on changes in the use of ceramics, is that it goes beyond the crude search for economic position (which in any case is usually more easily inferred in this period from the size and position of the building, or from documentary sources) to examine the ideological and cultural context of the production, acquisition and use of material culture. The full potential of transfer-printed wares in the analysis of social strategies and cultural beliefs has not yet been exploited. In the context of this book, our concern at present is how the manufacture and consumption of these ceramics was involved in ideologies of Improvement. Apart from the technological improvements that permitted their mass-production, and the improvements in transport and markets that allowed them to be distributed all over the world, transfer-printed wares can also cast some light on the area of self-improvement

One of the hardest areas of Improvement to approach archaeologically is the one that generated more literature than any other sphere of Improvement for most of the period: improving the self. What distinguished self-improvement in this period is that the 'better', more moral, more accomplished, more educated and tasteful self is a worthy end in itself. Although advantages might proceed from such improvement (and the literature is full of stories or reflections on how self-improvement could result in material wealth, a good marriage or other worldly

rewards), self-improvement was more than just instrumental in acquiring wealth, power or prestige: it was a laudable, and increasingly expected, expression of personal moral worth.

The importance of self-improvement rests on a belief in a future self different from the present self, but actively created by the present self, through strategic work. This distinguished the 'improved' self from the self who is merely different, perhaps as a result of inevitable social and physical changes relating to age. The 'improved' self is never complete, never entirely realised – it is always a work-in-progress and in need of further refinement. However, being an improving kind of person can be signalled culturally and materially.

Part of the process of self-improvement was the acquisition of taste. This was not necessarily something with which a person was born; it could be learned through familiarity with things, places and works of acknowledged superiority. For a man of means, such familiarity could be gained by travel, in Europe and beyond. Taste could also be improved through studying art, literature and music, and acquiring an education in the arts. Knowledge of a 'canon' in those subjects and an aesthetic appreciation of certain types of architecture and landscape would demonstrate that some effort had been applied to the improvement of the self. One's choice of ceramics, like many other aspects of material culture consumption, afforded eighteenth or nineteenth century men and women an opportunity to communicate the refinement of their tastes and thus their personal amelioration. However, it is not only in the strategic deployment of discursive material like transfer-printed ceramics that the values of the improved self appear. Even in the most mundane of material practices – throwing away rubbish – a distinctively modern attitude is evident.

Rubbish Pits

One of the positive results of the post-processual turn in archaeological theory in the last couple of decades is that attitudes to hygiene and cleaning in the past can be seen as interesting elements of cultural practice. This contrasts with an approach which treated evidence of curation or tidying as regrettable distortions of archaeological patterning: Michael Schiffer (1987) famously designated such activity 'C-transforms' (C standing for culture). Different levels of tolerance for dirt were hardly recognised, and neither was it considered that different cultures might have different ideas about what constitutes dirt or pollution and that those attitudes might themselves be illuminating. Critique of taken-for-granted assumptions about dirt and cleaning has had liberating consequences for archaeology. Even in historically recent periods changing practices of rubbish disposal relate to wider cultural changes in hygiene and use of space.

How people choose to dispose of their refuse is indicative of social attitudes towards cleanliness and the ordering of space. Archaeological evidence from the period 1750–1850 shows us no uniformity in disposal practices, but there are general trends which, although interesting and of great cultural importance in view of the contemporary attitude to dirt and disorder (discussed in this chapter and elsewhere), have not been subject to proper archaeological analysis. It is a frustratingly common feature of archaeological site reports that even when the post-medieval and modern phases of a site have yielded the majority of its evidence, that material is barely described and is treated as intrusive truncation of the interesting medieval or earlier remains beneath. Pearson (2002), for example, teasingly allows that the majority of evidence from a site at Braintree was post-medieval, but then concentrates almost entirely on the small amount of Roman material discovered underneath it, so that our knowledge of the seventeenth to nineteenth century pits 'and other intrusive features' (2002: 81) is not advanced. I have picked on one report, but could have chosen a hundred others.

Most households a couple of hundred years ago produced considerably less domestic waste than any comparable modern house. There was little paper waste or packaging, no plastics or aluminium cans, no disposable nappies and far fewer drinks bottles and cartons. Much of what would be considered waste these days would be reused or recycled – milk containers and food storage would be reused until they broke and sometimes even then would be repaired. Old textiles were always in demand and paper manufacturers would pay by weight for rags. Organic waste was also in demand for compost. Rural households probably spread their compost on their own land; in urban areas farmers sometimes paid to carry away organic waste, including foul waste which was removed by night-soil men, for use on the fields. A fair amount of non-organic waste evidently followed this route too, judging by the distribution of eighteenth to nineteenth century domestic sherds around fields.

