

## The Co-operative Movement

The basis of the co-operative movement is quite simple. A group of people decide to pool some money to buy a shop. The shop is then collectively owned by the investors who are called Members. The Members buy their provisions from the shop and any surplus that the shop makes is returned to the Members in proportion to how much they have spent. Other benefits of being a Member might include educational provisions and of being part of a community of interest.

The group of Members is usually called the (name of village of town etc.....) Co-operative Society.

Co-operative Societies often grow and add more shops and other interests. From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century hundreds of such Co-operative Societies were formed. Most villages and towns would have a co-operative society. By 1900 there were 1,400 co-operative societies in Britain. In the Sheffield area there was:

Sheffield Improved Industrial & Provident Society. Est. 1865  
Central stores – Snig Hill and Trippett Lane

Ecclesall Society. Est. 1874.

These two societies amalgamated in 1907 to form the Sheffield & Ecclesall Co-operative Society, which later merged with Yorkshire Co-operatives, United Co-operatives and finally The Co-operative Group.

Brightside & Carbrook Co-operative Society. Est. 1868  
Changed name to Sheffield Co-operative Society in 1985  
merged with United Co-operatives in 2006 which in turn merged with The Co-operative Group in 2007.

By 1976 the following Co-operative Societies had merged with Brightside & Carbrook Co-operative Society:

- Woodhouse & Handsworth
- Oughtibridge,
- Stocksbridge
- Killamarsh
- Tideswell.

In 1968, Bakewell Co-operative Society merged with Sheffield & Ecclesall Co-operative Society

- In 1900 there were 1,400 Co-operative Societies
- by 1950 there were 1,000
- by 1960 there were 875
- in 2019 there are 15

Today, The Co-operative Group is the biggest in Britain and all of the Co-operative supermarkets in Sheffield are part of The Co-operative Group. Other co-operative societies which are still trading include:

- Midcounties Co-op
- Central England Co-op
- East of England Co-op
- Heart of England Co-op
- Lincolnshire Co-op

The number of Societies has reduced from 1,400 to 15 mainly through mergers.

In 1863 a co-operative wholesale society was founded (the CWS). The Co-operative Societies became Members of the CWS which supplied most of their goods. This created a federation of co-operative societies, often called The Co-operative Movement.

The Co-operative Movement was supported by The Co-operative Union (which is now called Co-operatives UK).

Horora Enfield in 1927 wrote about how co-operative societies eliminate profit on price;

“.....the private ownership of capital allowed thousands of men and women and little children to be employed and exploited for the profit of one; the making of “profit on price” placed them as much at the mercy of the private trader as of the private employer, till money wages bore no relation either to effort or to needs; it was a system of competition for profits and competition for employment.....”

“.....for when the profits are given back to the purchaser from whom they come they cease to exist; in the Rochdale system there is no such thing as profit or profit-making.”

“....In all these developments ( of the co-operative movement ), the motive has been to bring an ever larger part of industry within the orbit of the consumers’ movement, for so long as Co-operation is only, as it used to be thought, “a state within a state”, a system operating within the alien system of capitalism, dependent on capitalist production, governed by capitalist finance, and competing with capitalist rivals, the full effects of co-operative principles cannot make themselves felt....”

“The dividend on purchase does much more than eliminate profit from co-operative transactions. It eliminates the profit-making motive. For whatever may be said about the “dividend hunting” of co-operators – a charge which is usually made by those with a very superficial knowledge of the Movement – it is something quite different from profit seeking. The essence of profit-making is the retaining by one party of a surplus paid by another party to the transaction: the co-operative dividend on the other hand is a restoration of that surplus to the party by whom it was paid. Moreover, in the consumers’ movement, sellers and purchasers are the same people in their collective and individual capacities respectively. The members collectively sell to the members

individually, the whole business being owned and controlled by the members”.

“Under the present profit-making system it is to the interest of the owners of industry to charge as high a price as the consumer will pay. There is a point beyond which prices cannot be put up because the reduced sales and consequent increase in costs would more than counterbalance the high prices. But the motive towards raising prices is always there, and wherever the consumer can be exploited with impunity he is. Thus prices do not necessarily correspond to the real cost of production at all, and as they are continually changing the workers never know what the real value of their wages is. Where there is a scarcity in any essential commodity for instance, or even the probability of scarcity, prices go up. This is not necessarily due to any increase in the cost of producing the articles, but occurs because capitalism sees its chance of playing off the needs of consumer against those of another and of getting the biggest price either is willing to pay. In industries largely controlled by trusts and monopolies prices are even kept high by restricting production, so as to create an artificial scarcity. Under a co-operative system these things would not happen. As the surplus is returned to the purchaser and there are no profits made, there can be no reason for raising prices except where the cost of production or distribution really rises”.

### **Brightside & Carbrook Co-operative Society**

#### **OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY**

To produce and distribute goods that are made under proper and duly recognised Trade Union conditions of labour.

To promote organisation for the Social Advancement and better Economic Conditions of its Members by the medium of Conferences, Classes, Lantern Lectures and other propaganda means of social intercourse.

To oppose and renounce the evils of Competitive Trading, by securing for the workers immunity against the tyranny of sweated

labour, and thus imparting thereto healthier and happier surroundings.

To divide Half-Yearly the surplus left, after due observance of the foregoing conditions amongst the members in proportion to their purchases and to encourage a policy of thrift and Self-help by the usual employment of members accumulated Dividends and Home-saving Deposits in the Societies operations.

**EVERY MEMBER ASSURED FREE**

**NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION. NO PREMIUMS.**

Remember that your HUSBAND or your WIFE is assured under this Scheme.

### **The Brightside & Carbrook Co-operative Society story**

Collective self help was alive and well in the 1860's in Sheffield. Workers in the industrial East End were becoming more literate and were becoming actively involved in the Mechanics Institute and Library and the Working Men's Clubs. These clubs were a meeting place for enquiring minds to listen to and debate the subjects of the day. Such were the men of the blacksmiths shop of Wm Jessop & Sons Ltd., who one night met in the School Room, Dean Street, Brightside and the subject of the working men's co-operative at Rochdale cropped up. No one could explain until one member said that he noticed the word 'Co-operative' on a clock over a shop at Kilnhurst. A deputation went over and the secretary of Kilnhurst Co-operative, Mr Charles Holroyd, not only explained the principles behind this form of trading, but came over to Brightside and gave a talk to the club members on how to start a similar co-operative in Brightside and Attercliffe. The result was that a collection was taken and the proceeds started what became Brightside & Carbrook Co-operative Society.

This story illustrates three important features of the Co-operative Movement. First, collective self help and education, which led to seeking out knowledge of the co-operative principles. Second, the willingness of one co-operative society to help others to start a co-operative. The success of the Movement was dependent on mutual support and help between co-operatives. The Rochdale Pioneers gave that lead. Isolation will always be the downfall of working class movements - solidarity, the strength. The support given by the Kilnhurst Society was exemplary. And third, that by people pooling resources for a common objective, a great commonwealth can be built up for the benefit of all if it is based on co-operative principles. Present day examples of this in Sheffield are the community shares of Portland Works, where people contributed collectively to save a valued place of small industry and craft from being closed down by a developer. This is now a co-operative owned by the community. Or Sheffield Renewables, a share offer has led to a project which will help the community to produce renewable energy, another innovative co-operative. Other examples of co-operatives in Sheffield can be found on [https://sheffield.coop/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://sheffield.coop/wiki/Main_Page)

Steve Thompson  
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