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'Roots in the soil': the evolution of a countryside youth service in Westmorland, 1939–c.1950

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the evolution of the statutory Youth Service in rural Westmorland (now part of Cumbria), from its establishment in 1939 to the early post-war years. It focuses on how the county's Youth Service innovated and developed new ways of working with young country people in their spare time, and the challenges of introducing urban-focused policy into rural practice. It argues that to be effective in work outside urban areas, the national Youth Service had to adapt to existing patterns of country life and leisure. Tensions between this external organising body and local communities are also considered. The article draws on official Youth Service records, including minute books, correspondence and annual reports, alongside local press accounts and oral history testimony. In doing so, it enhances our understanding of the professionalisation of informal education, and the leisure habits of rural youth, during and immediately after the Second World War.

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Introduction

The outbreak of war in 1939 prompted the UK Government to establish a statutory Youth Service for England and Wales, to mitigate the potentially destabilising effects of another conflict on a younger generation of citizens.¹ It was widely agreed that young people, more than ever, would require education for the responsibilities of citizenship, in order to protect the democratic stability of the nation. This was in essence, the founding principle of the statutory Youth Service. Accordingly, in November 1939, the Board of Education issued *Circular 1486: In the Service of Youth*, in which the Government assumed 'a direct responsibility' for 'the social, physical, and recreative welfare of those boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 20', who 'had ceased whole-time education'.² Under this directive, Local Authorities across England and Wales were tasked with forming their own county-level branches of the Youth Service. This was a significant

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¹Penny Tinkler, 'Sexuality & Citizenship: The State and Girls' Leisure Provision in England, 1939–1950', *Women's History Review* 4, no. 2 (1995): 194–6.

²Cumbria Archive Service, Kendal Archive Centre (KAC), WC/Y/Box 1, *Memo on Board of Education Circular 1486 The Service of Youth*, January 8, 1940, 1; Charles Stewart Orwin (University of Oxford Agricultural Economics Research Institute), *Country Planning: A Study of Rural Problems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 163; Board of Education, *Circular 1486: In the Service of Youth* (London: HMSO, 1939), <https://infed.org/mobi/circular-1486-the-service-of-youth/> (accessed October 19, 2021).

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development in the history of informal education, which, until this point, was largely undertaken by voluntary youth organisations, such as the Boys Scouts and Girl Guides.³ Ideas concerning ‘good’ citizenship were popular during the 1930s and, even before the added pressures of another conflict, it was seen as imperative to provide young workers, as the next generation of citizens, with leisure-time character training, after leaving school at 14.⁴ This reflected another inter-war preoccupation: that of the ‘right’ use of leisure, in light of rapid commercialisation and standardisation in popular leisure culture. This preoccupation led to a wave of studies on how the population (especially young people) spent their spare time, and what this might say about the nation’s future.⁵ The inter-war years saw a ‘hurried response’ to new, commercial leisure opportunities, and the increasing affluence of young, urban wage-earners, via a ‘reorientation of youth work’.⁶ The State’s involvement during this period, however, was patchy, with various initiatives aimed at improving the nation’s moral and physical health, including the short-lived National Fitness Council, established under the Physical Training and Recreation Act (1937).⁷ The introduction of a national Youth Service at the end of the decade therefore marked an unprecedented level of government involvement in youth work. Yet, despite its significance, few historians have examined it in any real depth.⁸ There are a few exceptions, however, including some of the earliest and most insightful historical research on the Youth Service by Penny Tinkler.⁹ She investigated how this state-led initiative shaped young women’s leisure time, predominantly within urban localities. Her work highlighted the ‘service’ aspect of state intervention, and how this was carried out in distinctly gendered forms. This pioneering research had limits, however; it omitted the experiences of young men, and provided an almost wholly urbanised account of youth work in wartime and beyond. When academic studies do consider the countryside within youth work, attention tends to focus on its use *by* young people from large urban areas, for character-building exercises such as camping and

³Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Princeton University Press, 1968); John Springhall, ‘The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to British Youth Movements, 1908–1930’, *International Review of Social History* 16 (1971): 125–58; John Gillis, ‘Conformity and Rebellion: Contrasting Styles of English and German Youth, 1900–1933’, *History of Education Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1973): 249–60.

⁴Tammy Proctor, ‘(Uni)forming Youth: Girl Guides and Boy Scouts in Inter-War Britain, 1908–1939’, *History Workshop Journal* 45 (1998): 103–34. Ideas concerning good citizenship and youth training had much earlier roots: see, for instance, John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883–1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

⁵Cecil Delisle Burns, *Leisure in the Modern World* (Washington, DC: McGrath, 1932); M. Roof, *Youth and Leisure: A Survey of Girls’ Organisations in England and Wales* (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1935); A. E. Morgan, *Young Citizen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1943); H. James and F. Moore, ‘Adolescent Leisure in a Working-Class District’, *Occupational Psychology* 14, no. 2 (1940): 132–45.

⁶David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-Earners in Inter-War Britain* (London: Woburn Press, 1995), 159.

⁷A range of inter-war initiatives from voluntary organisations and the State focused on improving the nation’s physical fitness: see Charlotte MacDonald, *Strong, Beautiful and Modern: National Fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935–1960* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸Academics from other disciplines have, however: Tony Jeffs, *Young People and the Youth Service* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Simon Bradford, ‘The “Good Youth Leader”: Constructions of Professionalism in English Youth Work, 1939–45’, *Ethics and Social Welfare* 1, no. 3 (2007): 293–309. See also Bernard Davies, *From Voluntarism to Welfare State: A History of the Youth Service in England, Volume 1: 1939–1979* (Leicester: National Youth Agency, 1999).

⁹Penny Tinkler, ‘An All-Round Education: The Board of Education’s Policy for the Leisure-Time Training of Girls’, *History of Education* 23, no. 4 (1994): 385–403; Penny Tinkler ‘At Your Service: The Nation’s Girlhood and the Call to Service in England, 1939–50’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 4, no. 3 (1997): 353–77; Penny Tinkler, ‘Cause for Concern: Young Women and Leisure, 1930–50’, *Women’s History Review* 12, no. 2 (2003): 233–62. More recent work includes Charlotte Clements’s (urban-focused) study, ‘Lady Albemarle’s Youth Workers: Contested Professional Identities in English Youth Work, 1958–1985’, *History of Education* 48, no. 6 (2019): 819–36.

hiking.¹⁰ Few historians have gone far enough in their examination of how informal education operated in rural areas, in terms of work *with* young countrymen and women.¹¹ This article therefore addresses two key gaps in the existing literature: the lack of knowledge on state-led informal education in remote rural communities, and the leisure experiences of young people living in the twentieth-century countryside. The article's geographic focus is the former county of Westmorland (part of modern-day Cumbria), which offers a useful case study through which to examine early state-led youth work.

In order to trace the development of a distinctly rural Youth Service, the article uses official documents, including minute books, pamphlets, correspondence and annual reports. A rich archival base at a county level allows for meaningful comparisons to be made with national Youth Service records, and to compare national policy to local approaches.¹² Young people's voices can be difficult to 'hear' in the historical record, and this is certainly the case in official Youth Service records, where adults mediated their responses when including them in official reports. Finally, alongside official sources, the article also draws on excerpts of oral history testimony, precisely because they were not created by Youth Service personnel.¹³ Accounts in the local press are used to understand how some of these initiatives were written about within the region.