Householders were responsible for the disposal of their own waste, at least until the advent of municipal collection in the mid nineteenth century; by-laws, sometimes unchanged for 600 years or more, specified what was expected and frequent court cases attest both to the infringement of these laws and to the punishment of malefactors (Keene 1982). In smaller and less formal settlements disposal of all waste, including foul waste was less likely to be assisted by scavengers or nightsoil men. At Warminster Common in Wiltshire, in what must have been a fairly common practice, the poor inhabitants simply piled up household waste by the entrances of their homes and allowed foul waste to run into the stream across the road from the houses (Daniell 1850: 11). Presumably the compost heaps by the doors were occasionally removed for use on fields or gardens. Relatively inoffensive waste might not even be removed from the building, especially if it was an earthen floored non-domestic one. The accumulation and compaction of wood shavings from a nineteenth-century pole lathe

workshop in a hut on Bucklebury Common, Berkshire, had raised the floor level by about 5 cm in ten years, and disguised the building's origin as an Anglo-Saxon *grubenhaus* (Myres and Dixon 1988).

In the case of other dwellings, particularly town houses, domestic waste could often be left in the street and then removed by scavengers who were, by the nineteenth century, often contracted by the local authority as the precursors of municipal 'dustbin men'; or allowed to accumulate in the house yard, either as a heap, or as a layer on the surface of the ground, or in pits. The yard of the Peacock Inn on the edge of Chesterfield's market place consisted of 'a succession of rubble, rubbish and soil levelling spreads, with many disturbances', and deposits included nineteenth-century pottery, demonstrating that this use of the yard space as an open disposal area continued until then (Fowkes 1978: 36). Some of the excavations from the St Ebbe's area of Oxford suggest that the land behind the tenement buildings sometimes saw the accumulation of rubbish piled or distributed across the ground surface. Gnaw marks on meat bones and other evidence of animal scavengers 'indicate trodden and perhaps malodorous yards or animal pens' (Hassall et al 1984: 267).

However, more common than simply leaving waste on the ground surface, and often in any case subsequent to it, was its deposition in pits. Where earlier subterranean features such as cellars or wells had gone out of use (this was particularly the case for wells in this period, as they were increasingly rendered redundant by piped water supplies), they were often infilled with domestic waste. Garden wells appear to have been backfilled at this time, such as those at Castle Hedingham, Essex (Walker 2002), at St Mary Cray in Kent (Grey 1993: 28), on the Ashmolean Museum forecourt site in Oxford (Andrews and Mepham 1997: 196) and the Moat House Hotel site in Northampton (Chapman 2001: 99). Cellars were also filled in with mixed deposits including domestic waste as well as building rubble and other materials, such as that at Market Street, Oxford (Taylor and Hull 2002) which was filled with dumped material sometime in the 1770s or 1780s. The material from Market Street does not appear to have accumulated in the cellar, but rather to have been redeposited there after having been collected in a more open situation: 'The faunal evidence', report the excavators (2002: 357) 'suggests an environment like a compost heap, perhaps in an open yard where rats briefly had access to the material'. The house yards could have been used as dumps for rubbish from the houses and also apparently from Jesus College, since several seals from wine bottles, dating from the 1770s, were marked with the stamp of Jesus College Common Room. At Brook Street, Warwick, from the late eighteenth century rubbish was dumped in disused cellars, latrines and wells rather than in specially dug pits, as had been the medieval tradition for that area (Cracknell and Bishop 1992: 38–9). Rather than one or two large-scale dumping events, as at Market Street, the two cellars and the latrine in Warwick appear to have seen

a gradual accumulation of debris from the time that the features went out of use (1992: 24).

Evidently, pits were not necessarily dug primarily for the purpose of refuse disposal. Often pits that were made in order to extract sand, gravel, clay or other material were subsequently backfilled with either domestic waste or building rubble. Two eighteenth-century pits at St Mary Cray in Kent, for example, were probably the result of sand or flint extraction but were apparently backfilled with domestic rubbish, including fragments of glass, pipe and pottery (Grey 1993). On other occasions, pits seems to have been dug expressly for the purpose of disposing of rubbish. This was not a new practice in the post-medieval period. Many sites demonstrate long traditions of pit-digging, as at the Ashmolean Museum Forecourt in Oxford where pits had been dug for centuries before the particularly vigorous activity of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. At nearby Henley-on-Thames pits for rubbish disposal had been excavated since the thirteenth century, but the majority of pits date from the late eighteenth century (Pine 1999: 259). By the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, moreover, excavation shows that refuse pits were concentrated in some yards and absent from others, which perhaps indicates a more specialised use of yard space or perhaps household differences in the way that waste was disposed of.

