

Dr Katrina Navickas,
School of Humanities,
De Havilland Campus,
University of Hertfordshire,
Hatfield, Herts,
AL10 9AB.

Luddism, Incendiarism, and the Defence of Rural ‘Task-scapes’ in 1812

Attacking property was one of the most common forms of expressing a grievance during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Arson in particular crossed the permeable boundary between person vengeance and collective action against an individual or group perceived to have transgressed community norms or expectations.¹ Attacking machinery, either by fire or by force, also featured within the varied repertoire of methods of intimidation, protest, and resistance in the eighteenth century. James Hargreaves’ first spinning jenny was forcibly dismantled in 1767; in 1779, cotton weavers demolished carding engines around Blackburn and Richard Arkwright’s water frames at Chorley; machine-breaking flared up in parts of Lancashire, the West Country, and the Midlands in 1780 and again in 1792.² The development of ‘Luddism’ in 1811–12 has, however, overshadowed these previous outbreaks of machine-breaking, and of other forms of destruction of property more generally. The intensity of Luddism, its geographical spread, and the panicked if not severe response of the authorities, gave the agitation of 1811–12 a peculiarly compelling character and legacy. Luddism was unique in its adoption of the

mythical leader ‘General Ludd’ as its moniker, as I have shown elsewhere.³ However, the tactics of Luddism in effect comprised of a more extreme version of more general popular resistance against changes in both industry and agriculture in northern England from the late eighteenth century onwards. Attacks on machinery and other forms of property did not emerge out of nothing or nowhere in 1812, but reflected customary tactics used in the new circumstances of a common fear of national rebellion.

This article argues that Luddism can only be understood within longer and deeper frameworks of social tensions and popular resistance in particular localities. Crucial to this understanding is an awareness of ancillary activity occurring in the fields, woods, and bye-ways alongside the set-piece attacks on powerloom weaving factories and woollen shearing mills. Contrary to perceptions of its industrial character, Luddism was not a solely urban phenomenon. Using a case study of the Horbury district in the West Riding, this article shows that Luddism, and especially popular fear of Luddism, was heightened by ancillary activities, both criminal and customary, occurring on the semi-rural peripheries of urban-industrial areas. The semi-rural, semi-urban environment and landscape of the industrializing Pennines shaped the disturbances of 1812. Many of the smaller Luddite machine-breaking incidents were accompanied by secret meetings, military-style drilling, and stealing arms. These acts were often conducted in a semi-urban environment on the edge of arable land on the fringes of industrial villages or on the turnpikes over pastoral moors. Furthermore, agricultural machinery and grain stacks were attacked in ‘Luddite districts’ in the West Riding, well before the more commonly known ‘Captain Swing’ agitation in the early 1830s. Referring to studies of rural unrest more generally, Andrew Charlesworth has lamented the tendency among historians to

compartmentalize protest into ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ categories ‘in a way more befitting twentieth-century conceptual dichotomies than eighteenth and nineteenth-century realities’.⁴ This article avoids those categorizations by demonstrating the interplay between urban and rural societies, economies, and customary forms of protest and resistance.

Why were workers and labourers attacking machinery and other types of property from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries? Marxist historians sought to portray Luddism and indeed the Swing riots as ‘movements’ within a wider chronology of working-class resistance to laissez-faire Smithian capitalism. Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé sought a class-conscious ‘proletariat’ among the rioters. Defeated in their quest for class, they concluded that shared ties of tradition and custom confined the mental world of labourers. In their view, therefore, ‘genuine’ collective organization on a class model was restricted until the emergence of national industrial trade unions in the 1840s and their agricultural equivalents in the 1870s.⁵ Later interpretations sought political radicalism in Luddism and Swing. Historians sought to fit the movements into the narrative of the emergence of plebeian reform societies in the run up to the 1832 Reform Act.⁶ Early labour historians, followed by the sociologist Charles Tilly, constructed a Whiggish trajectory of modernization. According to their narratives, popular protest underwent a progressive ‘transition’ during the industrial revolution from customary, localized, and individual forms of protest to organised mass membership movements, especially trade unions and political societies. Luddism and Swing were perceived as ‘pre-industrial’, and therefore were a backward obstacle to this progression.⁷

Luddism and rural resistance more generally cannot be reduced to such singular frameworks. The agitation was not about the development of working class consciousness and the politicization of the poor *en route* to democracy. Kevin Binfield's analysis of Luddite letters and my own rethinking of the myth of General Ludd have shown how the agitation of 1812 was not as simple, defensive or reactionary as it has been portrayed. It rather involved a complex web of demands and grievances, regional differences, and identities.⁸ Once we take away the old meta-narratives of class formation and politicization, however, we should not be left with the impression that the agitations were discrete outbursts, unrelated to local contexts and other forms of resistance. In relation to early modern protest, John Walter has called for a broader view, arguing that crowd actions should be regarded 'not as isolated events, spasmodic and reactive, by in terms of protest – as one, if key moment, in a history of longer term negotiations'.⁹ Adrian Randall is one of the few historians to place Luddism within its longer and broader context. His detailed examination of episodes of machine breaking from the mid-eighteenth century through to the Swing riots will not be repeated here.¹⁰ Rather, this article builds on his approach with new evidence and interpretations. Recently, Randall and other historians of rural resistance have revised the grand narrative of the Swing riots that had been set in stone by Hobsbawm and Rudé's monumental study, *Captain Swing*. New studies of the Swing riots in southern England are acutely sensitive to regionally-specific causes of change and of resistance to change. They argue that the incendiarism and machine-breaking of the early 1830s cannot be understood without full appreciation of local circumstances and structures of authority. The mythical character of 'Captain Swing' helped to give the movement a pan-regional coherence, but historians should not

generalize the causes and consequences of its spread.¹¹ This article applies these ideas to Luddism in 1812, arguing that the specific local context played a large part in shaping popular perceptions of the disturbances more widely.

