





A comparison between 'then' and 'now' photographs of scenes within the Cotswolds AONB shows that, over the last century, significant changes have occurred in the landscape. Roads - now busy with motorised traffic - have been surfaced, airfields have been constructed, food production has become more intensive, villages have expanded and become sub-urbanised, farm buildings have become larger and more industrialised (or been converted to dwellings) and thatched roofs have in many areas completely disappeared. Yet there is still the perception that 'the Cotswolds' appear now as they always have done and that, somehow, a now-vanished past lives on in the present. Earlier chapters have touched on aspects of why this is so; specifically how this apparent continuity stems in part from local distinctiveness in the built environment, and where this distinctiveness is threatened. This chapter looks at how change might affect the landscape of the AONB in the future, that is to say 'what if' certain trends continued or if major upheaval were to occur.



FARMING LANDSCAPE C. 1930



FARMING LANDSCAPE TODAY



HIGH WOLD ENCLOSURE LANDSCAPE



LANDSCAPE BROKEN-UP BY HEDGES



ENCLOSURE LANDSCAPE IN BEDFORDSHIRE



BOUNDARIES REMOVED FROM THE LANDSCAPE

### 7.01

#### Dry Stone Walls Replaced by Hedges or Fences

It has been shown in Chapter 04 that hedges are as prevalent across the AONB as dry stone walls. It is therefore quite easy to see the difference between areas of the landscape that are predominantly hedged and those which are not. That said, many hedged areas are of 'ancient' enclosure which means that, in terms of boundary pattern, they are very different from those areas where the dry-stone walls of enclosure prevail. Replacement of these walls with hedges - whether by colonisation (as can often be seen where a wall has fallen into disrepair) or grubbing-out and planting anew - will therefore produce a landscape that is very different from what can be seen today, something more akin to the enclosure landscape of Midland areas such as Bedfordshire, and Nottinghamshire. The identity of much of the AONB would be lost to a 'planned' landscape of large, regular fields bounded by neat, mono-species hedges or post and wire fences and the occasional hedgerow tree.

### 7.02

#### Walls and Hedges Lost from the Landscape Altogether

Chapter 03 described how modern (i.e. eighteenth and nineteenth century) 'enclosure' affected the landscape of many parts of the AONB and how that, before that time, the landscape of the 'open field' system would have defined the character of the much of the area. It might therefore be surmised that the loss of walls and hedges would be no more than a reversion to what, historically, was 'the Cotswolds Landscape'. However, this presumes that old methods of farming and husbandry such as large-scale sheep farming on open runs were revived which, given the economic dominance of arable crops, would be highly unlikely. The most likely outcome of the wholesale loss of defined boundaries would be a landscape that was either dominated by the sort of massive 'prairie' fields seen in parts of East Anglia or, quite simply abandonment of vast tracts of land that were no longer enclosed and hence no longer economically workable.



WALLS OBSCURED BY VEGETATION



PRODUCTIVE ARABLE LAND



GRAZING REVEALS WALLS IN DETAIL (PEAK DISTRICT)



LAND SET ASIDE (FOREGROUND)

### 7.03

#### Livestock Replaces Crops

It is in the High Wold and other areas where dry-stone walls predominate that the effect of livestock replacing crops would be most visible in the landscape of the AONB since, beyond the obvious difference in the appearance of grassland and crops, it is the perimeters of fields where the influence of livestock is most clearly seen. Fields that are used solely for crops will always retain a margin of growth at their edges, it being generally impractical to harvest tight-up to walls or hedges without damaging both machinery and boundary. This means that the visual impact of a boundary on the landscape is always softened by vegetation. Conversely, animals will chew grass right up to the edge of a field, leaving the boundary exposed and visually prominent - walls in the landscape then become very dominant, as can be seen in upland areas such as the Peak District or the Yorkshire Dales.

### 7.04

#### Set Aside Allowed to Dominate

Under current grant regimes, land which is 'set aside' has to be available for farming next season. This means that, although dereliction of land is unlikely, extensive weed killing is carried out to ensure no growth for the season, which results in brown fields, and a loss of soil organisms and wild flowers. A dominance of set aside across the whole of the AONB would result in a very barren landscape, far removed from the lushness of the farming scenery seen today.





WELL-WATERED (AND TENDERED) LANDSCAPE



FARMED LANDSCAPE



LANDSCAPE STARVED OF WATER (AND SPRAYED)



THICKLY WOODED LANDSCAPE

### 7.05

#### Rivers Dry Up

The porous nature of the rock underlying the Cotswolds AONB makes the area particularly sensitive to any development that affects the water table. An intensification of the numbers of roads, paved surfaces and roofs that drain direct to surface water sewers would speed up the process of water reaching streams, disrupting their continuous flow and increasing the likelihood of drought or flood. Lowering the water table would result in springs and the upper sections of water courses drying-up, which would put acute pressure on natural features such as the distinctive Beech Hangers along the scarp. Small, sluggish streams would also be vulnerable to scour and loss of bank-side vegetation. The overall result would be a noticeable reduction in the strength and variety of the eco system, tending towards the blandness that can often be seen in poorly-watered municipal parks.