Evidence from domestic properties in Hammersmith, London, showed that numerous waste disposal pits had been dug in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries behind the houses. The fill of the pits included fragments of many different kinds of ceramic vessel: dinner plates, chamber pots, cooking vessels, tea wares, flower pots, transfer-printed fine wares and imported porcelain, among others. There was also bottle glass and in general such a varied assemblage that the excavator could conclude 'the backyard and garden areas of houses were perceived as acceptable areas for the digging of pits for household rubbish' (Humphrey 2001: 21). Garbage pits varied in construction, but seem to fall into two broad categories. The first is the simple, unlined pit, whether a reused quarry pit, or a specialised disposal pit. These were probably used only once, and the fill indicates typical domestic refuse. There are also lined pits of various kinds. Four lined post-medieval pits from St George's Street, Canterbury seem to have been carefully constructed to permit reuse: they 'were certainly constructed to be periodically emptied' the excavator argues (Blockley 1988: 94). Three of the Canterbury pits were lined with brick, chalk and Caen stone, bonded in yellow mortar and were probably cesspits. The other, lined with brick, had a different fill including bone and shell debris, and was probably for domestic refuse (1988: 93). The only brick-lined pit from the Ashmolean forecourt, one of thirteen or so eighteenth-century pits, was also distinguished by a different fill from the unlined ones (Andrews and Mepham 1997: 196). It too seems to have been a cesspit (despite the unexplained occurrence of pieces of 'worked' human bone in the upper part of the fill). The nineteenth-century

cess-pit from Bedford was also lined with brick and stone (Baker 1970: 71). It is unclear, however, whether they would have operated as holding tanks for cess which could be emptied, or whether they simply acted as soakaways. In the latter case, there would have been some risk that adjacent water supplies, especially if water came from a well, could be polluted. A rectangular pit of probable eighteenth-century date at South Street, Bridport that the excavators suggest might have been a latrine is unlined and would probably not be easy to empty (Godden et al 2000: 113). In the St Ebbe's area of Oxford, seepage from cesspits was blamed for polluting the water in wells and causing outbreaks of cholera in 1832, 1849 and 1852 (Hassall et al 1984: 274).

There has been very little consideration of the ultimate fate of domestic waste after its removal from the domestic context. Cumberpatch (2005), however, has suggested that solid, dry domestic waste (such as broken pottery) was used to level the ground at construction sites in Sheffield. Based on his analysis of fragments of pottery found in the pre-construction layers at a number of nineteenth-century sites in Sheffield, he notes that the pottery appears relatively freshly broken at some sites, suggesting that it was brought directly to the building place, while some other pottery shows wear patterns characteristic of water deposition, suggesting that the waste lay elsewhere for some time.

This brief discussion has referred to a range of excavation reports which have published, in more or less detail, descriptions of post-medieval refuse disposal. Pits, dumps and spreads are known from many other contexts, particularly urban ones, but are not always included in reports. Although yard disposal is known from the medieval period onwards, there does seem to have been a particular frenzy of pit-digging in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries followed by a near ubiquitous abrupt (in archaeological terms) halt to the disposal of rubbish in pits in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many pitted yards were sealed by the construction of new buildings, as the pressure on urban space increased. This happened at St Ebbe's (Hassall et al 1984: 273) and in Bridport (Godden et al 2000: 115). In Henley, late eighteenth- to nineteenth-century house building occurred alongside the construction of garden features, part of a more general process of rebuilding in that period relating to the 'gentrification' of Henley associated with its economic success. Smart houses were remodelled in brick; Improvement Acts allowed the construction of a new bridge, improvements to the streets and the replacement of working-class slum areas with new cheap housing (Pine 1999: 273). At the Ashmolean site, the construction of the museum itself and the laying out of its grounds finished the domestic activity on the site, which is sealed by what is probably dump from the excavation of the museum cellars (Andrews and Mepham 1997: 196).

By 1850 there was no longer much need for garbage pits in most parts of urban Britain. Organised refuse collection and disposal took care of domestic waste, and pipes connected water closets directly to foul waste sewers.

Even in Lambeth, an area of notoriously poor housing conditions and dreadful public hygiene until very late, drains were laid from tenement buildings to properly constructed, deep cesspits in the yard, before mains sewage was completed (Webber 1991: 349–50). From the mid nineteenth century numerous brick-built drains and pits connected to the many phases of drainage and sewage were constructed and subsequently recovered during the course of archaeological investigations. The Lambeth cesspits produced over 1000 nineteenth-century domestic items. Since these items appear to have been associated with all aspects of domestic life, it appears that the cesspits were being used for general domestic waste disposal until the (very late) introduction of refuse collection to the area in 1880 (1991: 350).

Evidence for hygienic and sanitary practices of eighteenth and nineteenth century houses shows considerable diversity, affected by the arrangements made by the particular town authorities as well as the presence and diligence of local contractors. Individual households also differed in their tolerance of smell and mess, and the way that rubbish disposal fitted in with other uses of yard space, for storage, manufacturing activity or quarrying, for example. Nevertheless it is possible to pick out a general trend albeit embedded in much variation, from the medieval and early modern practice of disposing of waste in open, unlined pits, or in heaps or layers on the ground to the use of deep, lined pits and redundant underground features. In some cases, rubbish that had accumulated above ground appears to have been dumped into new disposal features around the end of the eighteenth century. Large-scale disposal of refuse in the house yard more or less ceased altogether with the general introduction of total waste collection by town authorities. Even before this time, the widespread use of lined and covered pits suggests a growing intolerance of smells and mess in the immediate vicinity of the house, and a concern about possible contamination of the water. Changing uses of space in the yard area were also significant. With increasing pressure on urban spaces many large yards had tenements or other additional working-class housing built on them in the early nineteenth century. In other cases the yard became a garden, part of the social space of the household. More work needs to be done in order to see how attitudes to yard space were affected by the composition and socio-economic status of the household. It may be that by the mid nineteenth century, middle-class households were more likely to use their yards for leisure, gardening and entertaining, and working-class households as extensions of working and storage space, as appears to be the pattern in New York (Crane 2000), or there may be local and regional differences which are not evident in the small and insignificant sample considered here.