Machine breaking was not a spontaneous tactic of last resort, or a desperate outburst of violence by labourers unable to ‘progress’ to the next ‘stage’ of class-consciousness. Workers usually exercised the tactic against a considered selection of targets, and it accompanied negotiation, striking, and other means of placing pressure upon employers.¹² The outbreaks of unrest must be situated within a wider and longer context of socio-economic tensions, often expressed in conflict over customary rights. Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, artisans and textile workers were incensed by what they regarded to be their employers’ displacement of individual skill for the cheap efficiency of mass production.¹³ Custom was central to the agitations. For E. P. Thompson, Luddism was the ‘crisis point in the abrogation of paternalist legislation and in the imposition of the political economy of laissez-faire upon and against the will and conscience of the working people’.¹⁴ The movement was a spirited defence against the removal of customary regulations concerning wage levels and apprenticeship by manufacturers and other authorities increasingly enamoured by the Smithian economics of the free market.¹⁵ Hobsbawm and Rudé dismissed the popular defence of custom as reactionary, but more recent historians have returned to Thompson’s definition of custom as a more vital, if still defensive, element of workers’ lives and worldview. Randall emphasizes the deep and often bitterly fought defence of customary regulations from the mid-eighteenth century to the 1830s. This is not to deny that early trades unions were gaining power and popularity in the early nineteenth century; we

should not go back to the old Fabian view that workers were disorganized until after the Combination Acts that had prohibited collective bargaining were repealed in 1824.¹⁶ Yet this printed regulations of trade shops and their strikes were only the outer, more extraordinary face of trade unionism. Privately an ‘inner world’ persisted that was designed not to be understood by outsiders, especially not by manufacturers and local authorities.¹⁷

The main characteristics of Ludd were not rational political debate or overt organization, but rather what cultural geographers Steve Pile and Michael Keith have dubbed ‘geographies of resistance’.¹⁸ Historians of rural protest have similarly identified what the anthropologist James C. Scott termed ‘weapons of the weak’ among subalterns. Outward compliance with social deference could mask ‘hidden transcripts’ of collective resistance to authority.¹⁹ Labour historians have long recognized that trade was a ‘mystery’, and that it was defended by outwardly mysterious means: the knowing look, the secret sign, the oath, the drinking ceremony in a back room. This article suggests that perhaps some of these mysterious signs extended outside, into the semi-rural environment. Luddism furthermore involved marginal spaces and everyday forms of resistance. The landscapes of Luddism were what the anthropologist Tim Ingold has termed ‘task-scapes’.²⁰ Marginal groups - handloom weavers, agricultural labourers, migrants, the poor - subsisted on the peripheries of urban areas: the industrial village or suburb, the turnpike, and the moor. Moors and fields were not picturesque or sublime backgrounds to conflicts, but formed their very battlefields. Popular agitation in marginal areas involved a defence of customary rights and working practices conducted in and using the environment. Luddites were defending the ‘task-scapes’ of their workplaces,

but they learned their tactics from longer running forms of resistance in the ‘task–scapes’ of commons, woods, and moors.²¹

Studying any form of underhand resistance inevitably raises major problems of evidence. Few perpetrators of agricultural machine breaking and arson were caught, tried, or reported in the newspapers. It is difficult to pin down hearsay and rumour rather than the more tangible evidence of convictions. The case for rural Luddism in 1812 remains impressionistic. Historians also need to be wary of conflating purely criminal activity with ‘protest’. Nevertheless, intriguing and previously unstudied evidence can be gleaned from contemporary diaries and the records of private prosecution societies. They reported events that fell outside the radar of urban–based newspapers and never reached the courts. Diaries in particular also indicate the role of emotion in the spread of Luddism. Fear and panic fostered rumours of unrest, which temporarily paralyzed local communities even if no machines were fired or no maurauding mobs ever appeared. Luddism was powerfully disruptive because those with property to defend imagined it to be so, and acted accordingly, even though in many cases the actual agitation was an amplification of customary or everyday means of expressing grievance.

I

The unpublished diaries of Matthew Tomlinson (c.1770–1850) give an insight into rural Luddism in the West Riding. Tomlinson was tenant of Dog House farm on the Lupset estate, situated off the Horbury Road a little over a mile south–west of Wakefield.²² He recorded his agricultural experiments, hirings of staff, and regular trips to markets in Wakefield and other trading centres in Yorkshire, thickly interspersed with self–examination into religious beliefs, and accounts of a failed courtship and eventual marriage and fatherhood.²³ Tomlinson’s account of the social disturbances of 1812 offers

valuable insights into events in his vicinity that were not reported in other sources. In doing so, he intimated the wider impact of economic conditions and social crisis upon the semi-rural hinterlands of industrial areas in the West Riding, and how threshing machines and haystacks also became a target for machine breakers.

Threshing machines usually come into historical focus in relation to the Swing riots in southern England in the 1830s. They were however already in common use in Scotland and northern England by the late eighteenth century. Andrew Meikle of East Lothian patented the most popular type around 1785, and by the early 1800s, millwrights and machine makers across Yorkshire were advertising a range of machines for sale. Most models were driven by water, later steam, or by up to six horses.²⁴ In August 1809, Tomlinson busily planned the construction of his new threshing machine, noting that ‘it perhaps takes up more of my thoughts than what is altogether necessary’.²⁵ It involved significant and long-term investment. The *Repertory of Arts, Manufacture and Agriculture* of 1808 stated that a threshing machine cost ninety pounds, ‘exclusive of carriage, and the board and lodging of four workmen for a fortnight while employed in fixing it up’.²⁶ The technology was debated in the literature of agricultural improvement and in the newspapers. In August 1800, the *Hull Packet* printed a column ‘On the Objections to the Thrashing Machines’, while ‘A Friend to Thrashing’ wrote a long defence in the *Leeds Mercury* in December 1815.²⁷ The displacement of labour was one issue. Although five labourers were still required to work the machines, the *Farmer’s Magazine* of 1812 observed that children could conduct some of the labour.²⁸ Threshing machines were adopted most frequently in northern England during the labour shortages

and high grain prices during the French and Napoleonic wars; their uptake appears to have slowed down after 1815.²⁹

