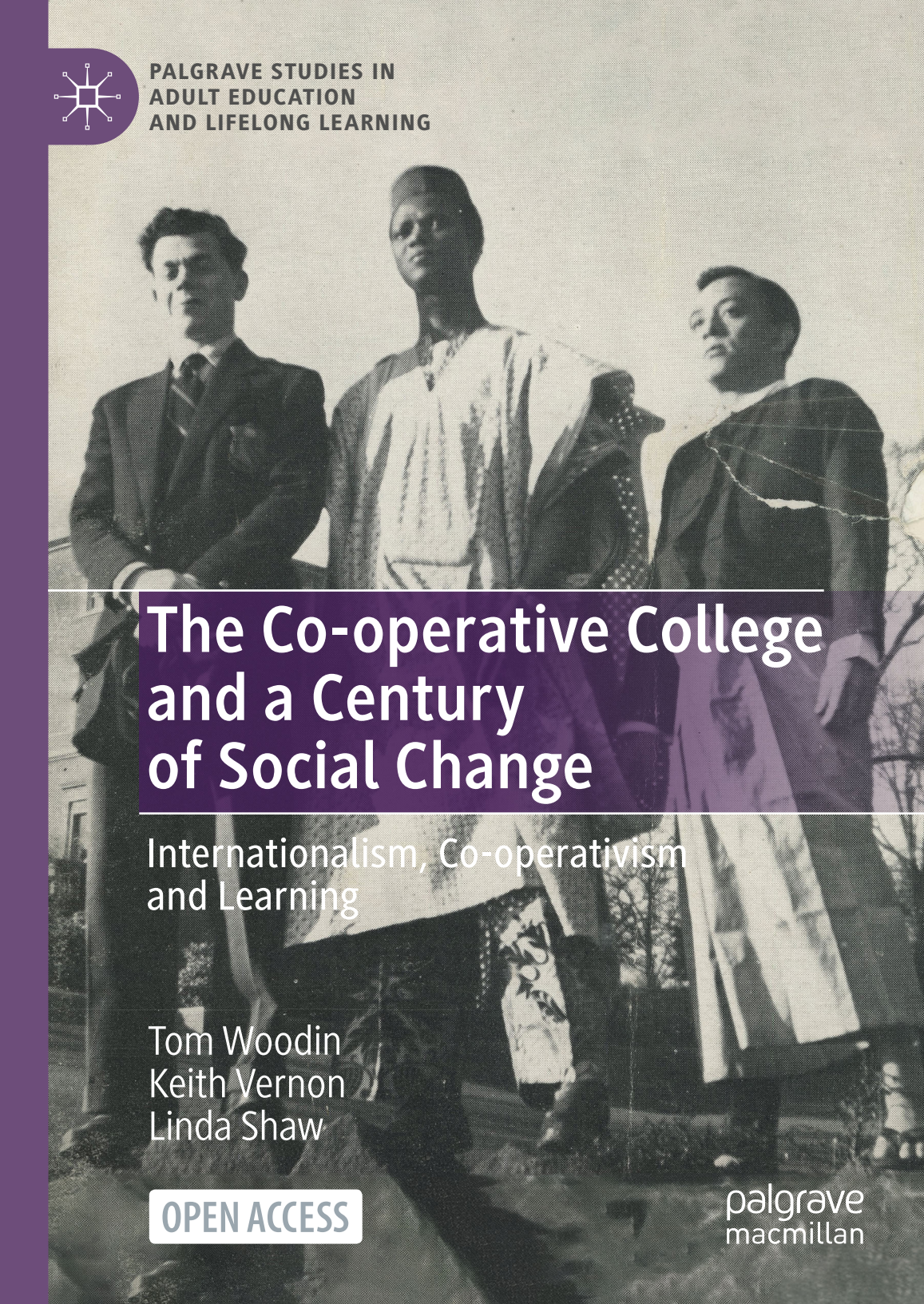




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The Co-operative College and a Century of Social Change

Internationalism, Co-operativism
and Learning

Tom Woodin
Keith Vernon
Linda Shaw

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Tom Woodin · Keith Vernon · Linda Shaw

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Internationalism, Co-operativism and Learning

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For Stirling for his constant support and encouragement

For Ella and Eva

For Gillian Lonergan

FOREWORD

We are delighted to contribute a foreword to this history of the Co-operative College. It is the first full-length study of the College, based on original sources, covering over a hundred years of growth and development, from its establishment in 1919 through to its centenary in 2019. As you will read, it is an ever-evolving learning establishment but the commitment to support co-operators and co-operatives to learn, develop and grow, both in the UK and around the world, remains constant.

Education has always been a central feature of the co-operative movement, enshrined as one of the founding principles of the Rochdale Pioneers. An independent college, operating at the highest levels and serving as the focus for co-operative education, was an aspiration through the second half of the nineteenth century. In the aftermath of the First World War, the dream became reality, on a modest scale to begin with, but still with the highest ambitions. After the Second World War, the College moved into the iconic surroundings of Stanford Hall, where it served the movement at home and overseas. On its return to Manchester, the College continued to seek new opportunities to support and enhance co-operation in all its forms.

As newly appointed Principal and CEO of the Co-operative College, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this comprehensive history of our organisation. In taking over from Neil Calvert, CEO and principal 2021-24, we are eager to continue the process of establishing long-term financial sustainability while developing our unique co-operative learning

pedagogy, embracing the full range of formal and informal learning, and increasing our engagement with members, co-operatives and other values-based organisations in the UK and globally. The long history of the College, its values and practices, all help to inform our thinking about the future.

We are proud to lead an exceptionally talented team of educators and professional service staff and are grateful to our partners: the Co-operative Heritage Trust, which has been instrumental in the creation of this book; Co-operatives UK; and Co-op News.

While this book focuses on the first one hundred years of the Co-operative College, we are keen to co-create the next one hundred years; the College is smaller than it has been in the recent past, but we are agile, adaptive and committed to making a difference with and for co-operators.

We hope that this book will inspire you to be part of the next one hundred years with us.

Ali Longden
Principal, Co-operative College
Manchester, UK

Jacqui Thomasen
CEO, Co-operative College
Manchester, UK

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At the National Co-operative Archive Jane Donaldson, Liz McIvor, Sophie McCulloch and Gillian Lonergan were all helpful in identifying archives and making them available. We thank staff at the Bishopsgate Institute, particularly Stefan Dickers, and at the British Library, LSE Library and UCL library, especially Nazlin Bhimani.

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A number of people connected with the College spoke with us including Mervyn Wilson, John Butler, Simon Parkinson, Cilla Ross and Stephen Yeo who all provided useful ideas and references. Staff at the Co-operative College have been supportive of the project and granted permissions for the visual material. We thank Jacqui Thomasen, Ali Longden, Hayley Street and Steve Kingman.

Some of the ideas have been discussed with staff and students at the IOE, particularly the International Centre for Historical Research in Education (ICHRE)—Gary McCulloch, Mark Freeman, Georgina Brewis, Jenny Bond, Sam Blaxland and Laura Newman. Part of the text was written while Tom Woodin was visiting the University of Sassari in 2023 and Fabio Pruneri and Federico Piseri kindly made space and time available to do this.