Westmorland in context

Westmorland was a predominantly rural region in the first half of the twentieth century, and the main industry was agriculture. Its economy was largely based on upland farming, mainly of sheep, such as the Herdwick and Swaledale breeds. The 1931 census reflects the dominance of agriculture, as the largest employer of young men in the county. Hiring fairs for farm workers remained commonplace throughout the 1940s, and young men were still hired on an annual or bi-annual basis for 'living in' positions as late as the 1950s.¹⁴ Farm labourers worked for most of the day, particularly in summer months

¹⁰David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920–1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), ch. 2; Douglas Hope, 'The Democratisation of Tourism in the English Lake District: The Role of the Co-operative Holidays Association and the Holiday Fellowship', *Journal of Tourism History* 8, no. 2 (2016): 105–26; David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 90–5; Sarah Mills, "'An Instruction in Good Citizenship': Scouting and the Historical Geographies of Citizenship Education', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38, no. 1 (2013): 120–34; Tammy M. Proctor, *Scouting for Girls: A Century of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009).

¹¹Sian Edwards' work is a rare exception, highlighting rural young people's perspectives: Sian Edwards, *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside: Creating Good Citizens, 1930–1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹²Westmorland County Youth Service records are held by Cumbria Archive Service and the National Archives (TNA), Kew, London.

¹³Taken from Ambleside Oral History Group (AOHG) archive, which holds over 300 interviews with local residents and was established in 1976. The interviews are available at Ambleside Local Studies Library, and online at www.aohg.org.uk. There are limitations to 'secondary analysis' of interviews, however, including asking different questions of the material than from those working on the original project. Only a handful of AOHG interviewees referred to the Youth Service in any way; relevant issues were sometimes touched upon but the discussion moved on before any detail was offered. As such, only limited use is made of this material in relation to young people's involvement with the Youth Service. Yet even these limited recollections can contribute towards a richer understanding of what it meant to grow up in the twentieth-century countryside, and provide material beyond official records. For more on using oral history testimony to explore rural youth culture, see Laura Harrison, "'There wasn't all that much to do . . . at least not here": Memories of Growing up in Rural South-West England in the Early Twentieth Century', *Rural History* 31, no. 2 (2020): 165–80.

¹⁴M. R. M. Bolton, *From Clogs and Wellies to Shiny Shoes: A Windermere Lad's Memories of South Lakeland* (Kirkby Stephen: Hayloft, 2002).

when the evenings were lighter.¹⁵ Much of the work available to young people was outdoors in nature, particularly for young men, who, aside from agriculture, were employed in gardening, road maintenance and forestry. Wealthy local residents also employed young men as butlers or in general maintenance. Domestic service was the largest occupation for young women in the region throughout the period, who routinely worked 17-hour days.¹⁶ Alun Howkins suggested that, in counties such as Westmorland, large numbers of servants working on local farms were responsible for the persistence of this occupation, although this trend is in part ascribable to the increase in tourist accommodation, in parts of the region popular with tourists, from the inter-war years.¹⁷ For the vast majority of young workers in the period addressed here, employment was found in and around local villages, to which they walked or cycled, therefore avoiding transport costs associated with working in a nearby market town, the nearest of which was possibly over 10 miles away. Young men and women found other job opportunities through the tourist industry, in seasonal work such as transport, or in shops and tearooms catering for both local residents and the growing visitor trade. Employment of this nature involved long hours and few holidays, and tended to be temporary, seasonal and sporadic. Employers such as the Bobbin Mill and Laundry (both in Ambleside) as well as the local Gasworks, provided small numbers of residents with more stable, regular work between the 1930s and 1950s. Wartime brought increased employment opportunities, such as those at the military aircraft factory, built on the shore of Lake Windermere. Evacuation meant that many local hotels and boarding houses were fully occupied for the duration of the war, thus also requiring staff. The long working hours were the foremost limitation placed on youth leisure opportunities but throughout the period geographical remoteness was also an issue; young people from more isolated surrounding areas were often attracted to the villages of Ambleside and Grasmere, as larger or more frequent leisure activities took place there. They were still some distance from the nearest urban centre, however. Grasmere, for instance, lay approximately 20 miles from Kendal and 13 from Keswick (the nearest market towns, and largest centres of population in Westmorland), around 50 miles from Lancaster and 40 miles from Barrow-in-Furness. As a 'predominantly rural county', without a principal city, Westmorland was sufficiently isolated from urban centres as to prompt a different approach from Youth Service personnel.¹⁸

Whilst the article's main focus is on youth work during wartime and the immediate post-war period, the discussion begins with a brief consideration of the role of voluntary youth organisations in the region before 1939, in order to fully understand the evolution

¹⁵A Youth Organiser's report in 1947 noted that 'the demands of farm work . . . closes [sic] most clubs at this time until the evenings shorten in September': KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Westmorland County Education Committee, Youth Organiser's Report on Youth Work in Westmorland, April–June 1947*, 1.

¹⁶Census of England and Wales 1931, County Report Part II: Cumberland and Westmorland, Occupation Tables, tables 16 and 17 (London: HMSO, 1934); Census of England and Wales 1951 County Report Part II: Cumberland and Westmorland, tables 26 and 27 (London: HMSO, 1956). Westmorland was not isolated in this, as Todd has highlighted: in the 1940s domestic servants in their teens worked 'in excess of twelve hours per day'; in Devon some worked 'between fifty and ninety hours per week'. See Selina Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain, 1900–1950', *Past and Present* 203 (2009): 184.

¹⁷Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (London: Routledge, 2003), 90. For a revisionist account of the development of domestic service in the first half of the twentieth century, see Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations', 181–204.

¹⁸KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *County Youth Committee and Voluntary Organisation Representatives Conference Report*, September 26, 1945.

of youth work in the Westmorland countryside. This is important, as one of the Youth Service's primary roles was to cooperate with, and coordinate the work of, existing voluntary organisations. The next section therefore provides a short examination of the four largest voluntary youth organisations in the county during the period under review here: the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) and Young Farmers' Clubs (YFC).¹⁹

Before state intervention: voluntary youth organisations in inter-war Westmorland

The Anglican Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) established in 1874, aimed to guide young country girls who left home and entered domestic service.²⁰ Members attended weekly meetings in the homes of (typically upper-class) 'Lady Associates'. GFS membership helped to maintain the more deferential local social structure between leaders (Associates), who owned the large houses where meetings took place, and the servants they employed.²¹ The GFS provided 'character training' via Associates, who offered moral guidance and education, while the young women practised domesticated crafts.²² One former member recalled weekly 'sewing classes', where the host read improving texts aloud, such as *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.²³ These activities did not reflect the 1930s preoccupation with physical fitness, and rejected modern methods of educating young people in favour of traditionally gendered ideas of women's ultimate destiny as wives and mothers.²⁴

Unlike the generally home-centred activities of the GFS, Scouting and Guiding often took place in the open air, 'towards happy citizenship, through natural rather than through artificial means' and included 'singing round the camp fire and learning to love the freedom and the wonder of the "out of doors"'.²⁵ Spending time in the countryside, it was postulated, had 'an effect both physical and mental', 'not like anything else'.²⁶ A central reason why Girl Guides were encouraged to take part in outdoor activities was to ensure they were physically healthy by 'promoting their physical development; making them capable of keeping good homes and bringing up good children'.²⁷ The *Hiking Log Book* for a Guide troop in Hawkshead, for example, recorded the range of outdoor pursuits that the girls enjoyed throughout the 1930s, including camping and evening hikes. There were geographical restrictions to these activities, however, as many local Guide and Scout groups never ventured more than a few miles away, and tended to camp close to their homes.²⁸

¹⁹Rooff, *A Survey of Girls' Leisure*; KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Report on Youth Work in Westmorland* (July 1946–March 1947).

²⁰See Rooff, *A Survey of Girls' Leisure*, 9; Brian Harrison, "'For Church, Queen and Family": The Girls' Friendly Society 1874–1920', *Past and Present* 61 (1973): 107–38. An original membership requirement was 'chastity'. An 'indiscretion' meant immediate expulsion. In 1936, 'respectability' replaced this requirement: Morgan, *Young Citizen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1943), 124.

²¹AOHG Respondent GN, born 1914.

²²Rooff, *A Survey of Girls' Leisure*, 8.