British farmers suffered a devastating series of particularly wet summers from 1810 onwards, leading to a wartime peak in wheat prices in 1812. The average price per quarter reached 126 shillings in May 1812, double the annual average of the 1790s.³⁰ Labour unrest in industrial areas intensified. On 29 March 1812, Tomlinson noted the ‘national calamities’ in the economy that were leading the ‘lower orders’ to break industrial textile machinery. Machine breakers had entered in woollen mills in and around Leeds, destroying their shearing frames, on 24 and 25 March. Local magistrates advised woollen manufacturers to take down their machinery in order to pre-empt the Luddites. Joseph Foster, a major manufacturer of Horbury, refused, and on 9 April a contingent of up to three hundred Luddites fired his large woollen mill. Lupset was only a mile and a half up the road from the manufactory. Consternation spread further among the manufacturers in Huddersfield, Leeds, and their surrounds, and they applied to the magistrates for military protection.³¹ The feeling of imminent destruction was intensified by events two nights later, when Luddites conducted their most ambitious attack on William Cartwright’s mill at Rawfolds near Liversedge. The incident culminated with Cartwright’s workers and soldiers shooting dead two machine breakers. On 26 April, Tomlinson wrote a longer entry on the Luddite outbreaks, referring to the tumultuous week of 18 to 24 April when Luddite activity was at its height in Lancashire.³²

Tomlinson’s diary entries so far tell the historian nothing new about industrial Luddism. He had most likely gleaned information about the disturbances beyond his immediate locality from the newspapers. However, the appended comments to these

entries provide an alternative view of the agitation as unreported in the press. After his general description of Luddism on 29 March, Tomlinson wrote: 'it is rumoured that the Thrashing Machine is also to become an object of their attention'.³³ The authorities were similarly concerned, and on 21 April, Sir Francis Lindley Wood, deputy lieutenant of the West Riding, issued 'handbills as to thrashing machines and watch and ward'.³⁴ On 26 April, Tomlinson again commented ominously upon the mounting speculation among farmers in his district: 'The Thrashing Machines are now all that are talked about, the rabble will have them all down, altho' I believe that there is not a husbandman out of employ in this neighbourhood'. Tomlinson was scornful of his neighbours' response to the intensifying climate of fear: 'Many of the Farmers have took [*sic*] down their machines, which I think is very impolitic; for if the labouring Man had no intention of destroying them, when they see their employers so panick-struck it inspires them with resolutions which otherwise they wou'd not have had'. Significantly, he believed that an enforcement of the 'moral economy' was one solution to ease the distress and therefore calm the unrest: 'I do not intend to take my machine down but to continue thrashing out my corn, and selling it in my neighbourhood at a moderate price, than what corn is sold at the present: as there is most certainly a great scarcity of grain in the Land'. This entry implicitly indicated, however, that farmers believed they were under threat because of the perceived effects of threshing machines in raising grain prices as well as contributing to agricultural unemployment. Despite insouciantly dismissing the panic of his fellow farmers over threshing machines, Tomlinson was apprehensive enough about his grain stacks to stay up to protect them:

Last night thought it advisable to stand century [*sic*] before my stack yard, as Saturday evenings are rather loose than other evenings of the week. Of course I loaded my firelock and commenced century [*sic*] Monday, until near one in the morning: all appeared quiet; so I return'd and I went to rest: how changable [*sic*] and fluctuating are Men and Things.³⁵

The next night, 27 April, Luddites from the Spenn Valley unsuccessfully attempted to take William Horsfall's mill at Ottiwells near Huddersfield. On 28 April, they shot Horsfall dead on the road over Crosland moor.³⁶ By 3 May, though concerned about Horsfall's murder, Tomlinson's confidence was returning. He wrote, 'I have wrought my Thrashing-machines two Days this last week and it is not broken or otherwise injured'. However, in order not to tempt fate, he concluded: 'I have strong confidence nobody will harm it. I may be mistook'. His final comment on the expected disturbances appeared a week later. He again denounced the pre-emptive actions of the farmers taking down their machinery, believing that it only served to encourage rather than to avert the threat of destruction.³⁷

Fear therefore formed the basis of the existence of Ludd in the rural context. The myths appear to have been fostered by the farmers who believed that they were threatened, rather than being propagated by the Luddites themselves. However, although Tomlinson does not record that any of his neighbours were targeted, the farmers' suspicions were not completely baseless. Josiah Foster, son of Joseph Foster, whose mill at Horbury was attacked by Luddites on 9 April, indicated the sense of paralysis generated by the events. He made a deposition to the presiding military officers:

My father has been much alarmed and indisposed ever since, and continues to be apprehensive that his Premises will be consumed finally by Fire in the night. All the Merchants, Farmers, and Gentlemen in the neighbourhood, who have produce of any kind, are in the utmost consternation, and indeed apprehensions are generally entertained of some public commotion.³⁸

His testimony supports Tomlinson's account of anxiety spreading among the farmers in the Spenn Valley. Remote and unconnected incidents easily stoked up panic when inhabitants perceived their situation to be threatened by a lack of sufficient military presence in the district. Moreover, on the evening of 10 May, (the same night that Tomlinson wrote his final remarks on neighbouring farmers exaggerating their fears), a threshing machine within a barn was arsoned at Soothill, about six miles along the Dewsbury Road north-west of Lupset. It belonged to a corn dealer and farmer, Robert Wooler, of Rouse Mill on the Bradford road leading to Soothill.³⁹ On 11 May, the postmaster of Leeds reported to the General Postmaster: 'Last night a barn and its contents at Birstall were set on fire; a threshing machine it is thought was the object of dislike'. This may or may not have been the same incident as the Soothill arson: the two villages are about three miles apart on the Bradford road. He commented that 'no threatening letters [were] received', but blamed the 'stubborn, discontented Body' of croppers. He thereby clearly placed the incident within a Luddite framework.⁴⁰