The four examples considered in this chapter are brief attempts to see how large-scale cultural changes in ideology are evident in and informed by changes in mundane or even trivial material practice. All four of these examples

could be developed much further, and numerous other manifestations of the ideology of Improvement could also be tracked over this period. For the researcher today the frustrations are that archaeological evidence relating to the period is hard to access, seldom properly published and almost never interpreted.

SEVEN:

FINAL THOUGHTS

It does not seem appropriate to call this chapter 'Conclusions' because this exploration of the idea and implications of 'Improvement' between 1750 and 1850 has led less to a set of closely defined rules and regularities and more to a web of ambiguities and further questions. Duke and Saitta (1998) advocate an archaeology which is, among other things, 'less concerned with achieving hegemony for a particular theoretical position (or some new, eclectic synthesis of "the best" of existing paradigms) than with "keeping the conversation going" among the diverse sets of clients and constituencies served by archaeology'. Since this book has certainly not achieved hegemony for a new metanarrative (to replace archaeologies of capitalism, colonialism or industrial technology, for example), nor has it set out to do so, if it keeps the conversation going, that would certainly be a good way to finish.

Points and Considerations

A few general points are worth recapping, and a few particular questions worth posing; the points (which I will consider in turn below) are:

- Improvement is a distinctively modern ethic that informs many fields of practice and discourse.
- Improvement is ideological rather than purely a rational response to economic circumstances.
- Espousal of an ethic of Improvement had social and political advantages. Nevertheless, attempts to effect improvements are not always reducible to the pursuit of personal social or economic advantage. Values, aspirations and beliefs are more complicated than that.
- Belief in Improvement had a complicated relationship to class and geographical identities; in contrast to earlier periods, it is the homogeneity,

rather than the local variability, of material improvements which is most remarkable at this time.

- Archaeological work in this period is hampered by a belief that, because it is modern, we already understand it and no further research is required.
- Poor communication between different specialists (landscape historian, ceramicist, architectural historian, etc.) and between archaeological practitioners in different fields (excavation, material culture, museums and heritage, management, academia and education), and the development of a range of schools (post-medieval, historical, industrial, antiquarian), each with its own territory in the data, its own agenda and often a failure to engage with any of the other areas, has also handicapped the development of critical and three-dimensional ways of telling the past.

Improvement is a Distinctively Modern Ethic that Informs Many Fields of Practice and Discourse

Because most scholars, from archaeology, history or any other discipline, stick to fairly narrow areas of expertise, the discussion of Improvement has mostly been restricted to the consideration of developments within particular contexts: improvement in agriculture has not been discussed alongside the work of improvement in towns; improvements in manufacture have not been related to the same philosophy that informed self-improvement; improvements in communications and transport are not discussed in the same literature that considers the development of workhouses, and so on. For this reason, the ubiquity of Improvement in the literature of the time and in its material practices is not always noticed. Because Improvement is still such an important idea in all areas of our lives today, its historical particularity often goes unremarked, but one of the astonishing features of Improvement is the comparative infrequency of the idea, in a secular, societal sense, in medieval or even early modern contexts. What distinguishes Improvement in a modern sense from what went before is that it is essentially secular and humanistic. While there are tensions within the ideology of Improvement, especially between paternalism and autonomy as discussed later, modern concepts of Improvement are founded on a belief that people are capable of change and that this change can be either internally or externally (environmentally) generated. Because people, along with places and things, are malleable, human intervention can change the course of history. Humans have an ethical duty to make interventions to the benefit of humanity in general and specifically to the benefit of larger abstractions like the City or Nation.

Improvement is Ideological rather than Purely a Rational Response to Economic Circumstances

This point needs to be made especially in relation to much twentieth-century economic historical literature on agricultural improvement. It is important,

even if one disputes the significance of an ethic of improvement, to ask why landowners and farmers instituted particular reforms. The assumption that a desire to increase yield and thus profit was responsible needs to be substantiated because it is not universal; the implicit 'systems' model which explains agricultural improvement by reference to the need to feed the growing population also needs to be unpacked. In making this point I am not suggesting that economic rationality and ideology are necessarily opposed; in fact, the desire for economic profit is itself ideological and relates to the development of capitalism and a particular kind of conception of the self that developed over the eighteenth century. Ideologies of improvement have some explanatory force even in contexts where a 'practical' or 'economic' justification for action can also be found.

