In 2001, reportedly over 10,000 people visited the English countryside, and spent over £12 billion at c. 12,000 farm visitor attractions.

- ‘Activities involved included bird watching, feeding farm animals, visiting rare breed centres, driving the latest 4x4 vehicles, tackling assault courses and playing golf.’ (‘MPs clash over farm visitor attractions’, Lancashire County Publications, 10th Feb, 2001)

To this end, as pleasing elements of the landscape farm animals acquired an additional use.
Farm Recreation and Tourism, CCP 83, 1974

The significance of the farm visitor attraction to the UK’s rural economy was first recognised in Britain in the 1970s, when it was realised that the countryside included:

‘a large number of people who cannot gain a complete livelihood from farming’. (Farm Recreation and Tourism, CCP 83, 1974)
• By the late 1980s, within the diversification agenda, it was widely accepted in the UK that:
  – ‘Catering for visitors ... can provide the basis of a wide range of successful businesses. ... Examples of attractions include: Farm trails.’ (Action for Rural Enterprise, Development Commission for Rural England, c. 1987)

• But, it is clear that by the 1970s there was already an established commercial practice in Britain of opening farms to specialist and non-specialist visitors:
  – ‘The last 20 years have seen a dramatic growth in recreation and tourism, [and in] the demands and pressures which they place upon the countryside.’ (Farm Recreation and Tourism, Countryside Commission, 1974)

• This had its origins pre-WWII.
Specialist Audiences: Open Days

• In the Post-War period Open Days and farm visits were part of established practice within the British farming community.

• As farming processes specialised and intensified in the twentieth century, so modernising, capital-intensive farms held ‘open days’ for farmers and their families to observe and discuss new developments:
  – e.g. *Farmers Weekly*, held open days on the farms it managed in the 1970s.
B&W photograph of picnicking in the car park, open day, Broadley Farm, 1973, image courtesy of MERL

‘Visitors watch the grazing cows on the steep slopes of Conrick’, Farmers Weekly 18th Aug 1978, p. 62, image courtesy of MERL
Non-Specialist Audiences: Farm Visits

- From the interwar period onwards British farmers offered farm tours to ‘townsmen’ who had a general interest in the countryside: farming/wildlife.
- Post-war, the ‘better-off’ ‘car-owning’ public in particular sought out rural experiences in the form of farm shops, farm visits, and accommodation on ‘home farms’.
- In the farming press, these visits came to be seen as a potential additional source of income, along with farm holidays, camping, fishing, riding etc.
- And, at the national level advice was given about grants for development, how best to serve visitors etc.:
  - ‘Simple notices or other forms of interpretation will add to the visitor’s understanding of what he sees.’ *(Farm Recreation and Tourism, Countryside Commission, 1974)*
Farm Visits – the value for farmers

• In these discussions, British farmers evidenced a belief that there was a disjuncture between town and country life, and a worrying failure among ‘townsmen’ to understand ‘modern’ agriculture/farming/the countryside.

• This perceptual lag among ‘townsmen’ supposedly led to errors of judgement, personal and political, on the part of those in the city, which could be tackled through farm visits.
  – Farm visits might improve the ‘understanding between town and country [which] has been advocated for years.’
  – ‘Farmers are curators of the countryside.’ (‘Profit from People’, FW 30 Aug 1974)
Farm Visits – the attraction

Farm animals proved particularly attractive to non-specialist visitors.

They were especially appealing to families with children.

Children: ‘even the most undisciplined become absorbed with interest as they go round the livestock sections.’ (‘Grassroots education’ FW 22 June 1973)
Farm Visits – the value for farmers & children

- Among British farmers there was frequently a focus on the longer term value of offering farm visits to children in particular:
  - “”Even a single visit to a farm is a start””
  - “”We ... hope it will create in them some sympathy with the environment so that when they are older they will think twice about ruining the countryside whether directly by their own behaviour or by allowing development.””

