

Introduction

John Leland, gathering his notes together in the mid-1540s after six years of journeys across England and Wales, had an audacious vision. He told Henry VIII that he aimed to produce for him linked texts, describing his land in a visual image and accompanying words. He wrote:

I trust shortly to se the tyme, that like as Carolus Magnus had among his treasures thre large and notable tables of sylver, rychely enameled, one of the syte and description of Constantynople, an other of the site and figure of the magnificent cite of Rome, and the third of the descripcion of the worlde. So shall your Majestie have thys your worlde and impery of Englande so sett fourthe in a quadrate table of sylver . . . And because that it may be more permanent, and farther knowne, then to have it engraved in sylver or brasse. I entend by the leave of God, within the space of xii. moneths folowyng, such a descripcion to make of your realme in wryttinge, that it shall be no mastery after, for the graver or painter to make the lyke by a perfect example.¹

These proposed texts, though very different in terms of form, are underpinned by a common purpose. The ‘quadrate table of sylver’ and the written ‘descripcion’ were intended, in an unprecedented and ineradicable manner, to render Henry’s realm visible. They would have presented to the King nothing less than a comprehensive, encyclopedic knowledge of his land, all capable to being ‘apprehended in a single, unified gaze’.²

Leland never realized his vision. He lapsed into insanity in 1547 and died in 1552, leaving, as testament to his dream, a brief text from which the above quotes are taken and a wealth of manuscript notes describing his journeys. The notes assumed a cultural life of their own, circulating among scholars for almost 200 years before eventually being printed in the early eighteenth century as *The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary*.³ This achievement in

¹ *The Laboryouse Journey [and] serche of Johan Leylande* (1549), sigs. D5v–D6v.

² Philip Schwyzer, ‘John Leland and His Heirs: The Topography of England’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature*, ed. Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (Oxford, 2009), p. 245.

³ Ed. Thomas Hearne (9 vols., Oxford, 1710–12).

2 *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England*

itself marked Leland as arguably the most important author of domestic travel-writing before Daniel Defoe: far more important, in fact, than the belated effort to pigeon-hole him as an ‘antiquary’ might suggest. Yet there is cause to dwell on Leland’s failure as well as his unquestionable achievement. The seductive image of nationhood as wholly visible, suspended from time and process, was clearly an ‘impossible object’ to realize.⁴ Moreover, it was founded on a curious paradox, which may be instructive in the present context. For, while Leland repeatedly stresses, in his letter to Henry, the author’s ‘laborious’ commitment to his task, the effect of his imagined achievement would have been to render those labours invisible. These twinned texts would have offered not narratives of individual journeys, but rather descriptions of the nation’s myriad notable sites. They would have provided information about the position of these sites in relation to one another, but would not have traced lines of connection between them. They would have inscribed a knowledge not of travel but of place.

Leland’s *Itinerary*, to which I will return in the following pages, thus signals the problematic status of domestic travel in the early modern period. This compilation of notes describes journeys which the author himself appreciated as anomalous; indeed his travels are intended to render similar exercises virtually redundant. In the present book, I want to look beyond Leland, to consider the wider meanings of domestic travel in early modern England. The book is based on the premise that human mobility, within the space of the English nation, posed fundamental challenges to the period’s predominant models of social order. Those models assumed a nation within which people were fixed in place not only socially but also geographically, allowing little scope for the undeniable realities of movement in its various forms. How, then, did contemporaries make sense of domestic travel? How did they register the increasing incidence of mobility and the development of new forms of travel? How did they accommodate mobility to existing models of nationhood? And how did literature participate in these processes? The book thus embraces the proposition that human mobility was one of the period’s most dynamic forces of change, and endeavours to delineate the cultural dimensions of the profound debates and ideological struggles attendant upon these changes.⁵

Leland and Defoe serve as book-ends. In the Epilogue, I suggest that Defoe’s *Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain* realizes a model of

⁴ Schwyzer, ‘John Leland and His Heirs’, p. 244.

⁵ David Rollison, ‘Exploding England: The Dialectics of Mobility and Settlement in Early Modern England’, *Social History*, 24 (1999), 2.

