

How the Co-op Press Influenced Public Opinion  
**Long Millgate's History of Marvellous Media**  
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*As the Co-operative News aims at increased sales and readership, researcher DAVID LAZELL recalls earlier successes in the Movement's journalism.*

**“Paper is the lifeblood of industry” declared a publicity campaign in the austerity-struck period just after the Second World War. Working in print myself, I knew how difficult it was to secure a ream of paper and I feel dizzy whenever I wander into a well-stocked stationers today.**

Magazines and newspapers were, and are, the heartbeat of the nation. It is a sobering reflection that even in hard times in 1949 circulation of *Co-operative News* was around 70,000, that of *Woman's Outlook* over 50,000.

Could it be that co-operative society leaders and members were more aware of the importance of the Movement's media than seems to be the case today? Were co-operative societies better at distributing co-operative magazines, remembering that *The Co-operative Home Magazine*, earlier known as *The Wheatsheaf*, was also widely read at the time?

An earnest concern to maximise influence through attractive publications was expressed at Stratford Co-operative Congress in 1904. Delegates approved the proposal for a monthly that would match the illustrated general interest titles launched by those three sturdy sons of the manse, George Newnes, Arthur Pearson and Alfred Harmsworth, the future Lord Northcliffe.

Following the Congress, W.M.Bamford, the editor/journalist, asked the historian W.H.Brown for some help, and the latter proposed a series which he helped to produce. This was the *modern influences*

series, which appeared in the new title, *The Millgate Monthly*, based on interviews with artists, writers, statesmen and, of course leading co-operative figures like George Jacob Holyoake, subject of the first profile.

W.H.Brown also interviewed Cannon S.A.Barnett and Revd, John Clifford for the series, but there were many other contributors to a collection that really deserved re-publication in book format.

W.M.Bamford did not live to see the influence of this useful journal in the inter-war period; today it is well nigh forgotten.

Its title owed much to geography. Just over a century ago, in 1894, the Co-operative Newspaper Society (as it was then known) came to Long Millgate in Manchester. Some 20 years earlier in 1871, *Co-operative News* had been launched from 13 Balloon Street, opening a new office in City Buildings, Corporation Street in 1883, though another four years were to pass before the enterprise secured its own printing facilities.

Expansion necessitated the move to Long Millgate, and a purpose-designed building was opened in February 1895. There was a deeper significance about the celebrations, for Long Millgate was one of the longest thoroughfares in Manchester, with a host of literary associations.

It is not hard to imagine one of the *News* writers, or even a proof reader like myself pausing to gaze out of the windows on to the busy thoroughfare below. Not quite Fleet Street of course, but not too distant in flavour either.

Long Millgate remained the home of co-operative journalism for many years, until, in the late 40s, a building offering double the floor space (i.e. around 50,000 sq. ft.) became available.

We sometimes forget that for decades there was a wide interest in the Movement's print and publishing activity. Undoubtedly, some remarkable characters were involved, including Frederick Rogers, a pioneer of university extension work, and whom I mention in my new book manuscript on the Co-operative College.

None of that present day ageism seems to have existed at Long Millgate; George Brownhill, a native of Accrington was still going strong as chairman of the National Co-operative Publishing Society at the age of 76.

## Education

Born in 1854, a lively minded non-conformist and administrator, he had been elected president of the Accrington Co-operative Society in 1907, was involved in education activities, undertook local editorship of *The Wheatsheaf*, and was also a JP.

Clearly he was one of those co-operative leaders with broad interests. His early Liberalism had prompted an interest in the Irish National League. W.H. Brown thought in a 1930 tribute, that Brownhill's generous political outlook enabled him to find pleasure in the company of Labour men, and the surviving Conservatives of his native town.

Of all the men linked to the *Millgate Monthly*, none had greater influence than Charles E. Tomlinson, editor for many years. A Yorkshireman, internationalist and expert linguist, he was another of those "co-operative renaissance men" we so sorely need today.

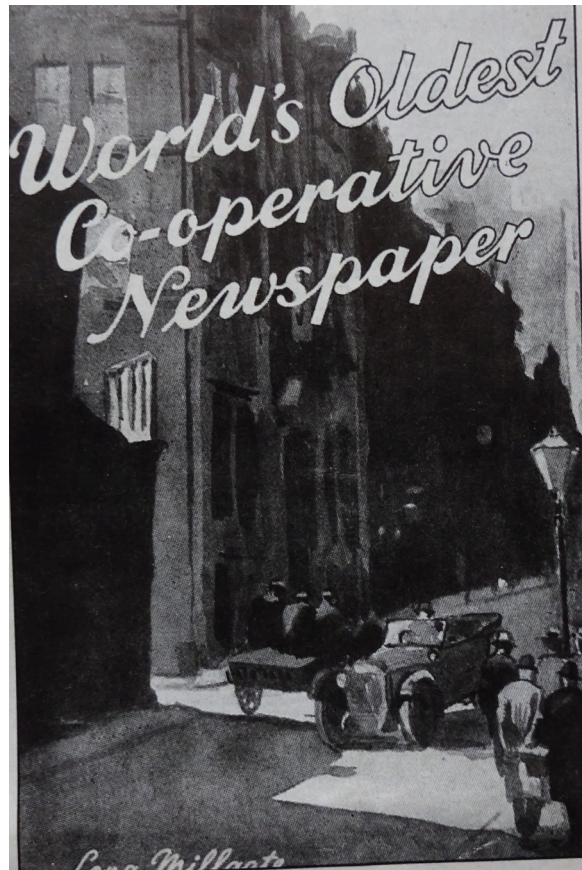
He had spent much of his boyhood in Boulogne, France, but returned to England to serve his apprenticeship on a Goole, Yorkshire, newspaper, finishing the course with credit. During his subsequent work on the staff of the *Blackpool Gazette-Herald*, he covered a conference of the Women's Co-operative Guild and there met another journalist, who later became his wife, Annie Bamford, known as "Mrs Bamford-Tomlinson".