²³AOHG Respondent GN.

²⁴An ideology prevalent in other voluntary organisations. See Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981); Lyn Murfin, *Popular Leisure in the Lake Counties 1880–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 156–7.

²⁵KAC, WDSO 42/16/3, *What Are Guides?* (c.1933), 3–5.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 5; KAC, WDSO 42/16/3, *Hawkshead District Hiking Log Book* (1932–1937), no page numbers.

²⁷Morgan, *Young Citizen*, 122.

²⁸KAC, WDSO 42/16/3, *Hawkshead District Hiking Log Book*; AOHG Respondent HU, born 1934.

National youth movements such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides also reinforced existing class relationships and the intergenerational nature of young people's leisure within Westmorland.²⁹ Well-known authority figures, such as Sunday School teachers, were generally leaders of village troops and companies.³⁰ Membership of these groups also involved spending spare time under the supervision of an adult authority figure, which is an indication of the difficulties rural young people encountered more generally, in finding leisure spaces beyond adult surveillance.³¹ However, the purpose of these movements was clearly lost on some members. The 1935 activity log for Natland village's Guide Company, for example, recorded a meeting when the District Commissioner (a Miss Greenwood), 'gave a lecture on Guiding which was very interesting indeed. She asked us what we came to Guides for, we said fun but Miss Greenwood said, We come to Guides, to be good citizens and have a Good Character.'³² As this example illustrates, it is important to remember that, even under adult supervision, young people could still find their own meanings within the messages of organisations devoted to leisure time training.

The Young Farmers' Club (YFC) movement was distinct from many other youth organisations during this period; as mixed-sex clubs, with a wider age membership (10 to 25 years old, rather than the more standard 14–21), they offered a more progressive outlook than the other groups examined so far.³³ YFC policies encouraged young people to exercise a greater degree of independence than was the case with the other organisations already discussed.³⁴ Members were afforded some autonomy, through both the YFC's organisational structure and its promotion of animal husbandry.³⁵ As Madeline Roof observed in the mid-1930s:

A feature of the club development is its training in self-government. The young members elect their chairman, secretary, and treasurer, and conduct their own meetings. Both boys and girls share in these duties, a girl commonly acting as secretary and quite often as chairman of the club.³⁶

Perhaps because outdoor activities including animal husbandry and raising crops entailed a considerable amount of physical exertion in themselves, YFCs placed little explicit emphasis on developing the physical fitness of members. Instead, they combined an emphasis on character training with a strong sense of community. Animal husbandry, for example, was intended to promote 'a concern for animal welfare', which would then 'be transferred to a concern for the community, whilst the sacrifice of spare time could be

²⁹See Rebecca Andrew, "'A Spectacle for the Cameras': The Survival of a Lakeland Leisure Tradition, 1930–c.1955', *Journal of Tourism History* 12, no. 2 (2020): 95–115; Michael Leyshon, 'The Betweenness of Being a Rural Youth: Inclusive and Exclusive Lifestyles', *Social and Cultural Geography* 9, no. 1 (2008): 11.

³⁰Orwin, *Country Planning*.

³¹Leyshon, 'The Betweenness of Being a Rural Youth', 11. Unlike their urban counterparts, rural youth often lacked large, commercial leisure spaces (including dance halls and cinemas) with opportunities to mix in relative anonymity.

³²KAC, WDSO 42/16/3, *Natland Girl Guides Log Book 1935–7*, November 14, 1935. See Selina Todd, 'Flappers and Factory Lads: Youth and Youth Culture in Interwar Britain', *History Compass* 4, no. 4 (2006): 719; Proctor, '(Uni)forming Youth'.

³³The first club was formed in Devon 1920, influenced by '4H' clubs in Canada and America. See Howard Edwin Bracey, *English Rural Life* (London: Routledge, 1959), 228–9; Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson, eds., *The English Countryside Between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 70.

³⁴Morgan, *Young Citizen*, 126.

³⁵For more on inter-war YFCs, see Alice Kirke, 'Education in Interwar Rural England: Community, Schooling and Voluntarism' (unpublished PhD thesis, University College London, 2016), ch. 5.

³⁶Rooff, *A Survey of Girls' Leisure*, 22.

transmuted into creative and rewarding endeavour'.³⁷ Whilst young members were afforded some independence, they were still supervised by adults who gave 'support by advice and encouragement'.³⁸

At the core of the Young Farmers' movement was a 'vocational element' combined with recreational interests, to create something rather 'unique in juvenile organisations' of the 1930s.³⁹ It intended to give future generations of rural citizens practical knowledge and an improved social life. Rural citizenship in this sense focused on keeping young people in the countryside, through extended education in rural life. If 'traditional' country life was to survive the threat from 'modern mechanised civilization', future generations needed to be educated for, and encouraged towards, a life on the land.⁴⁰ By the outbreak of war in 1939, there were only three YFC branches in Westmorland. Their significance to young people's leisure in the region during the inter-war years should not be over-stated, therefore. However, they are worthy of note at this point, as the creation of the YFC, and its emphasis on the informal education of young countrymen and -women, provided an important foundation on which the county's statutory Youth Service could build, both during and immediately after the Second World War.

This brief discussion has suggested that, before 1939, membership of voluntary organisations in small rural communities could reinforce existing social relationships and reaffirm the centrality of adults (and village spaces) to young workers' spare time. It was in this context that the State began its intervention in the leisure of Westmorland's young people, and it is to this work that the discussion now turns.

The national fitness campaign: a move towards statutory provision in Youth Work

The move towards a cohesive, state-led programme of leisure-based work with young people emerged via the short-lived National Fitness Council (NFC), created under the Physical Training and Recreation Act (1937).⁴¹ The act aimed 'to improve the physical and mental health of the community through physical recreation'.⁴² Its policies resonated with the 1930s fashion for cultivating a healthy mind and body, and moulding good citizens.⁴³ The Act established county-based National Fitness 'Area Committees', which were expected to work with existing voluntary groups in an advisory capacity, helping to coordinate, improve and extend facilities for physical training, largely through grant aid.⁴⁴ A Liaison Officer was appointed to Westmorland's Area Committee, to make regular visits and report back to the NFC. Tensions quickly emerged between the

³⁷Lynne Thompson, 'Agricultural Education', in Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 60.

³⁸Morgan, *Young Citizen*, 128.

³⁹Ibid., 129.

⁴⁰Ibid. See also Henry Morris, *The Village College, Being a Memorandum on the Provision of Education and Social Facilities for the Countryside, with Special Reference to Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924); Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *The Practical Education of Women for Rural Life: Report of the Sub-Committee of the Interdepartmental Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture and Board of Education* (London: HMSO, 1929).

⁴¹The NFC was suspended upon the outbreak of war in 1939 and never revived. See Board of Education, House of Commons debates, vol. 357, February 7, 1940, cc. 325–37, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1940/feb/07/board-of-education#S5CV0357P0_19400207_HOC_510.

⁴²TNA, ED 113/61, *Central Council for Recreative and Physical Training Report, 1936–1937*, 36.

⁴³David Matless, 'Moral Geographies of English Landscape', *Landscape Research* 22, no. 2 (1997): 149; Allen Warren, 'Sport Youth and Gender in Britain, 1880–1940', in *Sport Culture and Politics*, ed. Clyde Binfield and John Stevenson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 67.

⁴⁴TNA, ED 113/61, *The Central Council of Recreative Physical Training Annual Report, 1936–37*, 36.