No-one was caught for starting the Soothill fire. As was common with incendiarism cases in general, it was difficult to identify culprits working individually

and at night. Yet the incidence of arson was only one of many different agitations that, experienced together, place the major Luddite attacks within a broader context of both urban and rural resistance. The district in which Tomlinson's farm was situated (Lupset, Thornes, and the areas around the road between Wakefield and Horbury) fostered a range of Luddite activities, in which the semi-rural environment was an intrinsic part. On 6 June 1812, Luddites gathered at the edge of Soothill wood for illegal drilling practice. The magistrates received information alleging that these activities took place in preparation for a secret meeting on nearby Tingley Moor on 11 June.⁴¹ Victorian journalist Frank Peel suggested that Soothill was a 'favourite rendezvous' for the Spenn Valley Luddites at night:

The talk about a general rising still continued, and during the whole of June raids for arms took place almost nightly throughout parts of the West Riding [...] large bodies of men were seen almost nightly in the Yorkshire clothing districts, performing military exercises in secluded places. Soothill was a favourite rendezvous, and Cawley Wood, at Heckmondwike, was also frequently visited by the disaffected in that immediate locality.⁴²

The Luddites, drilling in the hills away from urban areas, may have had something to do with the incendiarism of 10 May. This cannot be proven, but it is significant that the authorities placed the two incidents within the same arena of covert unrest. Throughout June, the Wakefield magistrates were concerned about the 'nightly depredations' of arms stealing and 'other most violent breaches of the peace' in the neighbourhood, which they

blamed on Luddites.⁴³ The middle-class inhabitants of Soothill (in common with many parishes across the disaffected areas) set up a defence association to patrol every night. As late as September, they ‘found a set of disorderly persons ... who refused to disperse, and they were put into the Guard House – they had arms’.⁴⁴

Luddism therefore did not solely concern the major incidents of machine-breaking. From the point of view of the authorities, Luddism involved a rise in general criminal activity, from the violent (stealing of arms from houses and farmsteads) to more general nuisances (begging for food and money). Attacks on threshing machines also fed into this climate of unrest. The Soothill incendiarism was not unique. A barn containing a threshing machine was fired at Carlton, four miles north-east of Barnsley, on the night of 17 April 1812. It was situated on the large estate of James Stuart Wortley, Baron Wharncliffe (magistrate, Tory MP for a Cornish rotten borough, and, from 1818, member for Yorkshire). Rumours spread about potential threats to other prominent landowners and local authorities, and again observers placed the arson within a Luddite framework. Josiah Foster of Horbury appended news of the Carlton fire to his description of the Luddite attack on his father’s factory. Wortley received depositions from a ten-year-old son of the local bailiff and from one of his soldiers. The child reported that on Saturday 18 April ‘a stout man’ on a horse asked him ‘if Sir Francis Wood, Mr Volland, Mr Bingley and Mr Wilson of Vizett had not threshing machines’. The boy confirmed that they had. The man replied, ‘I will have them all pulled down ... I do not care for Sir Wood or any of them’, before riding off in the direction of Barnsley. Sir Francis Lindley Wood, whose seat was at Hickleton, about ten miles east of Barnsley along the Doncaster turnpike, also received this account. Wortley believed that, ‘from the circumstances’, his

machine was ‘clearly maliciously’ burned on purpose. He linked the event to the Luddite attacks in ‘the neighbourhood of Huddersfield’ and to a radical meeting that was due to take place on Barnsley common on 20 April.⁴⁵ The lord lieutenant of the West Riding, Earl Fitzwilliam, was more sanguine about the threats to his and his neighbours’ property. He was unconvinced by the testimony of the soldier, who claimed he saw ‘a large body of Men with their faces disguised’, apparently appearing and then suddenly disappearing around the time of the fire. This tale of blackened faces and suspicious behaviour had all the hallmarks of popular imaginings of the appearance and behaviour of Luddites. Fitzwilliam reasoned that ‘very probably the building was set on fire, but not by a numerous host but by an Individual’.⁴⁶ The newspapers offered another interpretation. A riot had occurred two days earlier in Barnsley market over the price of potatoes, and the *Sheffield Iris* suggested that the inhabitants then ventured to Carlton to take their revenge upon Wortley in his position as a justice of the peace.⁴⁷ We cannot be sure about the real explanation for the fire, but it again demonstrated the atmosphere of fear aroused by rumour, and the mix of urban and rural environments and tactics.

II

Examining the context of Luddism in other areas of northern England again serves to break down the urban–rural dichotomy in and typologies of protest. Magistrates writing frantic letters to the Home Office requesting military assistance were not solely concerned with attacks on machinery; rather, they were anxious about wider ‘unrest’ in the ‘neighbourhood’ of their towns during the most turbulent month of April 1812. In Bolton, Lancashire, attorney’s clerk John Holden recorded a tumultuous week of food riots and other disturbances leading up to the infamous attack upon Rowe and

