

The Theft Of The Countryside

by Marion Shoard

(Maurice Temple Smith, 1980)

Foreword By Henry Moore

Our surroundings are part of what we are. And the special quality of the English countryside has helped shape the English character. Certainly it has shaped much of England's art. From the Beowulf poet to Shakespeare, Chaucer to the Brontes, our literature has sprung at our writers from the natural environment. Our painters and our musicians too are inseparable from the landscape which inspired them. Try and imagine Constable, Gainsborough, Turner or Elgar having been born and brought up in a foreign country. Sculptors have proved no less dependent on the English countryside. My own work would have been different had not the shapes of the Yorkshire landscape existed first. This may seem a puzzling statement since the subject of most of my work has been the human figure, but it is forms that I have come across in the natural world—from pebbles or tree trunks to a whole valley which have often shown me how to interpret the human body. My work is a marriage of man and landscape, which is why I prefer to have it displayed out of doors with the sky, clouds and trees. And I believe that something of the same synthesis of man and nature makes up the character of us all, whether or not we are artists.

Such a view necessarily commits me to a deep concern for the English countryside. It is a concern I have found to be among the most widely shared of all the concerns of my fellow countrymen. And yet, the countryside which is so much a part of our nation now stands in real danger of destruction. I am in no doubt that the loss of our countryside would be universally perceived as the unprecedented catastrophe it would undoubtedly be. Yet there is almost universal ignorance of the imminence of this catastrophe. If people knew what was happening, they would rise up and stop it. I have not the slightest doubt about that. This book explains what is happening and how it could be stopped. Please read it, for your sake, for the sake of your children, and for the sake of your country.

§ - Ends -- §