Committee (composed of local residents) and Liaison Officer, who often recorded a lack of progress, and the Committee's negative attitude towards NFC objectives. Exasperation at their behaviour frequently characterised his comments, and criticism was often expressed in distinctly generational terms. His first report noted that the Committee seemed to 'consist very largely of elderly people disinclined to initiate any vigorous policy', who held an 'innate suspicion of new ideas'.⁴⁵ When a new committee Chairman was appointed, his 'principal comment was that the members of the Committee were too old', agreeing with the Liaison Officer that 'some younger people' should be nominated if any vacancies occurred.⁴⁶

When the NFC commissioned a nationwide survey to map the nation's access to existing leisure amenities, returns were sent to local Area Committees and forwarded to the NFC. Response rates in Westmorland were generally said to be good. The tone of the replies, however, indicates that local attitudes were not always welcoming towards state involvement in leisure, and new ideas regarding exercise. As the reply from one local parish suggested, '[w]e keep fit hear [*sic*] in the old fashioned way that is hardwork [*sic*]'.⁴⁷ Rather than simply listing the facilities available in the area, this respondent instead made a wider comment on the leisure identity of local people, focused on the 'hardwork' often associated with rural life. Attempts at arranging public fitness displays (a core NFC activity) were also met with little interest; a report for January 1938 recorded, 'again I raised the question of organizing demonstrations this summer. The Committee decided to consider doing something about it at the autumn games. Even so, I was taken to task afterwards for "trying to rush things"'.⁴⁸ Such examples suggest how cautious committee members were in their approach to change, and their aversion to decision-making proved particularly frustrating to NFC officials. Resistance to external involvement in the organisation of leisure was a consistent theme in the Westmorland committee's work throughout the late 1930s, and may have also reflected wider contemporary anxieties regarding the homogenisation of leisure in the countryside. Although its work in Westmorland was restricted, the establishment of the NFC (as an organisation with statutory powers), marked the beginning of a more focused approach to the leisure time of young workers nationally, which would be developed more comprehensively by the Government in the years after 1939.

Establishing a county youth service: early challenges

A county-level Youth Service branch was established in Westmorland shortly after the publication of *Circular 1486*. Based in Kendal's town hall, early progress was not as smooth as public discussions at a national level might suggest.⁴⁹ From the outset, the newly formed Youth Service encountered considerable objection from the County

⁴⁵TNA ED 113/2, *Cumberland and Westmorland Area Committee Report*, January 12, 1938; TNA, ED 113/2, *Cumberland and Westmorland Area Committee Report*, July 28, 1939.

⁴⁶*Cumberland and Westmorland Area Committee Report*, July 28, 1939.

⁴⁷TNA ED 113/2, *Cumberland and Westmorland National Fitness Area Committee Report*, November 6, 1938.

⁴⁸TNA, ED 113/2, *Cumberland and Westmorland National Fitness Area Committee Report*, January 12, 1938.

⁴⁹For debates at a national level, see 'Service of Youth', House of Commons debates, vol. 360, May 2, 1940, cc. 885–6: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1940-05-02/debates/2c05365b-2870-43a9-bedb-43a98e7d501d/ServiceOfYouth?highlight=circular%201486#contribution-02976724-e88b-407f-9406-6065e94e0416>.

Council. It repeatedly blocked funding for the Youth Service scheme, and steadfastly refused to pay for a Youth Organiser to coordinate youth work across the county.⁵⁰ Instead, the Director of Education for Westmorland (John Trevelyan) took on this role, in addition to his existing responsibilities. The Council consistently opposed requests for financial support throughout the war, thereby resisting the introduction of external initiatives aimed at young people's leisure time.⁵¹ Such setbacks encountered by Westmorland's Youth Service were often expressed in generational terms, echoing the NFC Liaison Officer's words only a few years earlier. This is evident in Trevelyan's correspondence with the Board of Education, writing that 'of the sixty members ... only one, as far as I can see, is under fifty years of age, and most of them are over seventy and still live in the world of thirty years ago'.⁵² As criticism focused on the apparent preoccupation of councillors with the past, this comment also suggests strains between an external, progressive body and communities in conservative rural areas.⁵³

Resistance to new ideas and external agencies in Westmorland was also evident in the lack of support for youth groups within village communities. Throughout the war, the Youth Service recorded the difficulties of finding leaders for local youth groups, particularly in Windermere and Staveley.⁵⁴ Responding to the challenge of finding suitable leaders in the wartime countryside, the Youth Service attempted to engage with existing social structures in the region, appealing to individuals already working with children and young people. This included the headteacher of a local infant school in Ambleside, Miss Routledge, who was approached for her assistance.⁵⁵ Although her response was not recorded, a later report noted the continued lack of leadership in the village, which appears to indicate that she declined their request.⁵⁶ Of course, problems in finding suitable youth leaders were not unique to wartime Westmorland. In his influential study of 'rural problems', C. S. Orwin claimed that such difficulties were symptomatic of a general lack of leadership in rural social life, observing 'unless a village has a tradition of responsibility for the welfare of its adolescents, a sudden demand for leaders in this delicate business will produce no answer'.⁵⁷ Yet young people's leisure in Westmorland was generally characterised by strong adult leaders,⁵⁸ something that perhaps the Youth Service recognised when it approached Miss Routledge, who was a central figure in the organisation of leisure locally. In this light, such difficulties can instead be viewed as symptomatic of resistance within local communities to new initiatives, particularly those with a strong recreational culture. Despite these setbacks, the county's Youth Service continued its work throughout the war, developing its practice in a specifically rural context, as the next section demonstrates.

⁵⁰KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, Trevelyan to Pearson, March 10, 1941; *Westmorland Gazette*, February 2, 1940; October 2, 1940, 2.

⁵¹KAC, WC/Y/BOX 1, Westmorland County Youth Service, admin. memo. 475, Youth Committee to Secretary of the Board of Education, January 24, 1944.

⁵²KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, Trevelyan to Pearson, March 10, 1941.

⁵³Ibid. Disconnects between young people and older adults in positions of authority during this period are noted elsewhere. See for example Anne Logan, 'Making Women Magistrates: Feminism, Citizenship and Justice in England and Wales, 1918-1950' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Greenwich, 2002), 147-8.

⁵⁴KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *County Youth Committee and Voluntary Organisation Representatives Conference Report*, September 26, 1945.

⁵⁵KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, Trevelyan to Miss Routledge, March 27, 1941.

⁵⁶KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *County Youth Committee*.

⁵⁷Orwin, *Country Planning*, 163.

⁵⁸See Andrew, "'A Spectacle for the Cameras'".

Rural citizenship training

The central purpose of the Youth Service mirrored that of many existing voluntary organisations, seeing young workers in need of leisure time training, to ensure their development into rounded citizens. Wartime signalled a new direction in the meanings of citizenship discourse at a national level, as definitions moved away from inter-war ideas placing the body and exercise at its centre.⁵⁹ Instead, older notions of service came to play a central role in what constituted ‘good’ citizenship and an individual’s duty to the nation. In order to meet wartime needs, citizenship rhetoric shifted to focus on service to the nation, war effort and local communities.⁶⁰ Official policy determined that membership of either voluntary youth organisations, or the Youth Service itself, would allow young workers to fulfil their service requirements. Young people’s place in this redefined concept of service and citizenship, however, often centred on work-related rather than purely leisure-based activities. In this context, voluntary ‘war work’ formed a central part of youth service activities. Service to the community was expressed through generalised tasks, such as gardening and rubbish collection.⁶¹

However, as some youth leaders and contemporary commentators feared, the State’s approach was more accurately described as service *by* youth rather than the service *of* youth.⁶² Unsurprisingly, given the national emphasis, service was a central theme in Westmorland’s ‘Scheme for Youth’, an outline for the county’s practice drawn up in 1940.⁶³ The idea of service by young people was evident in the document’s proposed programme, indicating that unpaid war work was central to activities organised locally. Types of service were grouped into categories including ‘Service to the district’, covering ‘beautification of villages . . . collection of litter, particularly from streams and fells’, and ‘Service to individuals’, such as ‘Organisation of help for farmers . . . Clearing snow from paths to houses and cottages’.⁶⁴ As this list indicates, the national idea of citizen service was, in Westmorland, expressed in specifically rural terms, in this case maintaining village aesthetics.⁶⁵ It also promoted the region’s rural landscape as a suitable site for this work, contrasting with much city-based wartime youth work, which tended to focus on modern spaces, such as recreation centres and gymnasiums.⁶⁶

The wartime concentration on service often helped to strengthen the significance of the countryside in young workers’ leisure. Evidence of this can be found in the activities in which members of existing voluntary organisations in Westmorland engaged, including local Boy Scout troops, which provided a messenger service for the Home Guard.⁶⁷

⁵⁹See Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, ‘The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870–1939’, *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 2 (2008): 203–55. See also Laura King, ‘Future Citizens: Cultural and Political Conceptions of Children in Britain, 1930s–1950s’, *Twentieth Century British History* 27, no. 3 (2016): 389–411.