The emphasis on international good will – sometimes defined as the co-operative commonwealth - was championed by such people. Charles Tomlinson was a member of the Society of the Friends of France, founded in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by his friend, Hugh Bryan.

A hard working supporter of the Browning Settlement at Walworth, directed by F. Herbert Stead, Hugh Bryan seemed destined for a career in international diplomacy, in which Charles Tomlinson, his close friend, would also have been involved. Tomlinson's talents might have been used in the service of the League of Nations, but for Bryan's death.

However Tomlinson found many new friends during his visits to France, among them the peace campaigner Hodgson Pratt, a native of Bath, and in who's name national scholarships for Co-operative

College students have been awarded. Like many colleagues in the Movement, he had served in the forces during the first world war (as Lieutenant Tomlinson); the experience had added to his energies for international understanding.



W. H. Brown, editor of *The Producer*, the CWS monthly, remarked that Tomlinson had been known to translate from eight languages in a single day, and then attend an English conference to try to interpret the hidden meaning of (English) words.

I have no doubt that this talented, thoughtful man would have had much to say to today's managers and business leaders, not least in the way that literature and journalism impacts upon the way that thought processes have practical outcome. Elbert Hubbard used to say that many businesses failed because people managing them did not go to bed early enough.

Charles Tomlinson, like his editor colleague T. W. Mercer, would I think remind us that the right vocabulary, and precision in self

expression, is as important now as it has ever been. Writing *Art, Life and Co-operation*, Tomlinson tried to widen the outlook of those involved in the every day hurly-burly of business life.

W. H. Brown, writing in the *Co-operative Official*, thought it a book that the modern co-operative Movement needed, because “more life and a fuller life is the need of the present age”. He saw the co-operative outlook as about lifestyle, commitment, fellowship, as much as it is about successful retailing and business arrangements.

Having joined the ranks of co-operative editors in 1918, Charles Tomlinson went to CWS in the late 1920s, and when James Haslam retired from his CWS publicity tasks in 1933, Tomlinson took on the interesting role of advertising and exhibitions manager. Then, when that hardy veteran Percy Redfern began work on the second volume of his history of the CWS in 1936, Tomlinson took on the publicity manager’s role.

The 1930s were exciting times, with CWS making use of new promotional opportunities in commercial radio – ended abruptly by war in 1939 – and in new film formats. But Tomlinson retired in September 1939, and took a quiet retirement, though it would be surprising if his linguistic skills were unused.

It seems a pity that this remarkable journalist wrote no autobiography. An obituary of November 1949 noting his recent death in hospital recalled many of his adventures overseas, including being mistaken for a pickpocket in Paris, narrowly avoiding involvement in a Morocco street riot and witnessing one of the early battles between Fascists and Communists in Italy – warning of events yet to come elsewhere in Europe, including the East of London. There was also the interesting matter of a visit to Moscow, and to a circus there when, in conversation with trapeze artists, he learned of events in Blackpool, as they had just returned from that town which he knew so well.

The *Millgate Monthly* did not survive the 1940s, but in its best years it had been an attractive medium of information on literature, the arts, travel, politics and much more. *Woman’s Outlook*, aimed mainly at Women’s Guild members but with consumer education material, was deserving of far better sales; it continued into the 1960s.

## Coincidence

It is an interesting coincidence that in the year of Charles Tomlinson's death there was concern about the sales of co-operative titles. At a time when the Movement claimed a membership in millions, and a significant active core, as well as its army of managers and students, sales of *Co-operative News* were no more than 70,000. Today the figure is less than a quarter of that figure, though the newspaper is still highly regarded.

There is no simple remedy, but, given the significance that co-operative journalism has had on the evolution of the co-operative Movement generally, a postal tuition course, or summer school on co-operative writing styles and history could be attempted. The developing archives at the Co-operative College might be linked to a programme on the development of working class and co-operative media.

Management seminars could also have some useful input on modes of self expression; how ideas are expressed and conveyed. There is certainly a growing mood, reflecting Tomlinson's view, echoed by W. H. Brown and other co-operative writers, that accumulating things is not the same as acquiring contentment.

Tomlinson was well described by his CWS colleague as "the evangelist of that new creed of art and business", or what we might call the created environment, personal and physical, which I suppose goes back to the days of Robert Owen.

As far as *Co-operative News* is concerned, there are simple aides, including distribution of occasional celebrity issues through stores and co-op offices. The cause of co-operative journalism has to be seen a strategically important. Ultimately, our performance as business leaders and as citizens reflects what we have read, what we have thought about, the way in which we use words. Think about it!

I'm not sure what Long Millgate looks like these days, assuming it still exists (yes, though greatly transformed – Ed). No doubt a pilgrimage to that part of Manchester would have its own rewards. We walk in the footsteps of giants, and we can support the cause to which they gave their best talents.