Improvement, however, was never a fully articulated or an entirely coherent ideology. This made space for contradictions which could be exploited ideologically to legitimate ongoing inequalities. The emphasis which many humanistic improvers placed on autonomy, for example, often had empowering and emancipatory potential, as in the case of tenant farmers and industrial entrepreneurs; however, the paternalism of much improving endeavour also legitimated the disempowerment of certain groups in particular contexts. Prisoners and workhouse inmates, for example, did not benefit from the increased autonomy that liberated some of their contemporaries; rather, control over the most mundane aspects of their existence was justified by the claim that they were being 'improved'.

Attempts to Effect Improvements are not Always Reducible to the Pursuit of Social or Political Advantage

Improvement is not motivated by greed or a crude desire for social dominance. However, the recognition of Improvement did rest somewhat on the identification of a set of characteristics associated mostly with the middle class: improved places, things and people should be clean, light, ordered, classified and the result of the application of rational principles of science. These values were not universally shared across society, and the institutions to which they gave rise were not enthusiastically welcomed by everyone.

Improvement was an aesthetic and an ideology as much as a rational response to perceived problems. It did have a strong moral and philosophical grounding and much genuine philanthropy was motivated by a desire to bring about improvement. Nevertheless, being seen to embrace the values of improvement, which could be done through material display as well as in other forms of discourse, was for many a means of social advancement. Middle-class social life turned upon the activities of improvement: demonstrating acquired skills in, for example, music, witty and well-informed conversation, taste in cultural matters and so on. Relationships were developed through attendance at lectures or meetings of Improvement Boards, Agricultural and Scientific Societies, Prison,

Workhouse or School boards or other societies. Thomson (1987: 239–40) describes the nineteenth-century proliferation even in rural Orkney of Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations, groups of men who met in country school rooms to recite poetry and present to each other 'highly abstract essays on such subjects as "Perseverance", "Politeness", and "Decisions of Character" '. They concentrated on 'self-improvement in its purest form', unconcerned with issues of local politics or identity. Thomson sees this as characteristic of the adoption of a national agenda, of a piece with a willingness to privilege agricultural Improvements originating outside Orkney above traditional vernacular practice.

Belief in Improvement had a Complicated Relationship to Class and Geographical Identities

One key element of the improved aesthetic and the values of Improvement was the comparatively small degree to which they varied from place to place within Britain.

It has become conventional in writing any wide-ranging archaeology or history book of any place or period that somewhere in the introduction or conclusion one should emphasise the range and depth of local and regional variation. In the case of British agricultural history over the period examined in this book, for example, local variations in the character and fertility of the land, traditional patterns of land-holding and the organisation of labour, proximity to communications, towns, cities and harbours, the number of 'improving' individuals, other industry and 'tradition' all affected the kind and degree of change. Since these factors varied considerably around Britain, authors such as Williamson (2002) are right to say that British rural history is a diverse process. To choose one much discussed example, Sackett recently claimed that there is no such 'thing' as enclosure; rather there are many locally distinct processes in train over many decades or even centuries (Sackett 2004). The fields of Kent differ from those of the Midlands, the East Anglian fens or the upland enclosures of Cumbria or west Wales.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there are differences wherever you look. But, crucially, there are also similarities, and these similarities are far greater than in any previous period. By the mid nineteenth century there is very little properly 'vernacular' architecture in Britain. In terms of material culture, a domestic assemblage from the Hebrides is hardly distinguishable from one from Buckinghamshire. Such differences as exist owe less to geographical location than at any other time; socio-economic, religious and aspirational differences are likely to be more significant than location.

Local differences are fairly easy to find because, from the viewpoint of a highly homogenised early twenty-first-century culture, such variability as exists is noticeable, hence there are scholarly studies of regional variation in building

materials, proportions of meat and cereal in the rural diet and so on. Because of a number of modern political concerns around identity politics, regionalism and devolved government, we are also perhaps more inclined to look for difference than for sameness. But for the people of the late eighteenth century, what was remarkable was the degree of similarity. Even where processes had very different local effects, it is a mistake to ignore what they shared with other regions. To reprise our earlier example, undeniably enclosure was different in timing, method and consequence in the different regions of Britain, but in some senses it *was* a unified phenomenon. The belief that land was better organised in demarcated parcels, individually owned and 'improved' by the application of scientific and rational management was a national, or even international premise. Improvements on Irish estates represent the landowners' 'essentially regional and local applications in the Irish context of ideas they shared with their social peers and relations in Great Britain' (Busteed 2000); their concern, like that of their counterparts elsewhere in Britain, was to integrate improvements to the estate with other local concerns which might include the improvement of towns, settlements and the local population.