### 7.06

#### End to Farming and Reversion to Woodland

It is no understatement to say that much of the way the landscape of the AONB appears today is the result of successive generations of farming otherwise there would be no fields, no dry stone walls or hedges, no farmsteads and precious little reason for most towns, villages and hamlets. So what now if farming were for some reason to end across the whole of the Cotswolds AONB? Other than where farmland could be re-used for leisure (e.g. golf courses), industry or house-building (all of which would be limited by the capacity of the area to support development), the ultimate state of abandoned farmland is its reversion to woodland. However, that is the long-term scenario. In the first instance, abandoned land would be invaded by brambles, docks, willowherb, etc. (arable land with its loosened soil would succumb earlier than grassland). Trees would begin to colonise the land after a few years, with the development of thickets of hawthorn interspersed with more open areas of ash and sycamore. Deer, grey squirrels and berry-eating birds would proliferate, and - in some areas - rabbits (hence areas of short turf). Tree cover and the beginnings of woodland would arrive within 20-30 years.



CLASSIC STONE SLATE ROOF



DISTINCTIVE EDGE OF TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENT



STONE SLATES REPLACED WITH WELSH SLATE



NEW HOUSE UNRELATED TO CONTEXT

### 7.07

#### No Further Production of Stone Slates

Although stone slates are an inherently durable roof covering that, properly selected and laid can be expected to last for many decades if not centuries, they are not indestructible and sooner or later will require replacement. The lack of availability of stone slates has been identified in Chapter 05 as one area where local distinctiveness within the AONB is at threat, meaning that there is much pressure to replace old stone slate roofs in cheaper, more readily obtainable materials such as concrete or clay tiles. One only has to look at the situation in the south of the AONB (north of Bath) to see a landscape where red clay pantiles are now the norm, local thatch having disappeared. Imagine if this situation were to be repeated throughout the area, and the impact of the landscape of the visually dominant roofscapes of places like Painswick or Snowhill - and hence what would happen if market forces and opposition to quarrying conspired to halt the production of stone slates.

### 7.08

#### Uncontrolled Expansion of Settlement

The towns, villages and hamlets of the Cotswolds AONB are amongst its most treasured features, their appearance in the landscape being a crucial component of local distinctiveness. Location and form both play a part in defining the special qualities of a settlement, skyline and edge detail being of particular importance. The latter is particularly vulnerable to thoughtless development which - if not controlled - may result in the erosion of subtle relationships between buildings and their spatial setting, leading to an irretrievable loss of distinctiveness, despite any well-meaning attempt to 'fit' the local vernacular.



THE GENERAL PERCEPTION OF QUARRING



MODERN 'SHORT STRAW' WHEAT



LOW IMPACT OF OLD DELVES



LONG STRAW WHEAT SHEAVES IN THE PAST

### 7.09

#### Delving as an Alternative to Quarrying

It has been suggested in Chapter 05 that the answer to the problem of the supply of stone suitable for splitting into slates (and also the provision of stone for field walling) might be to allow farmers to diversify and extract small quantities of stone from shallow pits known as delves, an alternative to relying on the stone industry *per se* for the full range of building products. But what of the impact on the landscape? Questions are increasingly asked about its environmental impact, locally and further a field, and many people have little desire to see an increase in the numbers of large open quarries such as Huntsman's Quarry to the west of Stow-on-the-Wold; but how many notice the many small depressions along the edges of the intervening fields, or the numerous hollows sitting hidden within small copses? These are what is meant by 'delves' - an almost forgotten method of extracting stone that has only a minimal (and short term) impact on the landscape.

### 7.10

#### Farmers Encouraged to Produce Straw for Thatching

Allied to the issue of delving is the notion of growing wheat to produce straw for thatching. The impact on the landscape would be slightly more marked than delving, since the taller varieties of wheat that are required for 'long straw' thatching are more likely to close-off views during the summer and to temporarily mask low stone walls and hedges. Thatching straw (e.g. hybrid varieties of wheat such as Maris Huntsman) also tends to exhibit green nodes (the points on the stems of wheat from which leaves arise) and a 'rainbow' of colours in its upper internodes (the lengths of stem between the nodes)





NON-ORGANIC MEADOW



ORGANIC MEADOW

### 7.11

#### Organic Farming More Widespread

The impact of widespread organic farming across the AONB would result in a number of subtle changes that, taken together, would mean a noticeably richer landscape than seen at present, especially on the High Wold. An absence of spraying may mean weeds being allowed to grow amongst crops such as wheat, as well as a need to machine-weed for some vegetable crops, which in turn would mean that headlands are more likely to be mown rather than ploughed. Livestock such as pigs would also have more access to arable fields, and a more mixed grassland would be encouraged for the grazing of cattle; the double-grazing of cows and sheep may also be used to encourage a denser layer of sward (grass cover). Organic milk production would mean increased levels of hay production, with traditional bails supplanting the now-common black or green silage bails, while crop and livestock rotation would produce more seasonal variation in the appearance of the landscape. An increase in the number of insects and the microbiological content of the soil would bring more worms and birds.