All errors of course remain ours.

PRAISE FOR *THE CO-OPERATIVE COLLEGE* AND A CENTURY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

“This well written book explores the pivotal role that the Co-operative College has played in the development of co-operative education in Britain and beyond on a global scale. The narrative intertwines the immediate practical requirements of co-operatives with broader, visionary perspectives, illustrating how education within co-operatives is intricately linked to their operational success and sustainability.”

—Simel Esim, *Head, Co-operative, Social and Solidarity Economy Unit, International Labour Organisation (ILO)*

“The Co-operative College has had a profound impact on the lives of generations of students. This impressive, lucidly written study makes a compelling case for both its national and global importance.”

—Peter Gurney, *Professor, University of Essex, UK*

“This book is an ideal example of how the study of the history of education can move beyond state education. It sits at the intersection of research on the co-operative movement, Britain, the British Empire and Commonwealth, and accounts throughout for the influence of social change. Overall, it evidences thoroughness in research, is most accessible and intellectually exciting. It is most deserving of widespread acclaim.”

—Tom O’Donoghue, *Professor Emeritus, The University of Western Australia*

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tom Woodin is a professor of the social history of education at the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society where he is a founding member of the International Centre for Historical Research in Education (ICHRE). His interests lie in nineteenth- and twentieth-century social and cultural history, particularly in learners and learning, co-operation and mutuality, and working-class culture. His publications include *The UCL Institute of Education*, with Richard Aldrich (UCL Press, 2021); *Working Class Writing and Publishing in the Late Twentieth Century: Literature, Culture and Community* (Manchester University Press, 2018); editing *Learning for a Co-operative World* with Linda Shaw (UCL Press, 2019) as well as *Co-operation, Learning and Co-operative Values* (Routledge 2015). He led an ESRC-funded project on the history of the school leaving age which resulted in a book, with Gary McCulloch and Steve Cowan, *Secondary Education and the Raising of the School Leaving Age—Coming of Age?* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013). Working with David Crook and Vincent Carpentier, he led another project for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the history of community and mutual ownership: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/community-mutual-ownership>. In 2007-8, he was the British Educational Research Association Brian Simon Fellow. He is currently the vice president of the History of Education Society, was previously co-editor from 2014-20 of *History of Education* with Susannah Wright and Mark Freeman and, from 2008-13, co-edited the *History of Education Researcher* with Susannah Wright.

Keith Vernon is an honorary Principal Lecturer in History at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), in Preston, where he taught on a range of areas of modern British Social History, including History of Medicine, Urban History and the History of Education. His research interests deal with aspects of the modern history of scientific, technical and higher education. These have included the relationships between universities and the state, connections between universities and their local communities, and the lives and experiences of students. Inevitably, he has developed an interest in the history of UCLan and is developing an oral history project with former students, as part of the forthcoming celebrations to mark the 200th anniversary of the origins of the institution. An interest in the history of co-operative education came out of a general commitment to co-operative values and was encouraged by the events surrounding the International Year of Co-operation in 2012. He has written several pieces on education in the co-operative movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Linda Shaw was formerly Vice Principal at the Co-operative College in Manchester where she was responsible for research and international programmes. She has worked with co-operatives globally and published widely on co-operative development, gender issues and history for both academic and wider audiences. Her work with Co-operative Colleges in Africa has included both teaching and research. Prior to joining the College, Linda worked in continuing education at the University of Manchester and for the Workers' Educational Association. She is still active in co-operative research and continues to advise on co-operative development programmes internationally.

ABBREVIATIONS

AUCE	Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees
BIM	British Institute of Management
CCC	Co-operative College Collection
CEC	Central Education Committee
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CfBT	Centre for British Teachers
CLEAR	Co-operative Liaison Education and Research Unit
CME	Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CP	Communist Party (of Great Britain)
CRS	Co-operative Retail Services
CU	Co-operative Union
CWS	Co-operative Wholesale Society
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfID	Department for International Development
DMS	Diploma in Management Studies
DPS	Diploma in Policy Studies
EQUAL	Social Enterprise East Midlands
EU	European Union
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FWWCP	Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
ICA	International Co-operative Alliance
ICD	Institute of Co-operative Directors
ICTC	International Co-operative Training Centre
ILO	International Labour Office

ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LAC	Leading Aircraftman
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOD	Ministry of Overseas Development
MTS	Management Training Scheme
NACEC	National Association of Co-operative Education Committees
NCA	National Co-operative Archive
NCEA	National Co-operative Educational Association
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIAE	National Institute of Adult Education
NUDAW	National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
POW	Prisoners of War
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Policies
SAS	Special Air Service
SCWS	Scottish Wholesale Co-operative Society
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SET	Selective Employment Tax
SGA	Strategic Grant Agreement
TES	<i>Times Educational Supplement</i>
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UMIST	University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WEA	Workers' Education Association
WMSEP	West Midlands Social Enterprise Partnership

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Introduction

For over a century, the Co-operative College has been at the centre of co-operative education in Britain and beyond. It was established in 1919 to meet the educational needs of co-operatives that had formed over the previous century. The College championed education focused on co-operation and mutuality, meeting and anticipating the needs of co-operative and mutual enterprises. Blending immediate daily needs with symbolic and longer-term visions contributed to a distinctive educational formation. The whole co-operative movement can indeed be conceptualised in educational terms, as much as economic ones, which depended upon the commitment and drive of both members and leaders. Whereas many radical and alternative initiatives have been relatively short-lived, given the difficult circumstances in which they existed, the longevity and distinctive nature of the College is worth exploring. Rather than a specific localised history, the story of the College in fact connects to major seismic changes of the twentieth century—the rise of the labour movement; the gradual encroachment of the state upon daily life; the spread of education and learning; and the relation of Britain to its empire and Commonwealth.

Co-operative education is more than a specialist area of learning. While co-operation stretches back to the beginnings of humanity and earlier, as a conscious movement, co-operatives started to form in the late eighteenth century.¹ The British movement dated its initiation to 1844 and

the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers which was commonly recognised as the first successful consumer co-operative. Many co-operatives would proliferate throughout nineteenth-century Britain so that, by the outbreak of the First World War, there were approximately 1,500 independent societies and three million members which would increase to more than ten million by the 1950s. The very organisation of a co-operative involved considerable social change on individual and collective levels so that self-interest, active participation and collective growth were mutually interdependent. Becoming a member of a co-operative set in train a new learning experience. Co-operatives became educational innovators and pioneered educational forms including reading rooms, libraries, adult and children's classes and a range of publications. As societies expanded, educational committees were formed. In 1869, an umbrella body for the movement, the Co-operative Union (CU) was created, which, in the early 1880s, set up a department to co-ordinate educational activity.²

This book traces the fortunes of the College from its beginning in 1919 to the early twenty-first century. At many points in the nineteenth century, co-operators had identified a need for a central college or university to support the movement. The beginning of the College resulted from a campaign in the British consumer co-operative movement to create an apex body to co-ordinate higher study and research. Rather than becoming an independent co-operative, it was located within the Education Department of the Co-operative Union. Later, it would become a charity with the Union acting as trustee on behalf of the movement. At the core of the College lay a vision of co-operative education inseparable from democratic co-operative member organisations. Co-operative business, historical awareness and values and principles in changing circumstances have all infused co-operative programmes of learning. The College blended curriculum and pedagogies that traversed the divisions common in adult and community education. It encompassed learning that was liberal, technical and directed to social change, in Britain and abroad. Employees from the British consumer co-operative movement were trained alongside those who worked in a variety of co-operatives around the globe. The education of members and directors came to be conceived as part of a co-operative democracy which might extend over economic, social and political life.