⁶⁰Tinkler, ‘Sexuality and Citizenship’, 206–11.

⁶¹TNA ED 126/89, *A Scheme for A Youth Service in Westmorland*, December 1940.

⁶²See Olive Wheeler, ‘The Service of Youth’, *Occupational Psychology* 13, no. 2 (June 1943), 69–73; Tinkler, ‘Sexuality and Citizenship’, 204–5.

⁶³KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Scheme for A Youth Service for Westmorland* (1940).

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 4–5.

⁶⁵Recent work has challenged historiography ‘that views citizenship as indivisible from national identity’, foregrounding instead the importance of local constructions of citizenship via informal education. Although this approach has mainly focused on cities, it can prove equally fruitful when extended to the countryside. See Tom Hulme, ‘Putting the City Back into Citizenship: Civics Education and Local Government in Britain, 1918–45’, *Twentieth Century British History* 26, no. 1 (2015): 26–51.

⁶⁶Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 91.

⁶⁷AOHG Respondent ID, born 1924.

Other Scouts in the region were given roles resonating with the older Baden-Powell ethos of discipline, outdoor activities and service. Some spent weeks at a time camping overnight on a rota of 'lookout' duty, whilst still maintaining a full-time job. One former Boy Scout recalled that, during the war, his mother got 'fed up' with how much time outside of work he spent away from home on Scout duty, recalling that he did not sleep in his own bed 'for months' because of this commitment.⁶⁸ This example suggests how forms of work and service crossed over into leisure, and that the young men involved spent a considerable amount of their spare time in and around the Westmorland countryside, a practice which echoed the earlier emphasis on rural spaces as an appropriate site for citizenship training.

Other types of outdoor work were encouraged by the Westmorland Youth Service, including collecting nettles for medical use, or sacks of conkers for pig food, and working on allotments.⁶⁹ This labour could be demanding; one group, for instance, was tasked with 'woodfelling, trimming and sawing', as the first annual report on youth work in the county recorded:

Roughly 400 trees felled, trimmed, graded and sawn ready for selling. We have been asked by various people to supply rustic to replace iron railings ... taken down by the Government. All members have given up their weekends and nights to help in these acts of service.⁷⁰

Beyond these continuities, however, Westmorland's Youth Service increasingly focused on change and innovation, as the next section suggests.

Taking a 'national lead': innovations in countryside youth work

The Westmorland Youth Service recognised that the needs of a youth population scattered over isolated and sometimes remote parts of the county were distinct from those of urban young people, and necessitated a new methodology. The distinctive nature of rural youth work, and the need for a different approach from that in urban centres, was slowly being recognised by organisers at a national level. A small book of *Suggestions for Youth Work in the Countryside*, published towards the end of the war, provides an example of this.⁷¹ Its author, Desiree Edwards-Rees (a West Riding Youth Officer, and member of the Board of Education's Youth Advisory Council), argued that to date, youth work had 'little sense of the special needs of the countryside as distinct from townspeople'.⁷² Before this national shift, however, a specifically rural dimension began to emerge in the work of the county's Youth Service. The existing network of Young Farmers' Clubs (YFC) proved essential to this.⁷³

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹AOHG Respondent EH, born 1926.

⁷⁰KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Youth Work in Westmorland: 1st Annual Report of the Youth Registration Officer (1942–1943)*, 2.

⁷¹Desiree Edwards-Rees, *A Rural Youth Service: Suggestions for Youth Work in the Countryside* (London: J. K. Whitehead, 1944). The book notes the *McNair Report on Teachers and Youth Leaders* (1944) recommendation that a youth leader's training should partly take place in the countryside – further recognition of rural youth's specific needs.

⁷²Ibid., 14.

⁷³Ibid., 80.

Westmorland YFCs were not run on the 'strictly practical' lines common in other parts of the country and it is likely that this strategy was adopted for several reasons.⁷⁴ By removing the purely practical function of clubs in the region, young workers who lacked either the space or finances to keep an animal were able to join.⁷⁵ This also opened up room for purely social activities at YFC meetings, which helped to attract a wider membership base. Alongside social entertainments, activities promoting the Youth Service's wider aims were also incorporated within club programmes. These included activities designed to enhance members' understanding of both domestic and international matters. A 'current affairs section' was organised, and talks on the society, culture and government of other countries were held regularly, signifying an effort towards internationalism, world peace and understanding.⁷⁶ Contests and debates organised by YFCs in wartime Westmorland aimed to promote the benefits of rural life to young workers in their late teens and early twenties, whilst 'broadening' their skills and knowledge. A 'special discussions series' for the over-16s encouraged young people to think about the future of rural life, and speeches prepared by young people at one YFC Public Speaking Contest in the region included 'The rural Britain I would like to see after the war'.⁷⁷ Initiatives such as these were clearly designed to address the ongoing 'drift from the land', by giving young workers the chance to express their opinions and think about the countryside society of the future.⁷⁸ This encouraged them to appreciate the rural world in which they lived, and fed into national discourse regarding citizenship and service, by training young workers to think about the wider political issues that informed their daily lives, including their leisure choices.⁷⁹ Emphasis was placed on increasing the interactions between young workers from rural and urban backgrounds, with the aim of creating a greater understanding of each other through events, social activities and talks.⁸⁰ Exposing young countrymen and -women to wider experiences and opportunities for self-government was therefore intended to reinvigorate village life among a new generation of locally born citizens, whilst serving a national agenda.⁸¹

A number of innovations were designed specifically to tackle the 'different problem' of 'young people neglected in rural areas', who suffered from 'little or nothing in the way of a social or educational link', even outside wartime conditions.⁸² Consultations on this matter were held between the Westmorland Youth Service and the BBC's Regional Director for Northern England.⁸³ The result was the Home Listening League (HLL), aimed at young people who lived in more isolated areas of the county.⁸⁴ The activity of

⁷⁴Orwin, *Country Planning*, 171.

⁷⁵Edwards-Rees, *A Rural Youth Service*, 76.

⁷⁶Tinkler, 'Cause for Concern', 250. See also Penny Tinkler, 'English Girls and the International Dimensions of British Citizenship in the 1940s', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 8 (2001): 103–26.

⁷⁷KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *County YFC Committee Annual Report 1944–45*.

⁷⁸Edwards-Rees, *A Rural Youth Service*, 80; Brassley et al., *The English Countryside*, 60–1.

⁷⁹Edwards-Rees, *A Rural Youth Service*, 81.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 77, 80.

⁸¹KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Building A County Youth Service: A Survey of Three Years' Work: June, 1942–June, 1945*, 3; Orwin, *Problems of the Countryside* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1945), 102.

⁸²KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *The Torch, Windermere Youth Service Review*, no. 1 (February 1942).

⁸³See Melanie Tebbutt, 'Listening to Youth? BBC Youth Broadcasts during the 1930s and the Second World War', *History Workshop Journal* 84 (2017): 214–33. Tebbutt identified that young people 'remained at the periphery of broadcasting' into the 1950s, further pointing to the novelty of Westmorland's trials.