(‘Grassroots education’ FW 22 June 1973)
Farm Visits – the value for farmers & children

• From the point of view of British farmers, we can see the expectation throughout the period that observing farms in action would enable children in particular to have a better understanding of agriculture as adults, and that this might impact on their decision-making in later life.

• E.g. Ted Owens observed in 1969 that his adult visitors sometimes remembered visiting his farm when they were children, and argued:
  • ‘This is perhaps the point of these visits by children. They make a lifelong impression.’ (Ted Owens, ‘So Worthwhile These School Visits’ in British Farmer, Nov 1969)
  – ‘many thousands of now grown-up people, who may well some day have a major say in the Local Government of ... rural areas ... have at least some idea of what farming and the countryside are all about.’ (Owens, BF, 1969)
Farm Visits – education

• There was a also pragmatic, ready adoption of the formal languages of pedagogy/education.

• E.g. in 1991 *British Farmer*, re NFU schemes in the regions:
  – ‘farms are fascinating class-rooms offering a wealth of interesting ways to study aspects of the national curriculum.’ (*BF*, April 1991)
Farm Visits – Farm Museums, 1970s-1980s
Concluding Remarks

• From the Romantic period onwards, children came to be associated with Edenic Nature, innocent of all experience.
  – Romantic children ‘deny, or enable us to forget, many aspects of adult society’ (Higgonet)
• The late-C18th, Romantic understanding that (a) adult lives are essentially shaped by childhood experiences, and that (b) Nature has a powerful and lasting moral influence, both held good in Britain in the 1970s.
• This Romantic conceptualisation of childhood intersected very easily with agriculture in the form of English domestic Pastoral, and this intersection persisted through the C19th and on into the C20th. It can be seen in:
  • the long-standing practice of teaching children about farm animals, in books,
  • the educational practice of offering farm visits to urban school children,
  • And even in the agricultural advertising that treated children as representatives of a bright new future.
Farm visits – Country Holidays

Farm Holidays were sought for children from poor backgrounds from the C19th. *The Times*, Thursday, May 20, 1880

**COUNTRY HOLIDAYS FOR POOR CHILDREN.**

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—Will you allow me to give a short account of our success in giving some weeks’ country holiday to 170 children from the close London streets. Each child stayed away about three weeks, and the total cost was £1.

We asked some friends living in country parishes within 50 miles of London to see if in some of the cottages room could not be found for one or two children. The answers were most promising, and in 21 different neighbourhoods families were found ready to receive the Londoners for 4s. or 5s. a week. We, on our side, promised that the children should have a clean bill of health, and that the money should be paid. Our friends promised to see to the welfare of the children and help to make the holiday pleasant.

The children returned not only with sun-burnt and brightened faces, but with new interest awakened by all they had seen and done in the country. The cottagers, who made the children feel themselves to be guests, and provided for them many treats, have been brought nearer to the real needs and sorrows of town life.

I hope we may be able to repeat our plan this year, and that it may be extended to other neighbourhoods.

I am, &c., SAMUEL A. BARNETT.

Farm holidays on a charitable footing continued into the C20th. S.S. ‘Holidays with Open Arms...’ *Farmers Weekly, 7th* Sept 1973 caption, ‘The children quickly settle in...’
Preservation

- 1940-2001, as well as being part of educational and philanthropic practice, farm visits came to be part of the cultural capital of well-to-do family outings.
- The 1960s-70s valorised country living, wildlife/nature alongside a perceived renewed/permisive access to the ‘freedoms’ of childhood – e.g. children’s liberation movement. It became natural to take children to the countryside, to farm parks & adventure playgrounds on rebuilt home farms & great estates.
- And, the association of countryside, childhood and animals – especially young animals, which perceptually have remained ‘innocent’ of the modern agricultural processes to which they belonged – also interwove with and came to serve the 1970s/80s preservationist approach to the rural that steered the development of rare breed visitor attractions and farming/rural life museums.