Much of the literature on the history of co-operation has revolved around the connections and disconnections between Robert Owen and

Owenism and the later trajectory of the movement. The various histories and accounts of co-operation reflected on this relationship in explaining the transition from the widespread ferment of the early nineteenth century to the seemingly more settled picture of later Victorian Britain.³ Sidney Pollard articulated this shift as a movement from ‘community building to shopkeeping’ in which he suggested there was a diminution of earlier radical activity.⁴ Stephen Yeo, Peter Gurney and others convincingly made the case that utopian, radical and moral analyses of society in fact remained central to the later history of the movement.⁵ There is a lot to be said for this perspective but it tends to view the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the pinnacle of co-operative achievement after which it was to become more marginalised by the labour movement, the welfare state and, of course, intensive commercial competition. This makes the history of the Co-operative College interesting insofar as it came into being at the end of this period of democratic expansion. Rather than simply having a residual status, however, the College moved onto new ground in coming to terms with these historical forces.

Writing on co-operation has indirectly addressed education or identified education as a discrete activity in the way that many co-operative societies themselves sidelined their education committees.⁶ The most recent major study of the movement by John Wilson, Anthony Webster and Rachael Vorberg-Rugh has focused on the ‘business’ side of the movement.⁷ Gurney certainly reflected upon the social and educational aspects of the movement up to the 1930s but was aware that education was a large topic which needed to be developed.⁸ Indeed, our conception of co-operation is as an intertwining set of social, educational and economic relationships; as much pedagogical as economic.⁹

The examination of the College, its students and tutors, leads us well beyond a straightforward institutional history, of which many impressive ones have been written, not least on adult education.¹⁰ Accounts of the Co-operative College have been produced by past students and contain anecdotes and references which have been of use to this account.¹¹ However, the roots and branches of the College stretched into social, economic and political developments, which can be discerned through the prism of co-operative education. Thus, the changing fortunes of the College help to shine a light upon historical change relating to the co-operative movement, to alterations in education and education policy, and to the mutating relationship between Britain and the world beyond.

A WIDER PICTURE

Operating as a barometer of the co-operative movement, the history of the College straddles the twentieth and twenty-first centuries during which time the movement was transformed almost beyond recognition. Indeed, during the post-war years, the reality has been of reducing numbers and societies, in receipt of a diminishing market share. Co-operative education was inevitably affected by these changes although there was sometimes a time lag before they impacted upon the College. Starting as the apex of a large network of co-operative educational activities, it gradually became the main agency carrying out such work and so grew in relative importance. By the 1970s and 1980s, many more leaders viewed the movement in exclusively business terms and even dismissed members and co-operative values as outdated. Despite the inauspicious context, the College and its supporters mounted spirited defences of values-based co-operative education and enjoyed some success especially at times when the movement periodically rediscovered its roots and the co-operative pendulum swung in their favour. The College acted as a generator, a 'stokehole', in the words of the first student magazine, of visions of co-operative control, in which values and principles, democracy and membership were prominent. The College has not always fitted easily into broader educational and social practices. For instance, in the early twentieth century, when the adult educational movement was riven by competing debates over liberal education and workers' education for social change, the College appeared to have a foot in both of these camps while also staking a claim for technical education. Indeed, the College has consistently embraced an extensive curriculum that elsewhere tended to be divided—technical training, education in co-operation, liberal education and education related to the specific needs of colonial/commonwealth/developing countries.

The evolution of educational policy and legislation in secondary, technical, higher and adult education, all affected the College. Up until the mid-century, co-operative and labour movements, and by extension the College, had some influence upon education policy itself but regular contact with policymakers would not be renewed until the early twenty-first century. Co-operatives campaigned for the extension and transformation of educational opportunities. The outcomes of such campaigns could create many difficulties for the movement. It raised a dilemma for the College as to how far it should pursue a distinctive path or should

fit in with the forms of education fostered by national policy or even by the labour movement. In the early twentieth century, the answer was clear and the College was part of a vibrant independent movement even though co-operative societies could be fickle in their support of it. Over time, the College learnt to engage more productively with mainstream educational assumptions, standards and qualifications. Contradictions and negotiations inevitably infiltrated its unique educational programme.

Moreover, throughout its existence, the College has related to co-operative education on a world stage. ‘British’ national borders rapidly changed during the life of the College. The complexity and re-evaluation of decolonisation processes in the UK and the colonies are now increasingly being studied by historians.¹² For some time, international, global and transnational histories have all discussed co-operative movements.¹³ The local and global were conspicuously brought into dialogue within the College that was less apparent in other adult education colleges. It was not solely a British college even though it operated within the mutating parameters of the British state. Indeed, from the very first year of its existence, the College attracted many students and visitors from Britain’s colonies and dominions, later the Commonwealth, and further afield. Having a diversity of students plugged the College into international currents across the fragmenting British Empire. After the Second World War, this attachment was deepened by the fact that the Colonial Office directly commissioned the College to train co-operative officials and civil servants from colonial and commonwealth countries. For some this tied the College into a colonial system of control, or highlighted the contested nature of co-operation that was occupying an ambiguous space between state and voluntary activity and could even become a site of struggle.¹⁴ Co-operation could become a technology of control but, as a potentially democratic form it could also be adapted to multiple purposes within volatile historical contexts. Furthermore, the Cold War implicated the College in political agendas. Attempting to uphold Western notions of democracy and freedom as well as radical and co-operative ideals would involve some problematic contortions. To the current day, the College has continued to work internationally.