Duncough's powerloom mill at nearby Westhoughton on 24 April. Local magistrates reported that several inhabitants had received anonymous threatening letters, but 'no acts of violence were committed until Saturday the 18th', when the spinning factory of Roger Holland was fired. On 20 April, following a food riot in Bolton market, a haystack on the estate of the bleacher Joseph Ridgway of Horwich, another outlying township, was fired. The next night, after crowds had been dispersed from Bolton moor by the military, a thatched building and the rope walk over the newly-enclosed part of the moor were set alight.⁴⁸ Because of the secretive nature of incendiarism, it is difficult to prove whether the wider community condoned such attacks; the fires may have just been the work of lone incendiarists. Nevertheless, it appears that arsonists were able to use the disturbed state of the industrial areas to amplify the sense of threat, even in areas unaffected by Luddism. At Ulverston in Furness, expressions of grievance and social tensions were also channelled through arson in an agricultural setting. William Fleming, a yeoman farmer and overseer of the poor for Pennington, recorded in his diary that on the night of 29 April, a barn and thirty carts of hay and straw were burned near Stonecross about half a mile south-west of Ulverston. He connected this act of arson with property crime and other forms of intimidation, noting that 'many threatening letters have been sent or privately put into the houses of many people in Ulverston'. On 3 May, Fleming again noted that 'many letters have been sent to different persons, threatening to burn Stonecross, the Town mill and some of the Factories in the Town which have alarmed the Inhabitants to such a degree that they now keep the watch and ward at the different places during the Night'. An arson attempt was eventually made on Robert Fell's 'new barn at Hodgpuddle' in Ulverston on the evening of 12 May. Fleming implied that the incident

was connected to a theft of material from the cotton factory of Fell, Burton and Co that morning. Even if the incidents were unconnected and had no overt political motivation, the psychological effect they had upon the loyalist elites were significant. Fleming certainly seemed to believe that the incidents were not mere coincidence, and the workmen 'are dissatisfied with everything' because of 'the very high prices of victuals of every description' and the trade being 'low'.⁴⁹

So throughout the manufacturing areas of northern England, aggrieved workers used the common tactics of incendiarism and threatening letters to accompany machine-breaking. Yet each outbreak of unrest had particular forms that were linked to the distinctive environments of each locality. The disturbances in the centre of Bolton undoubtedly had a different character from the incendiarism on the outskirts of Ulverston, which in turn contrasted starkly with the industrial hamlets of the Spenningsdale and Calder valleys. The relationship between the inhabitants and their landscape was at the heart of explaining Luddism and its ancillary activities. The Spenningsdale Valley Luddites in particular evidently had a close connection with the rural localities. Many of the pubs where secret meetings were allegedly conducted were situated in small villages surrounded by farms. As at Soothill, military-style drilling was conducted in fields or on moors, away from areas of concentrated habitation but nevertheless accessible to inhabitants of outlying textile-producing settlements.⁵⁰ The attack on Joseph Foster's factory was preceded by drilling 'on the road between Wakefield and Horbury', that is, very near to Tomlinson's farm.⁵¹ After the attack, they marched on towards Wakefield, but were stopped by armed volunteer troops near Westgate common, forcing them to disperse back to their homes as far as Halifax, Morley, and other woollen towns.⁵² The machine breakers' connection

with their local environment is further illustrated by their mobility. They established control over particular routes along edges of valleys at night and crucially used the topography to their advantage against the authorities.⁵³ E. P. Thompson noted how the Luddites were able to maintain ‘superb security and communications’ through their intimate knowledge with the terrain:

In the West Riding, whose hills were crossed and recrossed with bridle paths and old packhorse tracks, the Luddites moved with immunity. The movements of the cavalry were well-known, and the clash of their swords, the tramp of their horses’ feet were to be heard at a long distance at night, it was easy for the Luddites to steal away behind hedges, crouch in plantations or take by-roads.⁵⁴

This part of the Spenn Valley edge formed a crucial conduit for croppers and other workmen from the villages around Horbury, Wakefield, Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Heckmondwike, and Morley. Beleaguered manufacturers and gentlemen were anxious to inform magistrates about being accosted by Luddites on the roads over moors, especially near Horbury and Elland, and of course, the destruction of a cart containing William Cartwright’s shearing frames on Hartshead moor in February and the shooting of William Horsfall from a plantation on Crosland moor on 28 April.⁵⁵ Rev Hammond Robertson of Healds Hall, Liversedge, wrote to Cartwright (just up the road at Rawfolds) on 30 April:

This valley is of considerable importance. Mill Bridge is central and any riotous

assemblage which might collect towards Halifax, or even on this side of Leeds, or Bradford, would probably pass this way to Dewsbury towards Wakefield. On these and similar grounds, over and above the Rawfolds Mill which has attracted particular attention, I form my opinion of the necessity for more Troops.⁵⁶

The Luddites' nightly drilling on moorland roads – to the extent that they 'controlled' routes such as the Horbury road – had its roots in a longer history of socio-economic tensions. A greater proportion of upland commons and waste was enclosed in northern England during the Napoleonic wars than at any other time in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁷ The Luddites were enacting a temporary but highly symbolic and physical reclaiming of the spaces. Drilling and other acts were expressions of resistance against the landowners who were increasingly making both commons and roads private economic entities rather than as communal spaces. Horbury enclosure act was passed in 1809. Josiah Foster was the recipient of a substantial amount of land from the enclosure, including a parcel alongside the turnpike through Lupset. As was usual in such a process, footpaths and parish roads were diverted and stopped up during 1810.⁵⁸ In July 1811, four Horbury labourers were arrested for violently demolishing a stone wall and fence that had stopped up a road.⁵⁹ This act of destruction intimated at much wider tensions and grievances about a changing way of life. Customary routes to work and chapel were replaced with new straight roads and enclosures that represented the economic demands of improving landlords and manufacturers. As Nicholas Blomley has argued in his study of enclosure riots, resistance was as much to do with opposing the physical barriers that hedges and fences created as much as the symbolism of private property ownership that

