



## The Making Of The English Landscape

*W.G. Hoskins*

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## **The Making Of The English Landscape** W.G. Hoskins

'No one before has ever brought out with quite the same vividness the historical background of the country all around us' - "Guardian" - a classic of English landscape history, reissued in its fiftieth anniversary year. First published in 1955 by Hodder, "The Making Of The English Landscape" is a classic of English history. It was the first book to study, literally, the history of the landscape, and also the first to explode the myth that the English landscape was 'formed by enclosures'. Instead W. G. Hoskins traces the beauty and oddities of the English landscape further back, from pre-Roman times to the seventeenth century and beyond. Hoskins explains the layers of history in the landscape by taking the reader with him along Devonshire lanes, past lost villages in Lincolnshire, and through the pastures of upland Northamptonshire. This is a delightful book, readable and scholarly, which has been much-loved by readers for the past fifty years.

## **The Making Of The English Landscape Details**

Date : Published December 5th 2005 by Hodder & Stoughton Ltd (first published 1955)

ISBN : 9780340770207

Author : W.G. Hoskins

Format : Paperback 328 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Archaeology, Environment, Nature, European Literature, British Literature, Science, Geography

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## **From Reader Review The Making Of The English Landscape for online ebook**

### **Xander Mitchell says**

A book with a title that speaks for itself. Great companion to any study of British landscape.

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### **Kieran says**

In places, this book retains the superb insights and evocations of a sense of place that make it a deserved classic. However, in other chapters, it is starting to show its age. But then, few history books have any relevance 60 years after publication, so Hoskins' work is doing well to still be hanging in there.

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### **Guy says**

A little dated (published fifty years ago), but still interesting, this book was apparently the first real attempt to explain why the English landscape (insofar as it is man-made) is the way that it is. I love books like this (my archetypal example being "Guns, Germs, and Steel" by Jared Diamond), so when I saw this one in a Cambridge bookstore, I didn't hesitate. And although it isn't perfect, I'm glad I did.

Hoskins wants us to open our eyes to the presence of history in the physical world around us. Why does that lane have such deep ditches, why does it appear to go from nowhere to nowhere, and why does it jog left and right so often whereas another two miles away runs straight as an arrow? What do those waves in that field mean and why are those hedges so wide? What is behind place names? Why does that village have two churches, and the church in that town no graveyard? These and many other questions turn out to have answers... and by looking for the answers we learn things about why the English landscape looks the way it does today.

On the downside, it is a book written by an enthusiast for other enthusiasts... and as such has more detail and detailed examination of minor issues than would be the case if it were written for a general audience today. But if you skip ahead a few paragraphs or a page when you feel your eyes glazing over then there is more than enough to reward you for your perseverance.

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### **Elizabeth says**

fascinating!

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## **Jason says**

Classic.

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## **Conrad says**

Just as the parliamentary act of enclosure brought large tracts of barren land and open farm land into more productive use, so the information in this book has filled in a lot of blank areas in my knowledge of the development of the English countryside. The later chapters dealing with the impact of the canals and railroads and of the growth of the industrial cities and the cause of slums was particularly fascinating. Obviously, at the time of writing, he deeply lamented the crassness of the Cold War era and of its impact on the use of the land. Hopefully not all has been lost and a greater sensibility of the need to protect the marvelous heritage of the country has arisen since those days.

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## **Phil says**

This was an interesting read - rather dated in style and the writing can be tough to get through at times as he doesn't write well for a general audience, but for enthusiasts (consequently he can take several pages going into far too much detail while missing points that might be of more advantage to a general reader).

What I liked was the way it encourages you to read the language of the landscape - when telltale shadows of the past show through to the modern day: why does a road take an apparently unnecessarily circuitous path; why are the fields ridged; why are some ditches so wide; why do some lanes have no apparent destination; why do terraced streets in towns come in blocks or alternating directions; why did some towns develop dense slums while others spread out in a more comfortable way.

This was a pioneering work when first published in the 1950s so you have to forgive some of its faults, but I did find his dismissal of \*everything\* modern a little tiresome. He flips past the black death (understandably, because this is a book of the landscape not a social history and it didn't impact the landscape) but talks of how joyous it must have been to live just after the Black Death when there were no people (he doesn't seem to like people being in his landscape) and lots of clear countryside and you weren't scraping for a life and no planes (he hates planes ... and airfields ... even more than he hates people).

So very interesting, but his personal interjections were a little wearing and even comical after a while.