SUMMARY

This book is organised chronologically. Chapter two outlines the earliest ideas and proposals as well as the specific context of the early twentieth century from which the College was formed. Chapter three examines how Fred Hall led the College through the interwar period and forged a model of learning which inspired students from the British movement and internationally. Hall's sudden death in 1938 coincided with the period leading up to the Second World War and John Thomas would lead the College until 1943. Chapter four assesses the varied fortunes of the College during the war years when it suffered a series of setbacks although, crucially, students still arrived at the College from Britain and abroad. At a time of educational ferment, a College fund was established which enabled the purchase of Stanford Hall. Chapter five charts the residential education under the direction of Robert Marshall, based upon an enlarged cohort comprising four groups—those studying social subjects, management, and secretaryship as well as the expanding group of students supported by the Colonial Office and its successor bodies. With the hardening of Cold War restrictions, radical views of co-operation were regularly aired. Chapter six highlights that, from the late 1950s, significant weaknesses were showing in the British co-operative movement even though the impact upon the College would take some years to be felt. Marshall and many in the movement could see a crisis coming and aimed to take preventative action, specifically in relation to recruitment and training of staff. At a time when courses for overseas students thrived, domestically, a wider range of training and consultancy work was formulated to meet the changing needs of co-operatives and plug the gaps in provision. Chapter seven picks up the narrative in 1977, with the appointment of a new principal, Robert Houlton, who faced many hurdles with a reduction of enrolments on residential courses. He attempted to meet the needs of an inward-looking movement sometimes blinkered by an exclusive business mentality. The College responded with new developments, re-inserting membership, values and principles into learning programmes. Finally, chapter eight explains how, under Mervyn Wilson, the College sold Stanford Hall and moved back to Manchester as part of an attempt to assert a new vision for the College. Experimentation with new initiatives has been a characteristic of the recent past as it searches for greater purpose and stability. This historical account seeks to apprehend the attempt to uphold a vision and practice of co-operative learning over

more than a century, often in difficult circumstances. Reflecting on this history is instructive for re-thinking co-operation and learning.

NOTES

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 11. See David Lazell, *A 'Sociable' History- Stanford Hall and the Co-operative College*, Cheltenham: New Harmony Press, 2001; David Lazell, *Sir Julien Cahn at Stanford Hall: A View from the Co-operative College*, Wymeswold: Heart of Albion, 2020; Arthur Hemstock produced an archive-sourced play: Arthur Hemstock, *Co-operative Journey*, National Co-operative Archive (NCA), Co-operative College Collection (CCC) 20; see also Tom Woodin, 'Useable Pasts for a Cooperative University: As Different as Light From Darkness?' in Malcolm Noble and Cilla Ross, eds., *Reclaiming the University for the Public Good: Experiments and Futures in Co-operative Higher Education*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 23–43; Tom Woodin and Linda Shaw, *Learning for a Co-operative World: Education, Social Change and the Co-operative College*, London: Trentham/UCL Press, 2019, pp. xviii–xxvii; Tom Woodin, 'Co-operation, Leadership and Learning: Fred Hall and the Co-operative College Before 1939', in Richard Hall and Joss Winn, *Mass Intellectuality and Democratic Leadership in Higher Education*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 27–40. In addition, on co-op education see Keith Vernon, 'Co-operative Education and the State, c.1895–1935', *Forum*, 55, (2013), pp. 293–307; Keith Vernon, 'Values and Vocation: Educating the Co-operative Workforce', in Anthony Webster,

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Beginnings

Education has been a core principle for the co-operative movement.¹ A central theme for co-operators, as for other working-class associations, was to arrange for their own learning, to complement and counter the limitations and restrictions of the type of education delivered by established authorities. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, for most working people, acquiring even a basic level of education was a struggle so simply catering for basic cultural requirements was an arduous task. Yet, the ideal of a fully-fledged college, an institution pursuing the highest levels of study, scholarship and research, an apex of a movement-wide educational system, remained an aspiration. As the movement expanded through the second half of the century, the resources for education grew, for instance with libraries, reading rooms and classes although participating in a co-operative was also recognised to be an educative experience. Towards the end of the century, training up a leadership cadre became a matter of concern for both political authorities and the organised labour movement. Various means were essayed to cater for the higher education of workers, including university extension, summer schools, Ruskin College and the Workers' Educational Association. Valuable as they were, and encouraged by the co-operative movement, they were not organisations specifically for co-operative education. Prior to the First World War, based on an expanding educational programme of increasing range and depth, a vigorous campaign was launched for a Co-operative College, a

place of higher education and research dedicated to the purposes of the movement, carried out within a clearly co-operative ethos.

EDUCATION AND THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Across the nineteenth century, popular education was a matter of considerable significance. Those in authority debated the value of a more highly educated populace but were caught between the expense of providing education and the dangers of what people might learn if left to their own devices. By the same token, working-class organisations saw the importance of education for raising the social and cultural level of ordinary people, in part as the foundation of political participation.² For similar reasons, co-operators were fundamentally committed to education which was one of the founding principles of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, established in 1844. During the second half of the century, the state gradually took on the schooling of children, although always at a strictly elementary level. Meanwhile, the co-operative movement had helped to pioneer a patchwork of resources, mainly libraries, lectures and miscellaneous cultural activities.

The co-operative business model was underpinned not just by the store but also democratic control and cultural and educational improvement.³ The Pioneers were part of a ferment based upon working-class organisations which were eager to advance self- and mutual-learning.⁴ Through the upheavals of increasingly rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, and the turmoil surrounding political reform, education helped to raise awareness among working people of political issues and events and, in many respects, the formation of working-class consciousness was a process of education in political, social and economic thinking.⁵ Radicals read, discussed and debated the latest ideas, risking persecution in the process, which only reinforced the message that working people had to rely on their own resources to secure the kind of education they wanted. Education more broadly was a means of elevating the social and cultural capacity of the working classes as well as a source of solace, self-improvement and personal fulfilment in difficult times. In the 1820s and 1830s, there were developments in the spread of elementary schools for children and mechanics institutes for skilled artisans but this education was often not appropriate or was too exclusive to meet the needs of working-class movements.⁶

Radical and working-class movements provided a lead role in educational thought and practice.⁷ One of the most influential exponents of popular education in the early nineteenth century was Robert Owen. Although himself an employer of labour, Owen had lofty aspirations to create model industrial communities, which he sought to realise at New Lanark.⁸ Alongside the workplace, housing and community provision, education was a central feature, including classes and facilities for adults and a school for the children. The school aimed to be more stimulating than the lifeless rote-learning common elsewhere, with a light and airy school room, varied lessons and healthy exercises. Widely publicised Owenite and alternative educational ideas were adapted by working-class movements. For instance, as early as 1830, Charles Fry of the Liverpool Co-operative Wholesale Purchasing Agency had proposed a 'school or college' for co-operators as did Dr William King's journal, *The Co-operator*.⁹ As Owen became consumed with his utopian communities, many working people turned to Parliamentary reform. Bitterly let down by the 1832 Reform Act, which enfranchised only a small section of property holders, radical energies were diverted into the Chartist movement which, through the 1830s and 1840s, retained education of the working classes as a key component.¹⁰ William Lovett's version of 'knowledge Chartism' affirmed the traditional ideal of education as raising the tone and status of the working classes, to demonstrate their worthiness to take up the franchise. At odds with Feargus O'Connor and the adherents of physical force Chartism, neither approach succeeded in securing a wider enfranchisement.

In the mid-Victorian period, we can trace the development, if uneven in scope and pace, of valuable educational activities in Rochdale. It seems likely that, from an early stage, members met in classes, but a more formal manifestation was the formation of a Library Committee in 1849 to distribute newspapers and begin collections towards the creation of a library.¹¹ A signal moment came with the decision in 1853 to devote 2½% of the society's trading surplus towards educational purposes. With a regular funding stream, the library expanded and a full-time secretary-librarian was appointed in 1862. As the co-operative movement based on the Rochdale principles expanded, large societies emulated the Pioneers, mainly by creating a library or reading room and subsidising the distribution of co-operative publications, the most important of which, from 1860, was *The Co-operator* and, from 1871, *The Co-operative News*. Progress was impeded during the late 1850s when the

revised Friendly Societies Act of 1855 omitted the clause that allowed societies to conduct educational activities.¹² Although probably an oversight, the Act's over-zealous registrar prevented new co-operatives from applying trading surpluses to educational purposes, until the clause was reinstated in the new Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1862.