Introduction

3

national connectedness that stands, in many respects, as the antithesis of Leland's vision. Nationhood, for Defoe, is brought into being by mobility. But the book as a whole is not principally driven by a chronological narrative. It is concerned rather with an extended period of uncertainty and flux, arguing that men and women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the face of severe cultural constraints, developed radically new ways of appreciating their relations with national space, and accordingly new models for representing the contours of nationhood. The present Introduction is intended to establish a framework for this investigation. In the following discussion of Leland I discuss his *Itinerary* in more detail, considering its uneasy oscillation between different models of national space and human mobility. The subsequent section positions the book in relation to various related studies of the period, and introduces the theory and methodology which underpin the argument. The final section outlines the shape and parameters of the project.

JOHN LELAND: TRAVELS AND CONNECTIONS

Set alongside his vision of an immediately visible tablet of knowledge, Leland's *Itinerary*, by contrast, dilates uncontrollably into a mass of 'elusive and ungraspable detail'.⁶ Indeed the *Itinerary* is characterized by its sheer excess of purpose. It not only includes a miscellany of information about the geographical structures and human uses of the land, but also moves incessantly back through time, bearing witness to the project's origins in a survey of the contents of monastic libraries. Leland's 'topic is nothing less than "Britain"', and he approaches this topic with no overarching model or set of guidelines, simply because none existed.⁷ As much as he struggles towards a sense of coherence, and experiments along the way with different methods of organizing his information, the text remains disordered and indiscriminate. Yet I want to suggest that these volumes, in their unfulfilled gestures towards form, register critical tensions between different models of the nation, and variant ways of appreciating relations between its subjects and the spaces they inhabited. As much as Leland seeks to capture an image of his land removed from the exigencies of time and human endeavour, these forces press themselves upon the text regardless, suggesting in the process very different forms of nationhood.

⁶ James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution, The Oxford English Literary History*, Vol. II: 1350–1547 (Oxford, 2002), p. 14.

⁷ Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, p. 12.

4 *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England*

In the wake of the Reformation, which effectively trashed his effort to survey the nation's literary archives, Leland 'transposed his grand project from a bibliographical to a topographical key'. But what happens when space, in Philip Schwyzer's words, is 'called upon to stand in for history'?⁸ One consequence is that the fantasy of all knowledge ultimately being capable of presentation to the monarch, as the one person in the land privileged to perceive and comprehend it all, disintegrates. In the *Itinerary*, spatial knowledge is more elusive, and also essentially more demotic, than that fantasy allows. Hence the text records instead the experience of its author gathering his knowledge. From the opening pages the first-person pronouns are insistent: 'I saw in the quire'; 'These thinges brevely I markid'; 'In this chirch ... I saw the tumbel', and so forth. These instances, all taken from a single page of the modern edition, are intertwined with acts of interpretation: 'So that I think'; 'This Richard I take to be the same'.⁹ Moreover, the text acknowledges the degree to which knowledge of the nation is located not just in libraries, but equally in the minds of commoners. While the text typically suppresses what must have been daily discussions with locals over distances and directions, it occasionally records the value of popular knowledge and memory. In Bedfordshire, for instance, a miller tells Leland of a bridge over the Ouse that he is not able to see, while in Yorkshire he records the 'commune opinion' about the changing course of the Derwent (I.102, I.45). The effect of such notes is to suggest an almost infinite expansion of the nation's stocks of knowledge, not only spatially but also socially. One reason the project is essentially unrealizable, in fact, is this recognition of diffusion, which threatens to reduce Leland to the status of a conduit for 'commune opinion'.

Furthermore, spatial knowledge is demonstrated to be not merely a matter of information about places, but equally a matter of associations and connections. Leland experiments with various ways of structuring his notes. Perhaps the most conventional approach, for the eyes of a modern reader, is to arrange sections by county, with subheadings for that county's notable features. Hence, for example, he gives details of the market-towns, castles, rivers, and forests and chases in Worcestershire (V.8–11). This model, founded on the imaginative breakdown of the nation into administrative units, would be enshrined by the following generations of cartographers and chorographers, including men such as Christopher Saxton and

⁸ Schwyzer, 'John Leland and His Heirs', p. 242.

⁹ *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith, 5 vols. (London, 1906–10), all quotes at I.15.