The trap to be dodged, therefore, is thinking of local variation and national process as in some way opposites, or mutually exclusive. As Gregory (1988: 51) has indicated, with reference to the development of England's regions, differentiation and integration are not opposing processes. Evidence of both of these is plentiful. Moreover, the degree of national integration is of course comparative; compared with the present day, Britain in 1800 was a mass of dialect, local custom and tradition, variable craft techniques and folklore. But in comparison with Britain in 1650, it was a nation whose ruling elite associated freely over huge distances, where towns and cities resembled each other in many points of planning, architecture and amenity, and whose families used material objects and lived in styles of house that would have been familiar to most of their countrymen and women. The discourse of the time valorises Britain in the way that a century earlier the importance of county had been stressed. The similarities between a smart new residential development in Bristol and one in Edinburgh are far greater than those between a wealthy suburb and a working-class area in the same town. The new institutional buildings of the period show almost no local variation, an effect produced in part by the ubiquitous activity of a small number of architects and in part by a conscious preference for national or international styles accompanied by a deliberate repudiation of tradition. Conformity was further assured by the activities of national supervisory bodies (such as the Poor Law Commissioners) and the enforcement of national standards of architecture, planning and management. The process of cultural integration between Britain's constituent countries and regions has been explored by Colley (1992). Convergence in taste, style, values and behaviour is echoed in increasing national standardisation in material culture, including artefacts, architecture and landscape.

The valorisation of the local and the small-scale in British archaeology is fashionable and widespread, in both academic and management circles. Research frameworks and projects are developed with reference primarily to particular local areas. This work is essential to our knowledge and understanding of the period. However, unalloyed localism is also handicapping our wider understanding of the ideological, cultural and social developments of the later historical period. We need to ask not only what the existence of Chinese-style transfer-printed ware means in the context of a particular site, but also what it means that Chinese transfer-prints appear everywhere from the Hebrides to Tasmania, in the assemblages of the wealthy and those of labourers and convicts. This all means that we have to attempt more high-level interpretive analysis that goes well beyond the low-level conclusions about trade routes, manufacture or the constitution of a particular household. While local or regional perspectives may well be the best way to approach the archaeology of earlier periods, in an age of dramatic processes of national and global integration, we need to face the challenges of writing geographically and culturally broad pasts as well.

Archaeological Work in this period is Hampered by a Belief that, because it is Modern, we Already Understand it

Prehistorians are used to considering the possibility that the people whom they study might have had very different relationships with each other and with their world than we have today. It is much harder in historically recent periods to problematise the interpretation of material and textual discourses, because they are often so familiar to us. It is hard to see difference where an apparently shared set of values blinds us to historical specificity: of course streets should be clean and wide; of course wedding dresses should be white; of course criminals should repent and reform and the poor be enabled to improve their conditions; of course farmers should try to increase yields and big sheep are better than small ones. But all of these obvious truisms need to be put into a historical context and questioned. None of them are pan-historical truths. Cultural preferences and beliefs are particular to times and places; they should be explained, even when (perhaps especially when) we share them. The development of modern attitudes to cleanliness and associated rubbish disposal practices is a potent example of an area where superficial familiarity and 'naturalness' has produced archaeologies that fail to note cultural or social implications of changing practices.

Poor Communication has also Handicapped the Development of Critical and Three-Dimensional Ways of Telling the Past

It is not a new point, nor is it relevant only to this period, but for a relatively small field archaeology in Britain is also very fragmented. It is inevitable that in a period with such rich and numerous sources of evidence as later historical Britain,

not everyone will be an expert on everything, but it does not help us to develop sophisticated interpretive frameworks when so many of those who could contribute restrict their work to particular regions, types of evidence or research questions. Cumberpatch remarks:

> a structural weakness [of] British Archaeology at present is the tendency towards fragmentation and division. This seems to me an endemic feature of the discipline – we ignore the fact that we are united by methodology and philosophy and focus instead on divisions based on the materials that we study, on the chronological periods in which we specialise and a series of management structures that are not only fatuous but also divisive and entirely counter-productive when considered in relation to archaeology as a coherent discipline . . . [T]his fragmentation, which is also echoed in the distinctions between fine and coarsewares employed in pottery studies, is having a substantial and negative impact on the way in which we undertake archaeology . . . . (Cumberpatch 2004)

In this period, the segregation of 'industrial archaeology' is particularly unfortunate. It means that manufacture is separated from demand and consumption; social meaning is rarely considered; the implications for people's lived experience in the past are also not part of most research agendas (although some individuals are trying hard to change this). But in researching the last chapter it became clear that, for example, the vast majority of those who have studied glass production (industrial archaeologists) have never considered what it might mean in the wider world at this time that, for example, clear, uniform and large windows became available. Similarly, almost none of the people who have excavated field drains or urban sewers have considered (in print at least) what these vast engineering projects might say about changing attitudes to agriculture or hygiene.

Historically recent periods do challenge the archaeologist to consider the value and purpose of our discipline. In a period when such a superabundance of information is available from records and texts, including highly discursive ones and quantitative information, is there really any need to indulge in expensive and time-consuming excavation? If all we do is describe material, it is hard to make a credible response to this challenge. Instead there are a couple of changes in attitude we could usefully make. The first answer involves an expansion of the matter of archaeology to include landscapes, buildings and all physical and environment remains of our past and puts the emphasis on social and cultural history, rather than stuff per se. The second, and more radical shift in our perceptions involves challenging the dominant perception of what archaeology is for. It is not, in this period, for finding out new facts about the past. What far more

frequently happens in fact is that we use our knowledge of facts about the past, harvested from numerous other studies, to understand its physical remains and to consider the way in which material practices relate to ideas, processes and values of the time. Archaeology thus becomes part of an integrated suite of disciplinary approaches to a more sophisticated understanding of our past.