⁸⁴TNA ED 124/6, *Westmorland Youth Service Report* (1941). Edwards-Rees notes the 'Westmorland experiment in Home Listening groups' in *A Rural Youth Service*, 78.

'listening in' would educate young people, whilst creating a social bond through their engagement in the same activity at the same time.⁸⁵ By utilising new methods of communication, the Youth Service pioneered this approach, which aimed to supervise young people's leisure from a distance. The basis of the HLL was a promise by members 'to try to listen to at least two of the recommended broadcasts each week' and then send in reports, postcards and replies to specific questions.⁸⁶ In common with other Youth Service activities, leisure (in this case listening to the wireless) also became work (writing a report or answering questions on the content of approved programmes) in order to prove they had participated in the 'right way'.

The HLL also used competitions to encourage members to join in.⁸⁷ Prizes were awarded for the best report, and these ranged from book tokens to a trip to the BBC's regional headquarters in Manchester.⁸⁸ Such occasions revealed the sometimes condescending way in which rural youth was characterised by outsiders.⁸⁹ A visit by three young men from Westmorland to Manchester as part of a weekend educational course, for instance, was described in one youth service report as, 'a trip to wonderland' for the 'small country boy'.⁹⁰ One member of the group, a 'roadman' who left school at 14, was said to have found the contrast between Manchester and his home village 'almost terrifying', particularly when he used the telephone 'for the first time in his life'.⁹¹ As this example demonstrates, despite attempts by the Youth Service to promote a better understanding of urban and rural life amongst young people, popular stereotypes of the countryside as unsophisticated and old-fashioned were pervasive.

Aside from these relatively rare journeys outside the county, many young people who lived in more isolated areas of Westmorland often walked considerable distances to reach social events and entertainments put on for them. Even where local transport links did exist, in wartime there remained a shortage of evening and night-time buses, which complicated the logistics of organising activities and meetings for young workers, especially during the blackout and winter months. Transport difficulties meant that evening meetings in winter often finished after 'the last evening bus had departed'.⁹² As a result, long walks to and from leisure events and activities were common throughout the war.⁹³ On one occasion, as 'there was no return bus from Crook [a village between Windermere and Kendal] at the hour at which the meeting ended' a group of young people 'tramped back home' under the light of a full moon.⁹⁴ This night had been specifically selected for the meeting because the moonlight would allow young people to navigate their way home across the bleak winter landscape. Awareness of the lunar cycle clearly influenced how and when leisure opportunities were organised, and provides an example of how youth work in the countryside could be reliant on the centrality of nature in rural life, to facilitate

⁸⁵Charlotte Fabiansson, 'Being Young in Rural Settings: Young People's Everyday Community Affiliations and Trepidations', *Rural Society* 16, no. 1 (2006): 49.

⁸⁶KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Report on the Home Listening League (1942–1943)*, 3.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Community of Cressbrook Newsletter* (June 1944), 1.

⁸⁹Leyshon, 'The Betweenness of Being', 3.

⁹⁰TNA ED 124/6, *Westmorland Youth Service, Report on Youth Work*, 5.

⁹¹Ibid., 4–5.

⁹²TNA ED 124/6, *Westmorland Youth Service Report* (1941).

⁹³As Orwin remarked, after a long day of work 'it takes an effort of will to travel a distance in the evening': Orwin, *Country Planning*, 169.

⁹⁴TNA ED 124/6, *Westmorland Youth Service Report* (1941).

a programme of modern leisure activities.⁹⁵ Youth work also developed in other ways to mitigate the inconvenience surrounding transport, or the lack of it. Over the course of the war, the Westmorland Youth Service gradually built up a network of voluntary, 'mobile' lecturers, whereby speakers travelled from village to village or club to club, delivering talks to small groups of young people. To this end, a 'Young Pioneers Group' was founded, consisting of young people aged 18–25, who were either in reserved occupations or medically unfit for active duty. Their role was to assist with local youth work, by 'hiking or cycling to villages which have no evening transport, to help young people's activities there'.⁹⁶ Other young people were to be approached as potential leaders upon their return from the armed services.⁹⁷ Not only would struggling youth clubs in the region now receive direction but the Youth Service could also meet another objective, by injecting into the leadership and organisation of local leisure provision younger people who, it was hoped, would have a somewhat wider outlook than their elders. By easing the practical and financial complications regarding transport, this scheme may have also helped to ensure higher attendance at such meetings.

An additional solution to challenges posed by Westmorland's geographic remoteness was the Youth Service's 'experiments in residential education'.⁹⁸ Commonly referred to as 'Cressbrook', the idea behind this short weekend course, held at a Kirkby Lonsdale school, was to introduce small groups of local young people in their mid-teens and early twenties to the extended education provided by the Youth Service.⁹⁹ The primary aim of the Cressbrook 'experiment' was to broaden the knowledge and outlook of those who attended. A secondary goal was to create a new kind of community among those involved, as a fresh cohort of young people joined each year. Indeed, the course was often referred to as the 'Community of Cressbrook'. This educational community was intangible, and defined by generational limits, as only those between the ages of 16 and 21 were permitted to join.

For the young people who participated, referred to as 'Cressbrookians', the community really only existed for one weekend, although the organisers attempted to sustain a deeper sense of connection between the members by encouraging them to listen to specific radio programmes, whereby a 're-union' could take place if each member tuned in at the same time.¹⁰⁰ This also helped to extend the HLL experiments in engaging a disparate youth population through the wireless. In the spirit of providing young people with a greater sense of responsibility in their leisure, the future of this community was placed on their shoulders:

Whether or not there is a second Cressbrook course . . . is going to depend largely on whether you can personally enthruse someone to take the opportunity . . . whether a sufficient body of young people is forthcoming to make the course possible depends now on YOUR missionary [sic] work. You have to convince 20 other people of what Cressbrook meant to you.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵On the influence of lunar cycles on rural leisure, see Kate Bowles, "'All the Evidence is that Cobargo is Slipping": An Ecological Approach to Rural Cinema-Going', *Film Studies* 10 (2007): 91–2.

⁹⁶TNA ED 124/43, *County Youth Committee Report, Youth Work in Westmorland* (October–December 1943), 3.

⁹⁷KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *County Youth Committee and Voluntary Organisation Representatives Conference Report*, September 26, 1945, 6.

⁹⁸*County YFC Committee Annual Report 1944–45*, 1.

⁹⁹In one cohort of 31 students, the 'majority' had left school at 14 and were farm workers: *Community of Cressbrook Newsletter* (August 1945).

¹⁰⁰KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Community of Cressbrook Newsletter* (March 1944), 2.

¹⁰¹KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Community of Cressbrook Newsletter* (March 1944), 1. Emphasis in the original.

To encourage ideas of responsibility to a community, citizenship skills were taught at these residential education events. Cressbrookians were provided with a sense of belonging and a chance to mix with their peers, but also had to work on ‘quickenings’ ‘their sense of citizenship rights and responsibilities’.¹⁰² A newsletter was printed and circulated to all those who had attended the course, which updated young people with news regarding Youth Service activities and future courses, and provided a tangible link to their ‘community’ when they were apart. Residential schemes such as this exemplified the new approach of Westmorland’s Youth Service in its attempts to educate young workers through their leisure, which, it claimed, gave them ‘a national lead’ in this field.¹⁰³ The Cressbrook ‘community’ offered, albeit on a small scale, an alternative to the village spaces so central to young people’s leisure experiences before the war. They therefore also represented a threat to the existing organisation and supervision of young people’s leisure time within local communities. Not only did the Cressbrook experiment physically remove young people from village spaces for the weekend, but it also encouraged them to maintain connections with a new, generationally defined community after they had returned home, via the practice of ‘listening in’. Furthermore, the Youth Service encouraged its former residents to recruit new members, who in turn would leave their village spaces and, it was hoped, broaden their horizons beyond rural life in the process. It is important to remember that Cressbrook only ever involved a very small number of Westmorland’s young people, and therefore its overall significance should not be overstated. However, this remains a meaningful development in the Youth Service’s work in the county, not only as a ‘national lead’ in residential experiments in informal education but, importantly, in how it adapted to the difficulties of operating in the countryside. Again, an element of contemporary popular culture (in this case wireless broadcasts) allowed the Youth Service to innovate in its work with the region’s young people.