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## **Shelly Dennison says**

Interesting, if dated, narrative history of the development? of the English landscape. The turn of phrase often reminds you that this was written in the 1950s, and of course this also means that the modern day England he describes doesn't bear that much resemblance to ours. That said, the book did make me want to get out and look at different landscapes through fresh eyes and it was good that it wasn't all rural but looked at towns, canals and industry too. Geographically it concentrates on the Midlands and south west which can be frustrating at times if you're looking for more on what makes the north of England distinctive.

There are lots of photographs, maps and plans to illustrate the points being made in the text but as ever these are all in black and white when colour might have helped.

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### **Richard Thomas says**

Essential for any bookshelf. Deep learning, lightly expressed and fascinating throughout.

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### **Charles Sheard says**

I love this subject, and I feel the book is a necessary read if you care for the subject in general, and English landscape history in particular. But this book stemmed from five separate radio broadcasts Hoskins gave, and ultimately, that set up the major flaws of this book. In the first place, the author repeats himself far too often, which is something you would expect when he is touching on the same context in successive radio addresses, but is not something you expect when he just covered the same subject in great detail the last chapter. In the second place, Hoskins drops unending lists of examples of whatever point he is making, nearly every paragraph or two, pointing to small towns and their landscape features all across England. That might be valuable if you are a walking gazetteer of England, but is certainly less helpful for those of use that didn't grow up and spend our entire lives there (and I doubt even those that did would have the personal familiarity with all those places). It would have been much more valuable to reference fewer examples, but go into greater depth with explanatory photographs and diagrams of each example. In the third place, since this is specifically a book about how historical actions shaped the landscape, I felt the illustrations could have been even more frequent and more specific to the points being made. For example, in the Chapter on roadways Hoskins limits himself to using as an example for larger application the area shown on a single ordinance survey sheet, yet he does not even bother to include a copy of that sheet as one of the illustrations! Nor, for that matter, are most of the pictures in the chapter even from the area he is discussing, but from other parts of the country that might show a similar concept. The subject matter cries out for a textbook, where each particular concept is better discussed in detail with explanatory charts, photos, etc., rather than a brief surface treatment with a lot of references to places that are meaningless to me unless I pull of Google Earth and start doing my own research.

I wanted to enjoy the book more. I enjoy Hoskins sensibilities and writing, when his own voice is coming through. The closing pages especially, when he discusses the ten centuries of history evident in the surroundings viewed from his own window, represent the writing that I wanted more of throughout. It makes you wish you could pull on a pair of Wellies and spend the day walking the countryside with him, as he points out feature after feature of historical interest. Of course, I also shudder to think how he would have felt about land-use in the 60 years since he wrote this.

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### **Chris says**

Really interesting overview of the English landscape and its development in terms of villages, towns, and cities. Very interesting.

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## Lee Broderick says

Some books have a reputation that precedes them. I'd been meaning to read *The Making of the English Landscape* ever since my first degree. It's an acknowledged classic in a discipline which has very few. Given that context, it's probably no surprise that in some ways it couldn't live up to my expectations.

This is a classic for it's subject as much as for its prose. In weaving his narrative, W.G. Hoskins leans heavily on the East Midlands and, to a lesser extent, mid-Devon. Since he grew up in the latter and worked in the former (as a lecturer at the University of Leicester) that is perhaps understandable - particularly in light of the incredible amount of work that a larger amount of primary data would have entailed. The book, written as much for a popular audience as for an academic one, effectively birthed Landscape History and midwifed Landscape Archaeology. The growth of those sub-disciplines since this study's publication means that we have a wider understanding of matters now.

Our understanding is not just wider though but deeper - in the sense that we have a greater understanding of the development of landscapes through time than was possible when Hoskins wrote. It is then, in this sense, outdated.

The other reason given for its status - contributing to its impact - is the author's prose. Whilst this is acceptable I found it to be very much of its period, occasionally feeling like a public lecture. In the final chapter though it does come alive but this is largely because he has given up the lecture and allows himself full reign to indulge his sermon - namely the despoilment of the English countryside since its perfection with the Enclosure Acts. Some nice words for railways aside, this is the narrative the author focuses on - the development of the landscape through history until this point and its ruin afterwards, an evolution from Eden and back to the Heart of Darkness through those Dark, Satanic Mills.

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## Simon says

Brilliant. Highly recommended.

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## Peter says

This is a natural history of the physical environment we live in, both urban and rural, following the effects of successive invasions, colonisations, cultural developments and world events on shaping that landscape. This is a seminal text, but it reads like a text book, (it's a core text on most undergraduate geography and countryside management courses) which it became shortly after the acclaim it received after it's first publishing.

It's fascinating and informative but won't convert anybody who doesn't already have an interest in the subject; if you do then you'll plough through it if not try Oliver Rackham's *The Illustrated History of the Countryside*

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