they represented.⁶⁰

Within the wider context of incendiarism and moorland drilling, such tactics involved a defence of customary uses of property against encroachment by landlords privatizing land agricultural capitalism. From the evidence of private prosecution societies set up by local elites in townships across the north, the problem of ‘injuring trees’ and ‘barking’ was endemic, especially in old Luddite haunts and in areas enclosed during the last major wave of enclosure.⁶¹ Reward and warning notices provide another indication of the scale of a problem that straddled the ambiguous boundary between the popularly condoned criminal practice of poaching and a defence of formerly customary rights. For example, Robert Stansfield of Field House on the outskirts of Halifax issued repeated notices warning against those who were ‘found trespassing, cutting up and destroying the Young Trees, taking away any wood or sticks, getting nuts or doing any other mischief in the Woods or Woody Grounds’ on his property in the surrounding area.⁶² Luddites in the semi-rural ‘neighbourhoods’ of industrial towns drew their tactics from established forms of subversive action. Similarly, Carl Griffin has suggested that Swing rioters in southern England during the early 1830s learnt their craft not from isolated riots and political collective action but from more endemic forms of secretive property crime: poaching, smuggling, and gangs.⁶³ Such activity was endemic in northern England, even in (or especially) in the semi-rural semi-industrial ‘neighbourhoods’, as John E. Archer illustrated in his study of Lancashire poaching gangs, and Roger Wells similarly indicated in his examination of sheep rustling in Yorkshire.⁶⁴ Continued depredations suggested popular defence of the land as a task-scape, whether or not customary uses had previously been a reality or were merely an ideal.

The Luddites were attuned to the topographies and customs of the semi-rural environment that encompassed the workplaces of early industrialization. As Malcolm Chase has shown in his study of radical agrarianism, the fundamental changes facing skilled workers in their employment practices and economies were not at this point matched by rapid urbanization. Urban districts expanded predominantly through migration from nearby rural areas, and domestic outworkers divided their employment between loom in winter and field at harvest time.⁶⁵ Landscape was not picturesque scenery viewed from afar: it was a ‘task-scape’, a material resource worked on and in. That work was not merely agricultural, but also industrial. Coal and metal mines, and water-powered mills had long been part of rural industry. The task-scape was essential for the necessities of everyday life, food and fuel, rights that were defended in both overt and covert protests.⁶⁶ The connection of textile workers with the environment was more than just practical and locational. The continuing proximity (both spatial and psychological) of the working classes to the land in the industrializing North, sustained their close attachment to ‘Nature’. This was a common theme in working-class poetry, diaries, and in the hymns of New Connexion and Primitive Methodists so prevalent in this region. The later popularity of the Chartist Land Plan in the North also bears testimony to the continuing connection made between land, skill, and independence. As Chase has argued, this was not a sentimental or Arcadian perception of the landscape in the mode of the footpath preservation societies set up by bourgeois radicals in the 1820s, or their liberal Victorian antecedents of the Commons Preservation Society.⁶⁷ It rather involved an ‘ingrained, realistic’ notion of land valorized according to its use rather than its exchange value: again, their ‘taskscape’.

Attachment to the land represented a deep concern with ‘skill, security, independence, and status’.⁶⁸ Challenges to enclosure often contended that commons had been used ‘for time immemorial’ for food and fuel, and footpaths were followed ‘for time immemorial’ to get to the commons for these purposes. Industrialization and urbanization placed these values, engrained in both work and the land, under threat. The drilling of the Luddites, alongside tree maiming, pulling up fences, and other longer running forms of everyday resistance on the rural outskirts of industrializing areas, was a more direct and indeed intimate means of defending skill and independence from aggrandizing landowners and manufacturers. Even if such actions were not consciously expressed, they certainly reflected workers’ connections with their environment and shaped their experiences. Rather than compartmentalizing labour into solely urban and industrial interests, therefore, situating aspects of Luddism within its semi-rural context offers a more holistic and realistic picture of the material experience of both industrial and rural workers in northern England during this period.

The circumstances surrounding rural Luddism support Barry Reay’s proposition that ‘it is the background noise of nineteenth century protest that is important – the continual negotiation and contention, the grumbling, the acts of ‘self-help’ and revenge’ – rather than the great crescendos of open agitation.’⁶⁹ The relationships between place, property, and customary rights were at the heart of these conflicts. Workers believed that traditional skills and working practices were being eroded by laissez-faire economics of manufacturers, an analogous process to landowners taking their customary uses of space away for economic gain.⁷⁰ Luddites and inhabitants of semi-rural ‘neighbourhoods’ used customary means of resistance to defend their task-scapes and thereby to protect their

livelihoods. We should of course be wary of conflating acts of incendiarism with ‘protest’. Steve Poole has warned in his study of arson in Somerset that the tactic did not always carry a class motive, as Hobsbawm, Rudé, and other historians ‘from below’ have been keen to imply. Arson was used during times of general social and political unrest against prominent targets such as ‘unpopular tithe collectors, rampaging landlords or the advocates of enclosure’, but at other times it was a more regular and optional ‘weapon in multi-causal conflicts between large and small farmers, warring local farmers ... or sacked workers and their employers’.⁷¹ Nevertheless, Luddism cannot be understood without awareness of the wider world view of the relationship between custom and place in collective action in the early nineteenth century. As E. P. Thompson argued about resistance against the notorious ‘Black Act’ against poaching, ‘what was often at issue was not property, supported by laws, against no-property; it was alternative definitions of property rights’.⁷² Luddism marked the culmination of more everyday resistance between the privatizing laissez-faire capitalism of manufacturers and landowners against the customary uses of property and customary working practices of dual-economy weavers. It was a dramatic revolt in which, to apply the conclusions of Peter Sahlins’s study of the remarkably similar ‘Demoiselles’ defenders of the Ariège forests in France in 1829–30, ‘the stakes and strategies were defined in terms of cultural values’ (possession and mastery of the landscape) that ‘themselves structured issues of marginal utility’ (defence of common rights and working conditions).⁷³ Their defence of their task-scape was universal in its appeal against an encroaching capitalist political economy, but its form varied between regions, being deeply embedded in the rich and often hidden practices of local communities and their environments.

¹ Barry Reay, *Rural Englands: Labouring Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 152; Steve Poole, “‘A Lasting and Salutory Warning’: Incendiarism, Rural Order and England’s Last Scene of Crime Execution’, *Rural History*, XIX, 2 (2008) [hereafter Poole, ‘A Lasting and Salutory Warning’], 163.