The continuing growth of the co-operative movement prompted the formation of central agencies including a wholesaler, bank and, in 1869, the Central Co-operative Board and annual congress. Here was a national forum for the airing of issues affecting the movement, and spokesmen made the most of the opportunity to press for the expansion, and co-ordination, of education, including the prospect of a co-operative college. Ideas about co-operative higher education had been in circulation for some time; nothing like the old universities, but a forum that could embrace the education of working people.¹³ As new types of university institution emerged in the mid-Victorian period, a form of higher-level co-operative college began to seem possible. At the inaugural congress, William Pare mooted the idea of 'industrial colleges' alongside 'associated homes' for members and their children.¹⁴ It was a topic to which he returned on several occasions, abetted by prominent supporters of education, including George Jacob Holyoake, Joseph Smith, Arnold Toynbee and James Stuart. Gradually, a co-operative educational infrastructure began to crystallise. In some of the larger societies, committees promoted social and cultural activities, whether a library, newsroom or meeting room. As the co-operative movement grew, sectional boards were created and their educational committees would organise activities. In 1884, a Special Education Committee of the United Board was created, which circulated advice and educational materials for the use of societies. Examinations were organised centrally from 1887, at first in the study of Co-operation, then Bookkeeping, and then in an expanding range of topics. The close co-existence of Co-operation and Bookkeeping was symptomatic of a unique educational formation, marrying utopian desire to technical know-how.

Despite the existence of a staunch group of educationists, the Education Committee was often disappointed by the extent of co-operative education. A brief survey, soon after its formation in the mid-1880s, indicated that 120 societies had newsrooms and 100 had libraries, although only 25,000 copies of *The Co-operative News* were circulated among an estimated 600,000 families of co-operators.¹⁵ Lecture courses were run

by 34 societies, with a handful holding science classes or operating conversation rooms. A few years later, using slightly different measures, the Education Committee reported that local societies laid on classes and lectures on several topics, reaching almost 400 students, and operated 297 reading rooms containing over 200,000 volumes. There was little by way of systematic study, however, and the figures did not improve a lot over the next decade when it was noted that, in one year, only nine societies had held formal classes on the History and Principles of Co-operation, with 104 students taking examinations, while 14 societies ran courses on Bookkeeping with a total of 146 examined.¹⁶ By the mid-1890s, there was a palpable sense that, whatever the commitment in principle, co-operative education was in the doldrums. Activists feared that co-operative education was in danger of dissipating, its role largely superseded by the state. At the turn of the century, however, education within and for the labour movement more generally took on renewed significance, and an innovative endeavour in co-operative education was launched.

By the late nineteenth century, co-operation had grown considerably, and was expanding rapidly. With more than 700,000 members and profits exceeding £120,000, it was becoming a major national force.¹⁷ Many authority figures welcomed a working-class organisation committed to industry, self-improvement and mutual support, especially when contrasted to the more militant new unionism and socialism which they found frightening. The quiet revolution of co-operative democracy also posed a challenge to capitalism. When Arthur Acland, the sympathetic President of the Board of Education, advocated the study of co-operation in state-supported evening continuation schools, outraged private shopkeepers strenuously objected and, backed up by the press, the proposal was successfully resisted.¹⁸ Duly prompted, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, head of the Women's Co-operative Guild, favoured a more consolidated effort. The movement's whole educational apparatus was out of date, ineffective and in need of a stronger and more dynamic central organisation.¹⁹ Taking her cue from the recently established London School of Economics, she urged the co-operative movement to sponsor specialised educational bodies to investigate economic, industrial and municipal questions, ultimately perhaps resulting in a National School of Industrial Science. Rather abashed, the Education Committee was reticent to extend beyond their remit in promoting co-operative education within the movement. Seizing on the interest generated by the

speech, however, the committee decided to launch a full-scale review of the current state of affairs. Llewelyn Davies was supportive—‘we need a training ground in our movement, so that members may be educated to do the duties of citizenship as well as possible’.²⁰

A special committee was subsequently appointed, which circulated a questionnaire to every local society, supplemented by visits to a selected number.²¹ Responses were received from 402 societies, of which 133 had no educational fund at all. Among the rest, a total of £36,336 was spent on educational activities, of which £16,500 went towards reading rooms and libraries. A little was spent on lectures, classes and local publications, and some societies offered scholarships, but most of the remainder, amounting to some £17,000, went towards entertainments, ostensibly for propaganda purposes. In partial explanation of this diverting of educational resources, the survey found that, in many respects, there was not the same need for mutual instruction that had inspired the early pioneers. The education of the working classes had expanded enormously through the second half of the nineteenth century and was positively encouraged by the state, voluntary and working-class organisations. Free libraries had partly rendered co-operative libraries and reading rooms redundant, although in certain cases both had flourished together. Some local societies kept their libraries in the absence of other ideas about what to do with their educational fund. Elementary education was now required of all children who would gain a limited level of basic literacy. There were opportunities for technical education, with bespoke equipment and facilities, of a far more advanced standard than a voluntary society could afford. Other organisations had extensive programmes of talks and lectures, and several co-operative societies actively worked with neighbouring cultural and literary bodies to advertise these activities. Remedial classes in adult literacy, supported by state funding, allowed those who had missed out earlier in life to make good. On a broader canvass, the place of the working classes had also significantly altered, with the majority of working men now entitled to vote, even if universal suffrage remained distant.²²

Co-operators saw themselves as a significant force behind these changes and, alongside an organised labour movement, they now pushed forward on long-standing questions about democracy, citizenship and the place of the working classes in national life. Inherent in these questions were the forms that the continuing education of ordinary people should take and who should provide it. Building on the issues highlighted by Llewelyn Davies, the co-operative movement fixed on the absence of any positive

teaching about industrial and municipal subjects, '[h]ere, in *the teaching of industrial economics and of the duties of citizens*, is the new pioneer work lying at the doors of co-operators'.²³ Setting out an ambitious strategy, the Committee advocated overhauling the whole infrastructure of co-operative education to support the serious study of economic theory and practice, based on the detailed, scientific teaching of the history, theory and practice of co-operation. Citizenship was presented as having always been the essential aim of co-operative education, which now needed to be addressed more directly. Lastly, co-operative societies would continue to have a role in vocational education, but in conjunction with local bodies, which could better furnish the necessary specialised equipment. Thus, while firmly rooted in the ethos and principles of co-operation, the movement could take a lead in the analysis of pressing contemporary debates about citizenship, labour and democracy.

