

Co-operative Milestones

The following are some of the key events that have significantly contributed towards shaping the Co-operative Movement we have in the UK today:

1769 Fenwick Weavers Co-operative Society established and in the subsequent years many other Co-operatives were formed with varying degrees of success.

1844 Rochdale Pioneers Society established, starting a period of phenomenal Co-operative growth. Based on their eight 'Rochdale rules', including distributing a share of profits according to purchases that came to be known as 'the divi'.

1862 Industrial and Provident Societies Acts (I & P Act) for the first time gave Co-operatives corporate status providing a proper legal framework for Co-operatives. The first I & P Act had been enacted in 1843.

1863 Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) established originally called the North of England Co-operative Wholesale Industrial and Provident Society Limited; the Scottish CWS followed in 1868.

1867 Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS) established.

1870 Co-operative Union established (initially known as the Co-operative Central Board) as an outcome from the first national Co-operative Congress, held in 1869.

1871 Co-operative News first published.

1872 The Co-operative Bank established, initially as the CWS Loan and Deposit Department, registered as separate wholly-owned subsidiary of CWS in 1971.

1873 CWS entered manufacturing and later became substantially involved in importing, ship owning and in many overseas ventures, including joint CWS/SCWS tea estates.

1882 The Co-operative Productive Federation established bringing together producer owned (workers') Co-operatives – now a committee of the Co-operative Union.

1883 Co-operative Women's Guild established.

1895 International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) established and held the first international congress in London.

1900 A total 1,439 Co-operative Societies now registered.

1906 'Abortive boycott' on the supply of branded goods to Co-operatives imposed by the Proprietary Articles Trade Association, to prevent Co-operatives paying 'divi' on such goods.

Calls for a national Society to encompass all consumer Co-operatives by the President of Co-operative Congress, JC Gray.

1914 The number of consumer Co-operatives was 1,385, the process of amalgamation had started that has continued to this day; by the year 2000 the number of Societies had fallen to a total of 45.

1916 Profits Tax applied to Co-operatives for the first time, resulting in CWS paying £1 million in tax for the year.

1918 Co-operative Party established, as a Department of the Co-operative Union, leading to direct Parliamentary and local government representation under an electoral agreement with the Labour Party.

1919 Co-operative College established, first based in Manchester and in 1945 relocated to its current site at Stanford Hall, Loughborough.

1934 CWS retail established, becoming Co-operative Retail Services (CRS) in 1957, with the purpose of opening shops in 'Co-operative deserts' and taking over failing retail Societies.

1935 Ten-Year Plan for Co-operative development introduced, which was intended to encourage Co-operatives to expand into areas not yet served by Co-operatives.

1942 First Self-Service Shop opened by the London Co-operative Society. By 1950, 90 per cent of all the self-service stores in the UK were operated by Co-operatives.

1945 National Co-operative Chemists (NCC) established becoming the first national chain of Co-operatively-owned retail outlets.

1955 British Co-operatives operating 30,000 retail shops reaching their peak in terms of market penetration; having market shares for food of 20 per cent and 12 per cent of non-food; and with 13 million people reported to be in membership.

1956 Independent Co-operative Commission set up, initially only to consider Co-operative production, but widened to include retailing, which came to be known as the 'Gaitskell Commission'; publishing its report in 1958.

1959 Society Footwear (renamed 'Shoefayre' in 1964) established in a bid to form new national chains of non-food shops.

1961 Co-operatives operate their first 'off-licences', hitherto having maintained the abstinence policies of the founding fathers.

1964 The abolition of resale price maintenance as a result of the introduction of the Restrictive Trades Practices Act, heralding intensive price competition in UK retailing.

1965 Dividend Stamps introduced as an alternative to the traditional methods of paying the 'divi', and as a response to the adoption of trading stamps by other food retailers; individual Societies operated their own stamp schemes. CWS launched the national Dividend Stamp scheme in 1969. Publication of the Joint Reorganisation Committee Report. CWS full-time elected Directors discontinued (a practice which dated from 1906).

1966 Co-operative principles revised by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), with a view to making them more relevant to a wider variety of fast-growing Co-operatives throughout the world.

A Regional Plan, promoted by the Co-operative Union, called for the amalgamation of the then existing 680 Societies into 55 regional Societies.

CWS appointed its first 'outsider' Chief Executive, Philip Thomas, who was killed in a plane crash less than two years later, before the completion of the programme of radical change he introduced.

1968 Operation 'Facelift' launched and the first national 'Co-op logo' was introduced.

1969 The failure of the Millom Co-operative Society highlighted in the BBC TV 'Nationwide' programme, creating apprehension in the minds of Co-operative members throughout the UK as to the safety of their investments in Societies.

Dividend Stamps scheme introduced.

1971 The Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) established, becoming the central organisation for the 'new wave' of worker Co-operatives.

1973 Scottish CWS merged with CWS, following difficulties with the SCWS Bank; CWS now became directly involved in retailing.

1974 A second regional plan launched, which called for the amalgamation of the then existing 260 Societies into 26 regional Societies.

1978 National Co-operative Development Agency (CDA) established by government, mainly promoting worker Co-operatives; it was wound up in 1989.

1979 Co-operative Congress President, J H Perrow, calls for the formation of 'Co-op Great Britain'.

1981 London Co-operative Society transferred to CRS.
Hunting with hounds prohibited on CWS farmland (not fishing or shooting).

1982 Co-operative Congress resolves to reduce the number of Societies to 25.

1985 Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society transfers to CWS.
Ban on South African goods (lifted 1992).

1987 Institute of Co-operative Directors (ICD) formed.

1990 North Eastern Co-operative Society transferred operations to CWS, on the basis of new management arrangements.

1991 United Kingdom Co-operative Council (UKCC) established, for the first time providing a single body representing all forms of co-operation in the UK.

1993 Report on Corporate Governance launched, leading to a 'code of best practice' for the conduct of the affairs of Co-operatives, issued in 1995.
Collapse of Aberdeen Northern Co-operative Society (NORCO).

1994 Sale of CWS food factories to Hobsons.
Co-operative Retail Trading Group (CRTG), joint purchasing group, established by CWS.
The 150th Co-operative Congress called for a single UK Society by the year 2000.

1995 New Co-operative Identity Statement adopted by the ICA Centenary Congress, held in Manchester.
CWS Responsible Retailer Campaign launched. CWS commences Dividend Card pilot.

1997 The 'Lanica' affair. Efforts to take over CWS by city businessman repelled.

1998 CWS rolls out Dividend Card nationally.

1999 Co-operative Bank sets up smile, the Internet bank.

2000 Co-operative Commission established. CWS/CRS merger finalised.

From pages 102 – 103 of the Report of the Co-operative Commission January 2001 ‘The Co-operative Advantage’