² Jeff Horn, ‘Machine–Breaking in England and France During the Age of Revolution’, *Labour/Le Travail*, LV (Spring 2005), par. 6,

<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lt/55/horn.html>, accessed 16 Oct. 2010;

Adrian Randall, *Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry, 1776–1809* (Cambridge, 1991), [hereafter Randall, *Before the Luddites*], pp. 149–86.

³ Katrina Navickas, ‘The Search for General Ludd: the Mythology of Luddism’, *Social History*, XXX, 3 (2005), 281–95 [hereafter Navickas, ‘Search for General Ludd’].

⁴ Andrew Charlesworth, ‘An Agenda for Historical Studies of Rural Protest in Britain, 1750–1850’, *Rural History*, II, 2 (1991), 231.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (Harmondsworth, 1973); Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The Machine Breakers’, in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964); Steve Poole, ‘Forty Years of History from Below’, in *Captain Swing Reconsidered: Forty Years of Rural History from Below*, ed. Steve Poole, *Southern History*, XXXII (2010) [hereafter *Captain Swing Reconsidered*], 14.

⁶ Brian Bailey, *The Luddite Rebellion* (New York, 1998), Kirkpatrick Sale, *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution* (Michigan, 1996); John Dinwiddy, *From Luddism to the First Reform Bill: Reform in England, 1810–1832*

(Oxford, 1986); John Dinwiddy, 'Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties', *Social History*, IV, 1 (January 1979), 33–63; Malcolm I. Thomis, *The Luddites: Machine-Breaking in Regency England* (Michigan, 1970).

⁷ Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (Boulder, 1995), pp. 45–6.

⁸ Kevin Binfield, *The Writings of the Luddites* (Baltimore, 2004); Navickas, 'Search for General Ludd'.

⁹ John Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2006) [hereafter Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics*], pp. 17, 9.

¹⁰ Adrian Randall, 'Luddism of the Poor: Captain Swing, Machine Breaking and Popular Protest', in Poole, *Captain Swing Reconsidered*, 41–61; Adrian Randall, *Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England* (Oxford, 2006) [hereafter Randall, *Riotous Assemblies*]; Randall, *Before the Luddites*.

¹¹ Poole, *Captain Swing Reconsidered*; Peter Jones, 'Finding Captain Swing: Protest, Parish Relations, and the State of the Public Mind in 1830'; Adrian Randall, 'Captain Swing: a Retrospect', and Carl Griffin, 'Swing, Swing Redivivus or Something After Swing? On the Death Throes of a Protest Movement, December 1830–December 1833', *International Review of Social History*, LIV, 3 (2009), 459–97.

¹² Poole, 'A Lasting and Salutary Warning', 164.

¹³ This was occurring in the industrializing parts of France as well as in England: François Jarrige, *Au Temps des <<Tueuses de Bras>>: Les Bris de Machines à L'aube de L'ère Industrielle* (Paris, 2009).

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- ¹⁴ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), [hereafter, Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*], p. 543. See also E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth, 1991).
- ¹⁵ John Rule, 'Against Innovation? Custom and Resistance in the Workplace, 1700–1850', in *Popular Culture in England, c.1500–1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke, 1995) [hereafter Rule, 'Against Innovation'], p. 182.
- ¹⁶ Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1919).
- ¹⁷ Rule, 'Against Innovation?', p. 169.
- ¹⁸ *Geographies of Resistance*, ed. Steve Pile and Michael Keith (London, 1997), p. 16.
- ¹⁹ Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics*, p. 9; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1987).
- ²⁰ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London, 2000), p. 327.
- ²¹ For significant parallels, see Peter Sahlin, *Forest Rites: the War of the Demoiselles in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA, 1994) [hereafter Sahlin, *Forest Rites*].
- ²² Joseph Hunter, *Antiquarian Notices of Lupset ... in the County of York* (London, 1851), p. 43; J. W. Walker, *Wakefield: its History and its People*, II, 3rd edn (Wakefield, 1967) [hereafter Walker, *Wakefield*], p. 650.
- ²³ Wakefield Local Studies, 920:TOM, Journals of Matthew Tomlinson of Lupset Farm, 3 vols [only vols V, IX and XI survive], 1804–39 [hereafter Tomlinson Journals].
- ²⁴ John Claudius Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Agriculture* (Edinburgh, 1813), II, pp. 402–3; James Ferguson, 'On the Thrashing Machine', in *Ferguson's Lectures on Select*

Subjects (Philadelphia, 1814), II, p. 336; *Hull Packet*, 21 Feb. 1804; *Leeds Mercury*, 7 Dec. 1811.

²⁵ Tomlinson Journals, v, 27 Aug. 1809.

²⁶ *Repertory of Arts, Manufacture and Agriculture*, 2nd ser., VIII (London, 1808), p. 214.

²⁷ *Hull Packet*, 5 Aug. 1800; *Leeds Mercury*, 23 Dec. 1815.

²⁸ *Farmer's Magazine*, 16 November 1812, in Sir John Sinclair, *An Account of the Systems of Husbandry Adopted in the More Improved Districts of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1814), II, p. 121.

²⁹ Peter Dewey, *'Iron Harvests of the Field': The Making of Farm Machinery in Britain Since 1800* (Lancaster, 2008), pp. 8–9, 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³¹ J. L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer, 1760–1832* (London, 1919), p. 303.

³² *Leeds Mercury*, 11 Apr. 1812; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 560; Randall, *Riotous Assemblies*, pp. 285–7.

³³ Tomlinson Journals, V.

³⁴ Borthwick Inst(itute), Univ(ersity) of York, Sir Francis Lindley Wood papers, A.7/1B, account book, 1812.

³⁵ Tomlinson journals, V.

³⁶ 'Proceedings Under a Special Commission', *Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason*, XXXI (1823), col. 1008; Frank Peel, *The Risings of the Luddites, Chartists and Plug Drawers* (Leeds, 1888) [hereafter Peel, *Risings of the Luddites*], pp. 138–9.

³⁷ Tomlinson diaries, V.