Introduction

5

William Camden. More commonly, though, the text records trajectories. These trajectories are across time as well as space, since the *Itinerary* acts in part as a storehouse of historical and genealogical data and anecdote. A visit to a village church, for instance, may prompt a narrative of the fortunes of the local landowning family. But they are most memorably acts of individual travel, that suggest connections between one place and another, and ultimately between all of the various ‘regions through which he travels’.¹⁰ These trajectories privilege the experience of the traveller, struggling along the way with the nation’s often intransigent geography. Consequently, to take one example of his practice, while he occasionally describes the courses of particular rivers from source to mouth, as though tracing routes along the surface of a map, his attention is more urgently drawn to bridges, which are so essential to the experience of a traveller. As John Scattergood observes, for Leland rivers are essentially significant as ‘channels to be negotiated’ rather than as lines of connection.¹¹

This characteristic of the text aligns Leland’s journeys with more common experiences of travel. Indeed, while Leland is determined to represent his own knowledge as unique, and ultimately sufficient to submit to the gaze of the King, the *Itinerary* constantly reminds its reader of the extent to which he was following routes established and rehearsed daily by countless numbers of English men and women. Not only is he on occasion forced to rely on ‘commune opinion’, he is therefore also positioned, as though against his own will, as another commoner treading common paths. This effect is most striking on the occasions when he inserts tabular itineraries of distances, in the form that would become familiar in a range of printed texts over subsequent decades.¹² In the course of a journey through Gloucestershire, for instance, he includes the following:

The way lyith this from Cirencestre to London:
 To Fairford vi. miles.
 To Farington viii.
 To Abbingdon ... miles.
 To Dorchestre v. miles.
 To Henley
 To London

(I.130)

¹⁰ Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2004), p. 86.

¹¹ ‘John Leland’s *Itinerary* and the Identity of England’, in *Sixteenth-Century Identities*, ed. A. J. Piesse (Manchester, 2000), p. 67. See also Jennifer Summit, ‘Leland’s *Itinerary* and the Remains of the Medieval Past’, in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge, 2007), p. 164.

¹² See below, pp. 76–7.

6 *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England*

It is not clear that Leland actually followed this itinerary. His ellipses indicate gaps in his knowledge, and possibly also in his experience, while the text itself subsequently moves on at a more leisurely pace through Gloucestershire. Yet this route, like many of the others that he tabulates in this manner, was certainly well trodden by the numerous cloth traders responsible not only for making Cirencester's market 'the most celebrate ... in al that quarters' (I.129), but more generally for driving forward the economic strength of the region and the nation. Cirencester, as David Rollison argues, was in part a product of its 'traffic', and its status typified the growth of the English cloth industry.¹³ It is therefore fair to say that this particular itinerary was better known to commercial carriers than to Leland himself. As happens at so many other points in this text, it thus gestures outward – implicitly and perhaps involuntarily, but also as a matter of undeniable practical necessity – to the experience and knowledge of commoners accustomed to traversing the land.

As becomes apparent through such instances, the *Itinerary's* appreciation of the practical details of human process undermines the professed goal to define a static model of nationhood. This is not a new argument; others have commented that Leland 'describes a remarkably fluid landscape', or 'an England whose identity is fluid'.¹⁴ Such readings, however, have focused on the text's registering of the massive transformations wrought upon the land by the dissolution of the monasteries. The land, as Jennifer Summit states, was 'in a state of passing ... from one point in time to another'.¹⁵ But this was not just a matter of change through time; equally, it was a product of the movements of individuals through space. This point is apparent in the text's recurrent narratives of the genealogies and fortunes of families. The history of the Rainesford family, 'Of Tew in Oxfordshire', for instance, is a narrative of expansion across the land, as the son of 'Old Rainesford' virtually doubles the family's landholdings in the region (IV.76). On a broader scale, Leland often considers the rises and falls of towns as a result of their commitment to particular industries which have either failed or flourished. Of Beverley, Yorkshire, he notes: 'Ther was good cloth making ... but that is nowe decayid'; at Reading, by contrast, the 'waters be very commodious for diers', and as a result 'the toune chiefly stonidith by clothyng' (I.47; I.III). Such comments record the uncertain yet insistent

¹³ Rollison, 'Exploding England', 10; Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society: Gloucestershire 1500–1800* (London and New York, 1993), pp. 45–63.

¹⁴ Summit, 'Leland's *Itinerary*', p. 163; Scattergood, 'John Leland's *Itinerary*', p. 72.

¹⁵ Summit, 'Leland's *Itinerary*', p. 163.

development of trade and industry, which entailed, as essential and definitive factors, the movement of people and goods across the country. Uses of land involve, of necessity, movements through land.