A further challenge to village spaces, and the adults who controlled them, came from opportunities offered by the Youth Service to exert autonomy in their leisure time. In a members’ news bulletin, it accurately surmised that young workers in Westmorland had little ‘chance of getting their opinions heard nor of playing any part of the government of their village’.¹⁰⁴ Young countrymen and -women were consequently encouraged to sit on committees and organise various events and activities. District Youth Councils (DYC) were established in 1941, which gave young people a form of self-government whereby they were responsible for the activities organised. The DYC in Burneside village, for example, arranged dances and established hiking and tennis clubs, again defined along generational lines.¹⁰⁵ These social occasions were balanced with charitable efforts and service-based war work, as young members made tea for Air Raid Wardens and formed a gardening group to care for two allotments, plus a salvage group, while the DYC in Staveley village arranged help for farmers at hay time.¹⁰⁶

In Windermere, a publication specifically for young people was established, which encouraged them to be creative whilst voicing their opinions. The first edition set the tone: ‘This is YOUR paper, and we rely on you all for material. Prose and verse, readers’

¹⁰²KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *County YFC Committee Annual Report, 1944–45*.

¹⁰³TNA ED 126/89, *Building a County Youth Service*, 3.

¹⁰⁴KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, Westmorland County Youth Committee, *Memorandum on The Service of Youth* (1941).

¹⁰⁵KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *District Youth Council Bulletin*, no. 2 (May–June 1941).

¹⁰⁶KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *District Youth Council Bulletin* (July 21, 1941).

letters, essays, etc., we want them all. Do not hesitate.¹⁰⁷ A few years later, the ‘Community of Cressbrook’ bulletin appealed to readers for their thoughts on ‘The Needs of Youth in Rural Areas’, as young workers in local villages knew ‘better than anyone from the outside’ what this entailed.¹⁰⁸ These outlets were designed to provide the region’s young people with a space in which to express themselves, although this was often contextualised in relation to what was seen as their primary role as rural citizens. Though still moderated by adults, the schemes did provide an arena for young workers to share ideas and opinions, whilst tying in with a national agenda, allowing them to practise the processes of democratic citizenship on a small scale. Towards the end of the war, the Youth Service claimed that much of the adult leadership in the county was ‘ineffective . . . because it was grounded on an authoritarian approach to youth’.¹⁰⁹ This new generation of professional youth workers promoted different ways of working with young people, aimed at giving them their own voice, for example on the District Youth Councils. Despite the Youth Service’s more modern attitude towards young workers in wartime Westmorland, at its core it too used adult surveillance and supervision to organise young people in their leisure time.

A series of countryside youth clubs

In the summer of 1945, the Westmorland Youth Service reflected on its progress over the course of the war and could claim some success.¹¹⁰ A total of 29 new youth groups had been established and the YFC movement had been cultivated to such an extent that, from a pre-war total of three clubs in the county, there were now 18, with around 800 members.¹¹¹ The Cressbrook residential experiments had made progress in the difficult task of reaching young people in isolated areas. So, too, had innovations with technology, via the Home Listening League, which introduced and encouraged at least a small number of the region’s young people to engage with a progressive element of national leisure culture. As the war ended, the county’s Youth Service moved to extend work already begun, such as widening the skills and knowledge of rural youth. This approach continued to reinforce the centrality of the countryside to young workers’ lives,

any youth service that is going to be more than a spectacular assembly of young people noisily asserting its Youth, must here have its roots in the soil. With this principle in mind, we have built not so much a vocational YFC movement as a series of country-side youth clubs in which the technical activities and talks on agriculture have had their place, but in which the claims of a wider educational and social experience have had their place also.¹¹²

The Youth Service’s peacetime agenda stressed the importance of understanding and valuing one’s rural ‘roots’ whilst not forgetting the wider ‘community’ of the nation. As such, it aimed to ‘cultivate a real interest in the countryside realising the importance of good farming in this country’s present economic position, at the same time helping Young Farmers Club members

¹⁰⁷KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *The Torch – Windermere Youth Service Review*, no. 1 (February 1942), 3. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁸KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Community of Cressbrook Newsletter* (February 1944).

¹⁰⁹KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Building a County Youth Service*, 6.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹Individual club membership ranged from 19 to 100: *County YFC Committee Annual Report 1944–45*. This increase reflected a national rise in membership: *The Times*, May 13, 1944, 2.

¹¹²KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *County Youth Committee and Voluntary Organisation Representatives Conference Report* (September 26, 1945), 1. Emphasis in the original.

to further their education'.¹¹³ The programme it devised aimed to help members 'become good farmers, good citizens, good countrymen'.¹¹⁴ This emphasis on encouraging young workers in Westmorland to acquire new skills and experiences that would allow them to become 'good citizens' as well as 'good countrymen' was indicative of the changes that were taking place in the post-war countryside more generally, as the isolation that characterised counties such as Westmorland was slowly breaking down.¹¹⁵ At the same time, rural occupations moved away from agriculture and towards tourism, the service industry and office work.¹¹⁶ Both of these developments meant that young workers living in the countryside increasingly mixed with outsiders, whether they moved into their villages or visited as tourists, as the result of increased car ownership.¹¹⁷

Broadening outlooks and bridging gaps

As a consequence of these wider developments, many of the activities organised and run under Westmorland's Youth Service in the late 1940s and early 1950s focused on teaching rural young people what we would categorise today as 'transferable skills'. Training in public speaking continued to hold a prominent place on the programmes of local YFCs and competitive events were held regularly, allowing young people to practise and display their newly acquired abilities.¹¹⁸ In this way, young country workers in the post-war world were taught to standardise their language and accent, with an emphasis on the importance of 'good diction' to convey their ideas eloquently. This mirrored the homogenisation of national leisure culture more broadly during the inter-war years.¹¹⁹

Other noticeable differences between the late 1940s and early 1950s included greater attempts to bridge the cultural gap between rural and urban youth, and increase their understanding of one another. The YFC therefore also organised large events, such as the 'North of England Farming and Country Life Exhibition', with the aim of interpreting 'the ways of the country to town dwellers [sic]'.¹²⁰ In the same spirit, smaller meetings were arranged, for instance, between Gasmere District Young Farmers' Club and the Youth Hostels Association. These events were intended to provide the opportunity for 'a real exchange of views', and establish 'close co-operation between townsmen and countrymen'.¹²¹ As the next generation of rural (and, importantly, British) citizens, it was considered important that the region's young people should become accustomed to interacting with a wider range of fellow citizens. Thought to be the 'first of its kind in the country', this event further demonstrates that the region's youth service recognised the changing needs of the 'modern' countryside, and continued in its efforts to innovate in its approach to rural youth.¹²²

¹¹³KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Winter Programmes. Report on YFC* (October 1947), 2.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Jeremy Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change in England Since 1800* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), ch. 16.

¹¹⁶Edwards-Rees, *A Rural Youth Service*, 78; *ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁷Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 16.

¹¹⁸*Westmorland Gazette*, April 5, 1952.

¹¹⁹Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920–60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Fowler, *The First Teenagers*; Pys Gruffudd, 'The Countryside as Educator: Schools, Rurality and Citizenship in Inter-War Wales', *Journal of Historical Geography* 22, no. 4 (1996): 412–23.

¹²⁰KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, Cressbrook Community File, *Community of Cressbrook Newsletter* (August 1945).

¹²¹*Westmorland Gazette*, December 8, 1951, 3.