Quickly putting the policy into practice, the whole administrative machinery of education was revised. In 1898, a new Central Education Committee (CEC) of the Central Board was formed with representatives from the Board, the Women's Co-operative Guild and sectional educational associations, with secretarial support.²⁴ This reformed Committee promptly embarked on a new educational programme, including a syllabus and reading list for a regular taught course on citizenship. Local meetings, lectures and discussions were organised on 'Aspects of Citizenship' with topics including the Housing Question, the Land Question, National Education, Co-operation and the Poor, Municipalisation and the Temperance Problem.²⁵ These were outward-facing initiatives, designed for members, with a view to giving a renewed objective for co-operative education, and positioning the movement as an important contributor to contemporary debates. Soon, however, state regulation was to threaten the position of education for the working classes.

The 1902 Education Act was surrounded by bitter and protracted debate over its political, religious, social and cultural implications.²⁶ The ramifications of the legislation were far reaching and profound. Some features of the Act were welcomed as progressive, such as the beginning of state support for secondary education, but the co-operative movement, alongside most working-class organisations, deprecated the new Act for replacing the locally-elected democratic school boards with a uniform system of local education authorities and allowing rate-support to religious education without local authority control.²⁷ An additional clause restricted access to evening classes for adults. Thus, the 1902 Act

appeared to compound the wider assault being faced by the labour movement. It divorced education from popular control, made it less accessible to working people who had missed out earlier in their lives and held out a lifeline to predominantly Tory-supporting Anglican educational bodies. The co-operative movement, which had always harboured a wariness about the state, would increasingly look to its own resources to shore up its organisation, and nurture cultural identity.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION IN THE EDWARDIAN PERIOD

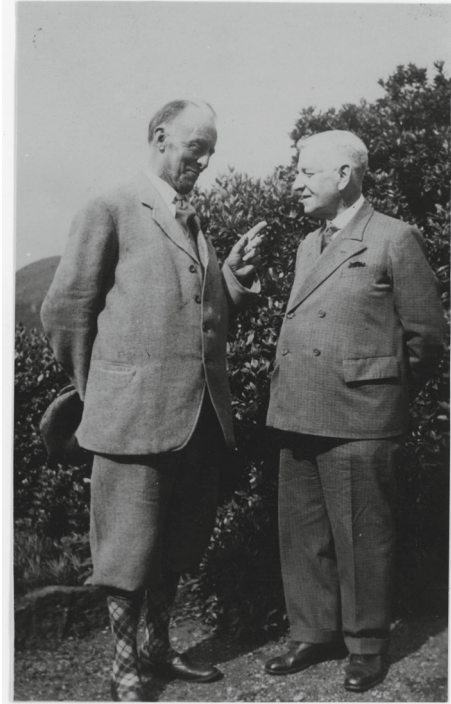
From the turn of the century, there was a revived sense of direction in co-operative education. Over the following decade, enormous efforts went into overhauling the educational programme, with revised syllabuses and examinations, a substantially extended curriculum and several new textbooks. An impressive educational programme was put in place that provided the essential foundations for a college, rooted in ordinary co-operative life, but aspiring to the highest standards of teaching, scholarship and research.

Moreover, W. R. Rae, chairman of the CEC (Fig. 2.1), reflected on the current situation and future direction of co-operative education and encouraged co-operators to look to themselves.²⁸ Despite strenuous labour over the last decade, Rae thundered, the amount of serious educational study of co-operative subjects in organised classes was lamentable. Only 1,200 adults in the whole of Britain were taking a course on Co-operation, so the movement could hardly congratulate itself on its educational ethos. He lambasted the local societies which preferred to spend their educational funds on entertainments:

We have a lecture series second to none in the kingdom – men and women of all shades of opinion. We make arrangements for big and little lectures, and clear and cheap, but you prefer the tea, buns, and funny men. If you are going to make solid co-operative character, you must build it on solid mental food.²⁹

Societies were critiqued for misdirecting funds on libraries and reading rooms or science and art classes which were all now on offer elsewhere. Criticisms that the needs of the movement were not being met were voiced at educational conferences.³⁰ According to Rae, the real priority

Fig. 2.1 W. R. Rae and C. E. Wood, chairman and secretary of the Co-operative Union Education Executive. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College



for the movement was classes in Co-operation which ‘deal with our very existence, and are as valuable to us as a knowledge of the principles of truth and honesty’.³¹ Children were one key audience to reach, whose minds were more readily formed. Suitably primed in youth, the adult classes would have a better chance of success.

Rae’s emphasis on the principles of co-operation was different to that of just a few years previously, when the goal was an outward-looking contribution to debates about citizenship, democracy and industrial development. Some of the same issues that had exercised the Pioneers and early co-operators had returned with renewed urgency. A new definition of co-operative education connected these two sides of the debate on co-operation and citizenship:

The objects of Co-operative Education are, primarily, the formation of co-operative character and opinions by teaching the history, theory, and

principles of the movement, with economics and industrial and constitutional history in so far as they have bearing on Co-operation; and secondarily, though not necessarily of less import, the training of men and women to take part in industrial and social reforms and civic life generally. It deals with the rights and duties of men and women in their capacities as Co-operators, Workers and Citizens.³²

Co-operative character, however, could not be conjured instantaneously, it was a cumulative process, beginning with juniors and proceeding to an advanced level.³³ In many classes, it was found that the standards were too high for the average member, and the textbooks simultaneously too difficult for children and not suitable for adults. Even Rae conceded that too high standards put people off if there was insufficient preparation, and there was a need for a more graduated approach to make the curriculum more manageable. Thus, what had been the introductory class in Co-operation was divided into a preliminary and elementary level, making a three-stage sequence that took youngsters from about age 10 up to 16. A new textbook was commissioned to accompany the junior levels. *Our Story*, by Isa Nicholson, traced co-operation through the nineteenth century and outlined the main elements of the modern movement in simple and accessible chapters. For those who had mastered *Our Story*, but were not ready to move onto adult classes, Ramsden Balmforth's *Social and Political Pioneers* could be introduced, a selection of biographical portraits of people and movements whose work was thought to be in keeping with the movement. Adult classes were aimed at those from 16 upwards and again split into three stages, preliminary, elementary and advanced, each with a detailed syllabus dealing with the historical and theoretical foundations of co-operation. The historical section laid out a chronological framework beginning with the effects of the industrial revolution on workers and the emergence of co-operation from Robert Owen, the Rochdale Pioneers and on to the formation of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and the Co-operative Union. The theoretical components considered the meanings of co-operation, and the emergence and role of associations of consumers and producers. Finally, the educational and propaganda work of the movement and its organisations was supplied. A new textbook for the upper levels, *Industrial Co-operation*, was compiled by Catherine Webb. Each stage covered similar ground although the material for children bordered on hagiography of key figures such as Owen, while that for adults was more attuned to the way that

co-operators had adapted Owen's thought in forging a unique democratic practice.³⁴ In some cases, mixed levels could be taught together in the same class. The focus on age-grading and developmental thinking would feed into expanding progressive ideas in education about stages of growth and, more diffusely and problematically, to recapitulation theory which postulated that children matured in the same way as humanity, from savagery to civilisation.