In the course of the *Itinerary*, then, the author who sought to establish himself as a unique gatherer of a finite stock of information to present to the King threatens to metamorphose into merely another subject travelling the roads and rivers of his nation. In the process, the text sketches the outlines of a very different model of nationhood to the one Leland proposed to Henry. This is a nationhood defined by connections across space: given shape by routes, and enacted by the subjects travelling them. As Schwyzer argues, the *Itinerary* ‘does not so much discover a unified nation already present on the ground as, through the figure of the itinerant, bring one into being’.¹⁶ This is not a model that Leland intended to produce, but it was an inevitable consequence of his decision to gather information through acts of travel. I want to suggest here that it is a model that remained a shadowy presence in discourse on space and nationhood throughout the early modern period. It posited a form of nationhood utterly different from the period’s orthodox model of placement, yet a form that was increasingly promoted in various forms by a wide range of texts and authors. Leland’s project, one might argue, was undone by the tension between these different ways of appreciating national space. Over the following 150 years or so, I want to argue, those tensions would give shape to debates over mobility and nationhood.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DOMESTIC TRAVEL

This book considers, in broad terms, early modern struggles to make sense of mobility. It is thus concerned not with particular kinds of travel, such as the narratives of tours produced by Leland and Defoe, but with mobility *per se*. The project is founded on an awareness of the significance of mobility – of people, goods and information – to the English nation. Such processes of mobility lent shape to some of the definitive transformations of the era: from the shift towards capitalism, through the ongoing spatial redistribution of the population, to the political reconceptualization of passive subjects as active citizens. To study the ways in which contemporaries understood mobility is therefore to better appreciate the formation of the modern English nation. The book’s task is to identify where – and, more importantly, how – new perceptions of mobility were conceived.

¹⁶ ‘John Leland and His Heirs’, pp. 247–8.

8 *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England*

As suggested in my analysis of Leland, the book is founded on the proposition that a commitment to values of place underpinned a powerful model of social and spatial organization in early modern England. This model assumed that the nation was organized into stable and relatively self-sufficient communities, whether in villages or towns, and it informed thought across the social spectrum. James I was perhaps the most vocal of the nation's rulers, though by no means unrepresentative, in his impassioned exhortations that the gentry should preside over an harmonious social order on their rural estates. 'Therefore as every fish lives in his owne place, some in the fresh, some in the salt, some in the mud', he argued in 1616, 'so let every one live in his owne place, some at Court, some in the Citie, some in the Countrey'.¹⁷ Within villages themselves, meanwhile, social interaction was commonly characterized by 'intense localism', or even 'parochial xenophobia'.¹⁸ The commitment to place was also reinforced by extensive legal structures. The Statute of Artificers, it has been said, 'wrote into law the model of a settled population where each laborer had his superior'.¹⁹ The Elizabethan Poor Laws, which effectively remained in place through to the eighteenth century, encoded the presumptions that paupers had identifiable homes and that their relief was the responsibility of their neighbours.²⁰ And the laws on vagrancy, to which I will return in Chapter 2, were especially harsh on those who had been displaced from particular settlements.²¹ The Elizabethan commentator William Harrison was thus entirely in accord with his age in expressing his disgust at the spectre of 'the vagabond that will abide nowhere'.²²

These attitudes and assumptions have in turn informed historical and cultural analysis of early modern life. 'The myth of the relatively isolated, self-contained and static rural community', as Keith Wrightson writes, 'is a powerful element in our conception of the past'.²³ Nonetheless, a range of important historical work has challenged this myth, thereby establishing valuable contexts for the present study. The tradition of transport history, which flourished particularly in the early to middle decades of the twentieth

¹⁷ King James VI and I, *Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge, 1994), p. 227.

¹⁸ Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004), p. 305.

¹⁹ Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1978), p. 29.

²⁰ On the history of these laws, see esp. Hindle, *On the Parish?*; and Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London and New York, 1988).

²¹ See below, pp. 93–5. ²² *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca, 1968), p. 180.

²³ *English Society 1580–1680* (London, 1982), p. 41. See also *The Self-Contained Village? The Social History of Rural Communities 1250–1900*, ed. Christopher Dyer (Hatfield, 2006).