¹²²Ibid.

Opportunities for young workers to express themselves continued to be encouraged, as the *Community of Cressbrook* newsletter became ‘a monthly broadsheet’, chiefly consisting of extracts from letters written by young workers. Contributors were encouraged to be creative and, in one case, a young man wrote ‘a one act play entitled *The Young Farmers*’, which, with ‘other original verses’, earned him a ‘prize in a national essay competition’.¹²³ The newsletter frequently appealed to young readers to share their thoughts and ideas on what they had recently read or were talking about with friends.¹²⁴ This example supports Tinkler’s assertion that the provision of mixed-sex youth clubs, although progressive, allowed adults to supervise young people’s interaction with the opposite sex.¹²⁵ These appeals can be viewed as a channel through which Westmorland’s Youth Service could gain insight into how young workers felt about their lives, current affairs and the programme of activities they offered; they also allowed the Youth Service to monitor the opinions of local young workers, to which they would not otherwise have been privy.

The extent of adult supervision and intervention was evident in other areas of youth work in Westmorland. For instance, YFC members were allowed to plan events and activities themselves; the most common activity suggested at meetings was dancing. In late 1949, members of Crook YFC decided to hold a dance but had to abandon their plans when the adult advisory members got involved and decided against it.¹²⁶ Although YFC members were allowed to organise social events, they were still overseen by a ‘doorman’, an MC and other adults from the local community, who provided refreshments. The degree of independence afforded young workers within these groups therefore continued to be closely monitored. While the young members of such groups were afforded some latitude, they still spent their leisure time engaged in programmes of activities deemed suitable and supervised by adult authority figures. The difficulty of breaking away from adult surveillance in rural spaces thus continued to dominate young countrymen and -women’s leisure opportunities into the early 1950s.

The problem of finding suitable adult leaders to supervise young people’s leisure, however, continued to plague provision in the county after 1945, to the extent that a number of voluntary youth groups closed between 1945 and the early 1950s, ‘mainly owing’ to the ‘desperate shortage’ of suitable adult leaders.¹²⁷ A partial solution came from outsiders who moved into the region after the war, who began to fill gaps left by older members of local communities.¹²⁸ The new Headmaster of Grasmere School, for instance, soon took on the role of village Scoutmaster. Originally from the North-East of England and fresh from service in the armed forces, he began to organise activities outside the immediate vicinity of the village. By the early 1950s, local Boy Scout groups were arranging longer trips, such as the annual camp held by the 1st Grasmere Scout Troop on the Northumbrian coast.¹²⁹

¹²³*Building a County Service*, 3.

¹²⁴*County YFC Committee Annual Report 1944–45*, 2.

¹²⁵Tinkler, ‘Cause for Concern’, 249, 252.

¹²⁶KAC, WDSO 129/1–7, *Crook Young Farmers Club Minute Book*, October 25, 1949.

¹²⁷KAC, WDSO/42/1/1, *Westmorland Girl Guides County Report* (1945), 8; *Westmorland Girl Guides County Report* (1950), 5; KAC, WDSO/42/1/1, *Westmorland Girl Guides County Report* (1951). A new Guiding rule, introduced at the war’s end, capped the length of service in any one capacity. This essentially barred an older generation from involvement in these groups, including some who had served for over 20 years.

¹²⁸For the effects of middle-class incomers on post-war rural social life, see Burchardt, *Paradise Lost*, 191–2; James Littlejohn, *Westrigg: The Sociology of a Cheviot Parish* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

¹²⁹*Westmorland Gazette*, May 26, 1951, 3.

In the immediate post-war years, membership of the YFC movement also offered opportunities to travel beyond village spaces. In the late 1940s, a contingent of 51 young farmers from 17 clubs across Westmorland visited London, for the annual meeting of the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs, a trip that included sightseeing, a motor launch on the Thames to Tower Bridge and lunch at a Lyons Corner House,¹³⁰ an iconic destination synonymous with 'the ambient spectacle of modern leisure'.¹³¹ The return journey home from London, 'was made by a different route in order to cover another section of country', suggesting the importance placed on generating new experiences for rural young people in the years following the war.¹³² It may also indicate that leisure opportunities organised by external organisations were constructed to cultivate a wider sense of national belonging. Youth groups in Westmorland after the war were increasingly able to offer young people experiences beyond village life, reinforcing the idea of a wider (national) community, and again fed into the idea of broadening their outlook. In the immediate post-war period, the practicalities of rural life were, therefore, balanced with an education in outside interests and topical affairs, as in the case of a walling demonstration, which featured on the same programme as talks by external speakers, and a debate with a Town Club, arranged under the auspices of the BBC in Manchester.¹³³ The general goal of the Youth Service in these years, then, was to widen young people's knowledge by introducing them to a variety of experiences and opportunities, and improve social mixing between rural and urban youth. Within local youth groups, outsiders with perhaps a broader view of what leisure could (or should) entail also added to this change in perspective. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the emphasis of youth work in the region increasingly concentrated on turning the focus of young workers outwards, away from their communities and towards a broader, national agenda.

Conclusion

This article has addressed two key gaps in the existing literature: first, the lack of knowledge on state-led informal education in the countryside, and second, the leisure habits of rural youth during and immediately after the Second World War. Specifically, it has examined how the newly formed Youth Service operated in a remote geographic region, and the challenges of putting urban-focused policy into rural practice. It has argued that Westmorland's Youth Service often had to adapt to existing patterns of country life and leisure to implement its policies, developing new ways of working with young country people in their spare time. It has also argued that there were clear tensions between an older generation and the professional youth leaders who entered the region from the late 1930s.

In spite of local resistance to the involvement of outsiders in the organisation of young people's leisure, a number of notable changes were introduced. The Youth Service attempted to create a new community of young people, based on generational limits and connected to a national agenda. The use of new technology (the wireless) and alternative locations, such as Cressbrook, challenged the pre-war centrality of village spaces to young country people's leisure, and offered opportunities for them to express themselves in locations designed

¹³⁰KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *Report on Youth Work in Westmorland, May–June 1948*, 1.

¹³¹Fiona Fisher, Trevor Keeble and Patricia Lara-Betancourt, eds., *Performance, Fashion and the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today* (London: Berg, 2011), 77.

¹³²*Report on Youth Work*, 1.

¹³³County YFC Committee Annual Report 1944–45, 2.

specifically for their generation, albeit still under adult supervision. Whilst challenging the importance of village spaces, county youth work also recognised and reinforced the significance of the countryside more broadly to rural young people's leisure, creating a network of clubs run on 'modern lines adapted to needs of village life', closely connected to the YFC movement.¹³⁴

In examining the leisure habits of Westmorland's youth, the article has also considered national discourse around 'good' citizenship in a rural context across the period. During the inter-war years, this often focused on keeping young people in the countryside, through extended education in rural life. Wartime signalled a new direction in this discourse, as national ideals moved away from placing the body and exercise at its centre. Instead, older notions of service played a central role in what constituted 'good' citizenship and an individual's duty to the nation, war effort and local communities. As such, voluntary 'war work' formed a central part of youth service activities; in Westmorland, the national idea of citizen service was expressed in specifically rural terms, such as maintaining village aesthetics. After the war, the work of the YFC movement increasingly connected 'good' citizenship for young country people to a national agenda and urban spaces. Yet it continued to be contextualised in relation to what was seen as their primary role as rural citizens. The county's Youth Service and Young Farmers' Clubs certainly evolved with their 'roots in the soil' of rural Westmorland but, by the early 1950s, their work was firmly focused on broadening experiences and outlooks beyond the countryside.

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¹³⁴KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, *County Youth Committee and Voluntary Organisation Representative Conference Report*, September 26, 1945; KAC, WC/Y/Box 1, Organising Secretary, National Council of Girls' Clubs, to Director of Education, June 9, 1941.