We need, even within the sub-disciplines of industrial archaeology and historical archaeology, to recognise the range of historical debates to which our work can contribute, which means that even the mass-produced and common have value and interest and should be properly recorded, quantified and disseminated. This includes paying attention to absences when absence of rubbish deposits, for example, can deepen our understanding of attitudes towards cleanliness and sanitation, and to sherd counting, where quantities of window glass in dumps of building rubble are involved in complex histories of light, seeing and being seen.

There is much good, detailed and meticulous work on the archaeology of later historical Britain, but in order to keep developing this part of the discipline and to offer anything of value to other disciplines, we need to be far more ambitious. Individual sites need to be put into a national context and to be considered in wider economic and social histories. Artefactual studies can address more complex histories than their own manufacture, or the socio-economic status of their owners. Questions about cleanness and dirtiness, the intended and actual uses of buildings and other spaces and the ideological context of rural change are all amenable to archaeological analysis, and some – but still too few – archaeologists have begun to explore these areas.

Questions and Ambiguities

The questions are numerous, but some of them are:

- Why did the ethic of Improvement come to such prominence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?
- How did Improvement change over that time?
- How can we distinguish between a rejection of the ethic of Improvement and a rejection of any particular 'improving' measure?
- How does religion – both theologically and through the structures of churches – relate to projects of Improvement?
- To what extent did the labouring classes value Improvement as an abstract ideal? Was the ethic of Improvement an empowering ideology or a legitimatory tool of social control?

Why did the Ethic of Improvement Come to Such Prominence in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries?

Describing complicated cultural shifts in terms of simple causational processes is never going to be entirely possible, but there are relationships between religious and ideational changes like spread of enlightenment views of the individual and society, ideologies of capitalism, scientific and rational approaches to knowledge and so on, with economic and cultural changes like the availability of capital (in large measure because of exploitative economic relationships with much of the rest of the world), the formation of self-aware 'classes', rapid industrialisation and profound demographic shifts. The relationships between these things are not one-way and would certainly repay further study.

How did Improvement Change Over that Time?

Improvement in the eighteenth century was much more likely to refer to the self or to agriculture; in the nineteenth, schemes of Improvement were likely to take in other social groups – the poor, natives of other places, or the whole population of a town or region, for example. Improvement also becomes more of a corporate concern by the end of the period, with councils, boards, government bodies and committees taking over the work that had in the eighteenth century belonged to individual entrepreneurs or philanthropists. At the same time, the machinery of state in the form of law and levy was increasingly used to carry out improving reforms in a coercive rather than a voluntaristic way. The nature of Improvement also seems to have varied according to numerous other factors including social situation, political and religious position and so on, that change over time is sometimes hard to pick out, and equally difficult to explain.

How can we Distinguish Between a Rejection of the Ethic of Improvement and a Rejection of any Particular 'Improving' Measure?

'Improvement' as a general ameliorative philosophy and imperative exceeds any particular 'improving' strategy. Today, for example, it is widely believed that intervention in other cultures in order to bring Christianity is not necessarily an improvement, but we nevertheless believe that in the abstract, improvement is worth striving for; other 'improving' measures, such as the provision of clean water and the availability of education are still considered to be 'improvements'. In the past it is easy to see the rejection of particular kinds of improvement by particular people or groups (such as the low value put upon segregated sleeping quarters by working-class families or the widespread resistance to the 'workhouse test'), but much harder to know whether these specific rejections are directed against 'Improvement' as a whole, or represent a lack of consensus on what particular developments would be 'better'. It is likely that for many people 'Improvement' as a philosophy was inseparable from the specific improvements

enacted upon them and their places. There are particular difficulties in uncovering the attitudes and values of non-elite groups in this context.

How does Religion – both Theologically and Through the Structures of Churches – Relate to Projects of Improvement?

Particularly in the nineteenth century many philanthropic improvements came from an explicitly religious standpoint. Like eighteenth-century improvements, these aimed at the amelioration of society rather than simply alleviating the worst of the inevitable pains of earthly existence as in the case of medieval charity. However, unlike many enlightenment improvements, the impetus came not from rational humanitarianism but from religious faith. These religious philanthropists (including people like William Wilberforce) not only worked towards the good of their own souls but often had explicitly proselytising ambitions as well. Missionary activity both in Britain and overseas did not separate material improvement from religious regeneration. Unlikely alliances between humanitarian liberal or socialist reformers on one hand and religious groups on the other were sometimes effective in pursuing particular ends. The history of dissenting churches is especially important in describing working-class attitudes to improvement at the time.

To what Extent did the Labouring Classes Value Improvement as an Abstract Ideal? Was the Ethic of Improvement an Empowering Ideology or a Legitimatory Tool of Social Control?