For those who had worked their way through the stages in Co-operation, courses in history and social sciences were devised. The course in Industrial History began with the Anglo-Saxons and economic activity through the medieval period, on to Tudor times, the agrarian and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth century and ending, where the course in Co-operation began, with 'the gloomy opening of the 19th Century'.³⁵ An advanced level in history again covered much the same material in more depth but went back in time to the Roman occupation. The study of Citizenship focused on the meanings of 'citizen', 'nation' and 'state', dealing with the organisation of local and national government, and areas of social policy such as education, public health and criminal justice. The duties of citizens and workers' organisations were considered. One element also mulled over the ambit and advantages of empire. Completing the set were courses in Economics, looking at issues of supply and demand, the meanings of wealth and value, and the nature of economic law. An alternative syllabus was based on a study of key economic thinkers, including Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Malthus' essay on population, Mill's theory of value and Henry Fawcett and Arnold Toynbee on social reform. There was some discussion about augmenting the curriculum to include Hygiene, Literature or Botany, but it was reiterated that the main work had to concentrate on Co-operation.³⁶

The weighting given to the history and theory of Co-operation reflected the need to create loyal members—historical analysis appeared to be on their side and pointed to a co-operative future. A commercial organisation had to be fortified with technically proficient employees and knowledgeable members. Bookkeeping was fundamental to proper financial standards, and there were particular issues to take into account for a co-operative society.³⁷ When the Bookkeeping textbook was revised to take on a more explicitly co-operative stance, there was a decline in the number of students, perhaps because it was not so suitable for those who wanted to prepare for examining bodies such as the Society of Arts. This

was not seen as a bad thing, but it was acknowledged that the classes had to be made more inviting for co-op employees, to maintain class sizes. Accordingly, the programme of study was revised with a familiar three-part progression to take a novice student through to certification.³⁸ The first stage was designed to deal with the principles of bookkeeping as applied to the operations of a shop or department. At the second stage, the scope was enlarged to take in the responsibilities of the secretary of a small society or clerk in the office of a large society. The third stage offered training that would equip a person for any position within the field. For those who wanted a recognised qualification, a correspondence course was available leading to the Co-operative Secretary's Certificate. A prospective candidate had to have first completed the third stage of Co-operative Bookkeeping, and the second stage of Co-operation, and then produced 20 fortnightly papers over a twelve-month course.

Complementing the core work on the essentials of co-operative history, theory and practice, a great deal of effort was invested in higher levels of training. Promotion from within the stores was a co-operative tradition, and Rae wanted to prepare skilled artisans for higher positions of management or 'we shall always have to get brains from outside'.³⁹ An ambitious scheme was formulated to create training schools for managers in suitable co-operative centres with reasonable transport links.⁴⁰ Teachers would be composed of suitable serving managers, who would be paid a retaining fee plus additional payment according to results. The syllabus would comprise relevant legislation, knowledge of stock and display, bookkeeping and prices, management of staff and relationships with society committees, plus obligatory classes in the history and principles of co-operation. In 1904, two centres were established in Glasgow and Manchester, recruiting a healthy 116 and 131 students, respectively. Following from this success, the scheme was rapidly expanded over the next two years to 18 centres, enrolling 622 students plus 78 by correspondence.⁴¹ The textbook also proved popular outside the centres. Pleased with the response, the CEC believed it to be capable of further extension, and hoped that management committees would show their sympathy by giving preference to employees who had attended the course and taken the examination.⁴² It was not cheap to run, however, and a deficit of £112 quickly accumulated, which was initially borne by the CEC itself.⁴³ Such losses were not sustainable in the longer term, so the CEC proposed raising the fees for correspondence students and appealed to local educational committees for donations. There was a related interest in advancing

the educational qualifications of co-operative officials, although this was slower to take root.⁴⁴ Courses for society secretaries were developed, and it was hoped that training centres similar to those for managers might be put in place.

Although clearly a success, the training centres for managers catered only for a minority within their geographical reach. There were other classes that co-operative managers could take by correspondence, but which also began to seem incomplete.⁴⁵ These, and the Bookkeeping courses, still required a certain level of academic ability, whereas most employees arrived with only a rudimentary elementary schooling. Quite senior managers could be ill-prepared even for the preliminary stages of the training course. Consequently, it was anticipated that there was a need for the revision of essentials, and a more structured approach. With typical zeal, the CEC thoroughly revised the scheme of work for employees, to mirror the classes in Co-operation with a graded system of stages. Stage I was for apprentices and junior employees, and covered simple numeracy and literacy, basic commercial awareness, and tests for quality control. There was a requirement to understand the essentials of co-operation through grasping *Our Story*. Stage II was for salesmen, with a detailed syllabus requiring at least 20 lessons of not less than two hours. If a candidate had successfully negotiated Stage II, they could progress onto a more advanced certificate for general managers, and the truly aspiring could seek the final Honours Stage in Management. The ultimate examination was to be 'not be so much a memory test as a test of whether a man is ready, resourceful, and practical, and possessed of personal initiative and force of character'.⁴⁶

Devising an elaborate programme of study for members and employees was a huge undertaking, and an enormous achievement by the Central Education Committee. It was, however, only one, and arguably the most straightforward, component of the process. Delivering it was quite another matter and drawing in students even harder. Organisationally, by the early twentieth century, a quite comprehensive infrastructure was in place, with the CEC driving national developments. Most of the regional sections had educational committees, which were represented on the CEC, and the larger societies had their own educational committees that organised activities at a local level.⁴⁷ Each year, the CEC issued an educational programme, which listed its courses and the recommended syllabus. Courses in Co-operation, the mainstay of the programme, were

the responsibility of the local societies.⁴⁸ It was thought that most societies would have the expertise to deliver the basics, especially at junior levels, although lists of certificated teachers were issued with the educational programme. The advanced courses depended more upon expert teachers. If it was not possible to organise a class locally, correspondence classes were offered in Co-operation, Industrial History, Citizenship and Economics. Employee training was deemed to be the responsibility of store managers, especially for apprentices. The higher-level classes for managers were largely run through correspondence courses, although those within reach of one could attend a training centre.

Completing a co-operative course was a demanding undertaking. For adults, fourteen weekly lessons of at least an hour were required to constitute a recognised class. Despite the detailed syllabuses, it was emphasised that teaching should not be over-rigid or slavishly follow the textbook. At the junior stages, especially, teachers were encouraged to make the sessions engaging, with music, recitations and use of lantern slides. Classes should not be too long or onerous and '[t]he method of teaching ... should be rather that of picture making'.⁴⁹ There was an interest in pedagogy and the CEC organised a special conference of teachers and representatives from educational committees to consider textbooks, classes and exams.⁵⁰ A course in the art of teaching was devised, with an examination leading to a qualification recognised by the Oxford University Delegacy. Several sectional boards ran classes for teachers, which was very much encouraged by the CEC. Examinations were regarded as essential to the educational process, providing a goal and reward for serious study.⁵¹ Papers were set for all courses beyond elementary junior Co-operation, with three-hour papers for first and second stages, and four hours for third level and honours. Papers were marked centrally and rigidly with frighteningly high failure rates.⁵² Perhaps with this in mind, and aware that there were those who wanted to study, but not sit formal examinations, societies were encouraged to form reading classes in Co-operation that did not require an examination.⁵³