Introduction

9

century, did much to demonstrate the mechanics of mobility.²⁴ More recent developments have attended in various ways to its social and economic dynamics. Research into internal migration, for instance, has revealed not only the importance of such movement, but also its characteristic patterns and types. Much migration was conducted across relatively small distances; however, some migrants covered much greater distances, tracing unpredictable arcs across the country, for causes that might be characterized in terms of ‘betterment’, ‘subsistence’, or something in between.²⁵ Other historians have sought to recover the category of the ‘labouring poor’, which caused early modern commentators such concern. These were people ‘able and willing to work’, but unable to support themselves within the confines of their ‘home’ villages, and often forced as a result into marginal and mobile existences.²⁶ In contemporary parlance, they were ‘living by the shift’.²⁷ Moreover, in extreme cases they were reduced to lives of vagrancy: a category that has rightly been subjected to scrutiny, but which nonetheless retains a certain integrity for understanding some of the most difficult of early modern lives.²⁸

Other studies have analyzed the effects of changing practices and understandings of marketing. Alan Everitt, for instance, begins his analysis of ‘The Marketing of Agricultural Produce’ by commenting: ‘By the year 1500 England had moved a very long way from the era of fully self-supporting rural communities. In all probability such arcadian conditions had never existed.’²⁹ Indeed internal trade, it has been estimated, handled ‘perhaps a quarter or a third of G.N.P. in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’, and this propelled the associated development of modern practices of consumerism.³⁰ These developments in turn challenged existing models for the

²⁴ See esp. J. Crofts, *Packhorse, Waggon and Post: Land Carriage and Communications under the Tudors and Stuarts* (London, 1967); Cyril Hughes Hartmann, *The Story of the Roads* (London, 1927); W. T. Jackman, *The Development of Transportation in Modern England*, 3rd edn (London, 1966); Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government: The Story of the King’s Highway* (London, 1913); T. S. Willan, *River Navigation in England 1600–1750*, 2nd edn (London, 1964).

²⁵ See esp. *Migration and Society in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Clark and David Souden (London, 1987). The classification of migration as ‘betterment’ or ‘subsistence’ is derived from Peter Clark, ‘The Migrant in Kentish Towns’, in *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500–1700: Essays in Urban History*, ed. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (London, 1972), p. 138.

²⁶ Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, p. 27. ²⁷ Hindle, *On the Parish?*, esp. pp. 92–5.

²⁸ See esp. A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560–1640* (London, 1985).

²⁹ ‘The Marketing of Agricultural Produce’, in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Vol. IV: 1500–1640, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge, 1967), p. 466.

³⁰ J. A. Chartres, *Internal Trade: England 1500–1700* (London, 1977), p. 10. On the development of consumerism, see esp. Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1984); and Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1978).

10 *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England*

conceptualization of economic relationships. In the early seventeenth century, Joyce Oldham Appleby writes, ‘the men who wrote on economic life had no analytical framework for discussing the shaping force of the market’. Indeed this was something, she argues, that was largely developed in the course of that century.³¹ More specifically, as Jean-Christophe Agnew has argued, early modern writers were gradually learning to conceive of the market in abstract terms, thereby gradually separating ‘the generality of a market *process* from the particularity of a market *place*’. Such writers, Agnew observes, were giving ‘practical and figurative form to the very principles of liquidity and exchangeability that were dissolving, dividing, and destroying form and that, in doing so, were confounding the character of all exchange’.³² They recognized, however uncertainly, that an abstract national market would create new relationships between places and people across the nation.

Scholars of literary and cultural history have added depth to these appreciations of the past, particularly by attending to the power of language to ascribe order to shifting and uncertain circumstances. Discourse can create meaning out of confusion; particularly resonant texts can condense debates into the space of a page. Crucially, Richard Helgerson’s analysis of what he terms ‘the writing of England’, evident in Elizabethan texts as diverse as maps and plays, has influenced a range of further analyses of the meanings of place and space in the period, attending especially to the shift from feudalism to capitalism.³³ In some respects, the present book also benefits from the insights of those who have examined the period’s rich literature of foreign travel, demonstrating the ways in which encounters with cultural difference prompted reflection upon the meanings of England and Englishness.³⁴ Further, the book’s concerns align, at a number of key points, with cultural and literary histories of mobile commoners. Numerous

³¹ Appleby, *Economic Thought*, quote at p. 21.

³² *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 41, 9.

³³ *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago and London, 1992). See further Jess Edwards, *Writing, Geometry and Space in Seventeenth-Century England and America: Circles in the Sand* (London, 2005); Bernhard Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2001); Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 1996); Garrett A. Sullivan, *The Drama of Landscape: Land, Property, and Social Relations on the Early Modern Stage* (Stanford, 1998).

³⁴ See esp. Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London’s Theatre of the East, 1576–1626* (Cambridge, 2003); Chloe Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography 1600–1830* (Manchester, 1999); Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Travel and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance, 1545–1625* (Oxford, 1998); Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730* (Cambridge, 2006).