For the most part our evidence suggests that initiatives for improvement came from the well-to-do: those with the leisure to read and the education to embrace non-traditional techniques and ideas. Agricultural science, it has been argued, was a part of landed elite strategies (Wilmot 1990). Similarly, thinkers and writers in the eighteenth century generally wrote from the position of the well-to-do, financially independent individual. Briggs (1959: 3) sees 'Improvement' as an idea cultivated by the middle classes, and the growing empowerment and enfranchisement of the working classes as a threat to its continuation from the later part of the nineteenth century.

To many writers on the eighteenth century the term 'Improver' is synonymous with the wealthy owners of the Great Estates who carried out agricultural reforms on their own farms. One of the main points of this book has been to demonstrate that the spirit of Improvement is not only evident in changes made to the country estate; the appearance of towns and houses, the organisation of schools and prisons, the conditions of the poor and even the development of the interior self are all expressions of the ethic of Improvement.

Is it right, therefore, to think of Improvement as essentially an ideology of the upper classes? Or was it used more by the emergent middle classes, with their energy and 'protestant ethic'? Some of the most effective and influential

reformers came from relatively humble backgrounds: Robert Owen, for example, was the son of a saddler and Benjamin Satchwell of Leamington was a shoemaker.

Hardest of all, what about the poor? Did the poor actively participate in the project of Improvement? Did they perceive Improvement to be a tool of ideological oppression by which they were removed from their land and their traditional social relationships were disrupted, in order to force them into the adoption of alien social mores? Or did they welcome their release from the control of the traditional moral economy of village and family? If they adopted the values of improvement, was this ultimately an ideological con-trick, ensuring their complicity in bringing about a new social order which was ultimately no more liberating than the old one? Were the philanthropic initiatives of the period, of which they were the beneficiaries, welcome ameliorations of the conditions of the poor, or unwelcome intrusions of middle-class control? Was improvement always desirable?

The crude idea that Improvement was an ideological hammer with which the middle classes clobbered the poor is wrong for a number of reasons: first, because the motivation of economic gain or social dominance on the part of the middle classes doesn't always hold up very well; in particular it fails to deal adequately with the specific ideological form of the improvement ethic as opposed to any other ideology available to the powerful. Second, because that idea homogenises the poor and gives them limited agency: their options are either be duped or resist. In fact, the poor, like the rich, were always making culturally informed choices about the strategies that best suited their values, aspirations and circumstances, as well as their economic conditions. It seems probable, rather, that the complicated ways in which enlightenment thought articulated with developing class relations – horizontal at least as much as vertical – produced a huge range of ways of engaging with Improvement, from enthusiastic subscription to a shared set of values, to rejection, subversion or appropriation of the new 'improved' material world. But demonstrating this range, in the case of the poor, remains difficult.

The bibliographic evidence is provocative, although problematic. The literature of 'Improvement', as we have seen, is not confined to the gentry, nor is it restricted to what might be considered elite projects – agricultural reform, patrician improvement of the working classes and so on. There is an abundant literature of improvement relating to artisan trades and labourers, including aspirational guides for farriers, smiths and domestic servants. In part this reflects the rising literacy among the masses, and probably also the erosion of traditional forms of apprenticeship, but the demand for these texts, often running to many editions, surely suggests that a culture of self-improvement permeated the working class. The British library holds four editions of William Taplin's *Taplin Improved or a compendium of farriery* dating to 1790, 1794, 1796 and 1811;

William Henderson's *The Housekeeper's Instructor, or universal family cook* went to more than twenty editions between the late eighteenth and mid nineteenth century.

Finally

It seems appropriate to the aim of continuing discussion to end with a series of questions rather than a 'conclusion' as such. I am not an expert on any of the areas I cover here. I have relied heavily on secondary sources for most of the book. This being so, readers would be quite justified in seeing this book as an audacious undertaking. But the strength of the book, if people will be charitable enough to say that it has one, is in range and synthesis, in making links and in the development of some sort of narrative within which new and existing material can be contextualised, or which can be refined or refuted by other archaeologists. Until now British later historical archaeology has had little in the way of synthesis, and virtually no arguments about historical process in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; no canonical set of 'big questions'; no home-grown interpretive narratives for new work to demolish or modify. My greatest hope for the book is that it will provoke some response and initiate a new phase of discussion in later historical archaeology in Britain as people see how their own work fits with or contradicts the argument of this book. (Actually, that is my second greatest hope: my greatest is that when it is published, all across Britain scales will fall from eyes and everyone who reads it will agree with me, but I think this is probably overly optimistic.)

What I have attempted to do here is draw together work in different areas of archaeology, history, historical geography and other disciplines to demonstrate that there are clear connections in the way that urban and rural landscapes, institutions of reform, the use of materials and the conditions of the working people all developed at this time. Since there are many people who know more than I do about window glass, or the history of Leamington, I have not tried to contribute original data, but rather to show how local and technical details can link to big phenomena in the cultural history of ideas. So a fragment of transfer-printed pot can tell us something about changing ideas of the self; mass-produced ceramic drainage tiles can be seen as part of one of the biggest projects of national improvement ever attempted; a few trees on a Welsh hillside can be related to new philosophies about the ethics of human action in the world; and the cultural meanings of modernity can be read in a rubbish pit.

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