³⁸ N(ational Archives): P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice), Home Office, HO 42/122, f. 279, Foster to Wroughton, April 1812.

³⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 16 May 1812; *Baines's Directory of Yorkshire*, I (Leeds, 1822), p. 164.

⁴⁰ NA: PRO, HO 33/1/171, Hart to Freeling, 11 May 1812.

⁴¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 13 Jun. 1812; *Sheffield Iris*, 16 Jun. 1812; NA:PRO, HO 40/1/1, Part II, f. 39, Wood to Ryder, 11 June 1812.

⁴² Peel, *Risings of the Luddites*, pp. 163–4.

⁴³ NA: PRO, HO 40/1/1, part II, ff. 31, 46, Wood to Ryder, 7 and 23 Jun. 1812; Yorkshire Archaeological Society, MD 401/7, Horbury constables papers, 1812.

⁴⁴ Borthwick Inst., Univ. of York, A.4.7., reports made by constables of West Riding parishes, 7 Sept. 1812.

⁴⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 25 Apr. 1812; NA: PRO, HO 42/122, f. 279, Foster to Wroughton, f. 246, Wortley to Beckett, 20 April 1812; G. Norgate, 'James Archibald Stuart Wortley (1776–1845), first Baron Wharnccliffe', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴⁶ Borthwick Inst., Univ. of York, A.4.7, Fitzwilliam to Wood, 24 Apr. 1812.

⁴⁷ *Sheffield Iris*, 21 Apr. 1812; Barnsley Local Studies Library, typescript, Eli Hoyle, *A History of Barnsley and the Surrounding District from Early Times to 1850* (c.1890), p. 601.

⁴⁸ Bolton Archives, ZZ/530, diaries of John Holden; NA: PRO, HO 42/122, f. 44, deposition from Bolton, 26 April 1812.

⁴⁹ Cumbria Record Office, Barrow-in-Furness, typescript, diaries of William Fleming of Rowe Head, 1800–21; J. D. Marshall, *Old Lakeland: Some Cumbrian Social History*

(Newton Abbot, 1971), pp. 128–9; J. D. Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution: an Economic History of Furness* (Barrow, 1958), p. 157.

⁵⁰ Peel, *Risings of the Luddites*, p. 38.

⁵¹ NA: PRO, HO 42/122/191, Campbell to Ryder, 11 Apr. 1812.

⁵² Walker, *Wakefield*, p. 546; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 Apr. 1812.

⁵³ Katrina Navickas, ‘Moors, Fields, and Popular Protest in South Lancashire and the West Riding’, *Northern History*, XLVI, 3 (2009), 93–111.

⁵⁴ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 565, citing D. F. E. Sykes, *History of the Colne Valley* (Slaithwaite, 1906), p. 309.

⁵⁵ NA: PRO, HO 40/1/1, part II, f. 52, examination of Joseph Woodhead, 22 Jun. 1812.

⁵⁶ W(est) Y(orkshire) A(rchives), Halifax, MIC 5/41, Radcliffe papers, Robertson to Cartwright, 30 Apr. 1812. Charlotte Brontë depicted Robertson as parson Helston in her novel *Shirley* (1849).

⁵⁷ *Discovering Past Landscapes*, ed. Michael Read (Beckenham, 1984), p. 138.

⁵⁸ WYA, Wakefield, A105, Horbury enclosure map, 1809; *Leeds Mercury*, 12 May 1810.

⁵⁹ WYA, Wakefield, QS1/149/6, Bradford Quarter Sessions, July 1810; QS1/150/9, Wakefield Quarter Sessions, Oct. 1811.

⁶⁰ Nicholas Blomley, ‘Making Private Property: Enclosure, Common Right and the Work of Hedges’, *Rural History*, XVIII (2007), 1–22.

⁶¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 8 Jun. 1807; WYA, Calderdale, SU 384, rules of Midgley prosecution society, 1838; David Phillips, ‘Associations for the Prosecution of Felons’, in *Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750–1850*, ed. Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (Oxford, 1989), p. 142.

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- ⁶² WYA, Calderdale, STN: 277, 330, 356, warning and reward notices, 1808–28.
- ⁶³ Carl Griffin, ‘The Violent Captain Swing’, *Past and Present*, CCIX (2010), 159.
- ⁶⁴ Roger Wells, ‘Sheep Rustling in Yorkshire in the Age of the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions’, *Northern History*, XX (1984), 127–84; John E. Archer, ‘A Reckless Spirit of Enterprise: Game Preserving and Poaching in Nineteenth Century Lancashire’, in *Crime, Protest and Police in Modern British Society: Essays in Memory of David J.V. Jones*, ed. D. W. Howell, and K. Morgan (Cardiff, 1999), pp. 149–75.
- ⁶⁵ Malcolm Chase, *The People’s Farm: English Radical Agrarianism, 1775–1840* (Oxford, 1988) [hereafter Chase, *The People’s Farm*], pp. 8, 10; Pat Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital: A Study of West Riding Wool Textile Industry, c.1750–1850* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 81.
- ⁶⁶ Chase, *The People’s Farm*, p. 15; Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, p. 327.
- ⁶⁷ Navickas, ‘Moors, Fields and Protest’; Wendy Darby, *Landscape and Identity: Geographies of Nation and Class in England* (Oxford, 2003).
- ⁶⁸ Chase, *The People’s Farm*, p. 8.
- ⁶⁹ Barry Reay, *The Last Rising of the Agricultural Labourers: Rural Life and Protest in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford, 1990), p. 188.
- ⁷⁰ Andy Wood, ‘The Place of Custom in Plebeian Political Culture: England, 1550–1800’, *Social History*, XXII (1997), 47, 55; Thompson, *Customs in Common*.
- ⁷¹ Poole, ‘A Lasting and Salutary Warning’, 164.
- ⁷² E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: the Origins of the Black Act* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 261.
- ⁷³ Sahlins, *Forest Rites*, p. 60.