The net result of all this effort was a significant growth of educational activity in the movement.⁵⁴ In the five years after 1900–1901, the number of classes increased from 88 to 219 and then to 450 in 1909–1910 and 564 on the eve of the First World War. Student numbers enrolled rose correspondingly from 2,724 to 7,143 to 17,703 and then 21,953, although those who successfully passed examinations were substantially lower than this. The amount expended by societies on education grew

from approximately £1,700,000 at the turn of the century to just over £3 million by the outbreak of war. Junior classes in Co-operation were by far the most popular, with a few hundred taking adult Co-operation or the historical courses. The other mainstay remained Bookkeeping, where numbers grew steadily through the Edwardian period. Following deliberations with the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees (AUCE) on how to encourage interest among employees, there was an appreciable rise in those taking the apprentices' course.⁵⁵ Really, the CEC wanted attendance and successful progress in the employees' courses to be made a requirement of career advancement but could not enforce it. Indeed, the CEC was constantly disappointed that more members and employees did not take up serious study, but they were perhaps overly hard on the membership, and on themselves. Over the course of little more than a decade, the scope and range of the educational programme had been transformed. It could, once again, reasonably be said that the co-operative movement had a serious commitment to education. An educational ecosystem represented a milestone on which the crowning aspiration of a college could be attempted.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Several interlinked developments combined to focus attention on the higher education of working people, which acted as a spur for a co-operative college. Inspiring the rank and file through the history, principles and value of co-operation was the primary aim of the educational programme, but there was always an inclination to add a leaven of higher-level study. As Rae realised, the movement would have to train its own leaders, imbued with a co-operative ethos. At the turn of the century, the co-operative movement was not alone in considering the higher education of the working classes. The labour movement was becoming more organised and playing an increasingly prominent role in national life. How best to build a leadership cadre of working people, closely connected to a well-informed membership, exercised both those within and outside labour circles. Meanwhile, university education was changing significantly, with new institutions and alternative types of courses reaching out to different audiences. Although the main beneficiaries of these innovations were the middle classes, there was a strong impulse to open university-level education to working-class students.

Extending higher education to a wider audience was a central issue of university reform in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ The ancient English universities of Oxford and Cambridge had been roundly condemned for being exclusive, expensive, inefficient and wedded to an outdated curriculum. Probed and prodded by state inquiries, one avenue for reform was to take university-level study out of the college quadrangles to the growing centres of population.⁵⁷ In 1867, James Stuart of Trinity College, Cambridge, set off on a tour of northern industrial cities to give lectures to provincial audiences. Co-operators in Rochdale were instrumental to this initiative, and co-operative groups provided key audiences for lecture tours.⁵⁸ In 1873, Cambridge University approved a larger scheme for a network of travelling lecturers, and Oxford introduced similar arrangements the following decade. It was gruelling work for the lecturers, who could travel enormous distances between venues and, since they had to be self-supporting, lectures had to entice a paying clientele. The sessions were not merely for entertainment, however, and a pattern was put in place from an early date whereby lectures were combined with discussion, and students were encouraged to submit written assignments. This was a burden for the tutors, but there were enough young graduates, inspired by the prospect of performing socially useful work, to sustain the scheme. At Oxford, the influential Master of Balliol College, Benjamin Jowett, promoted this social responsibility among a coterie of energetic acolytes.⁵⁹ He backed the university's Extension Delegacy, which thrived under the leadership of Arthur Acland, as part of a programme of bringing Oxford into contact with working people. An important further innovation from the late 1880s was the Summer School, whereby some extension students could actually attend one of the old universities, enjoying a more complete university experience, albeit for a few days. By the early 1890s, it was estimated that around 60,000 were attending university extension lectures nationally. Frequently, the audiences came from the middle classes, including high proportions of women, but working people also attended.

As the century came to a close, two contrasting ventures made a significant addition to the higher education of working people. Beguiled by the distinctive genius of Oxford, American philanthropists Charles A. Beard and Walter W. Vrooman launched a scheme of working-class education in the city, including correspondence classes, extension work and accommodating residential students for short periods.⁶⁰ Taking form as Ruskin Hall, it was not designed as an admission point to the university, and was

resolute in upholding its independence. There were no entrance or exit qualifications and the Hall was open throughout the year for students to attend as they could, at cheap rates. Ruskin appealed to Oxford reformers and several trade unions, which began to fund scholarships for periods of study. After some financial problems, the Hall was reconstituted as Ruskin College and became more focused on Oxford-based activities. Coming from a decidedly humbler background than Beard and Vrooman, keen co-operator and employee Albert Mansbridge was doubtful that, for all its benefits, university extension was really reaching the working classes.⁶¹ He proposed bringing together trade unions, the co-operative movement and other labour organisations to develop a more systematic programme of higher-level classes. In 1903, a modestly informal, grass-roots association was formalised as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Initially modelled on extension lectures and co-operative organisation, the principal innovation was the tutorial class for more intensive academic work. Featuring written assignments with high standards, tutorial classes aspired to a genuine university level, sustained over a lengthy course of study. Despite its lowly origins, the WEA also enjoyed high-level support. Backed by Oxford University, pilot classes were held in Rochdale and Longton, led by R. H. Tawney.⁶² Proving successful, tutorial classes spread rapidly, were adopted by new universities and old, and piqued the interest of the Board of Education, which gave grants for these small, advanced classes.

The WEA brought the co-operative movement into closer connection with the old universities and, from the turn of the century, the CEC explored several initiatives with the university extension agencies. Representatives were invited to give short talks in the regional sections to popularise their lectures. In a complicated agreement, the Oxford Delegacy would examine students of Advanced Co-operation, thus entitling them to teach for the delegacy, on the condition that the class was taught by one of their tutors.⁶³ In its first year, the scheme made a promising start, when 16 candidates were examined, of which 7 passed, but there was a dearth of joint work in the succeeding years. A similar fate befell another goodwill initiative, whereby it was agreed to reduce the prices for co-operators attending the summer meetings. The cost was still beyond the means of most of the membership and teaching materials were deemed incomprehensible to workmen's viewpoints.⁶⁴ Throughout the Edwardian period, despite advertising campaigns, there was very limited interest from the movement. Even when quite substantial funding could

be obtained, it was difficult to muster enthusiasm. In the 1880s, two scholarships were endowed in the names of Thomas Hughes and E. V. Neale, tenable at Oriel College Oxford. By the early twentieth century, they were worth £100 per annum, for four years, but it was still far from easy to attract takers, and there was some scepticism as to whether these outlets were the best use of resources.⁶⁵

University extension and summer schools were a genuine attempt to take higher-level education beyond the traditional residential colleges of the ancient universities but could furnish only a modicum of university-type teaching and a brief glimpse of a university experience. At the same time, new forms of university institutions supplied more genuine opportunities closer to home. From the middle of the nineteenth century, led by Owens College in Manchester, university-level colleges took shape in most of the major British industrial cities.⁶⁶ Although drawing on slightly different resources in each place, a common set of factors included substantial support from industry, philanthropists and local authorities. In return, the colleges fostered links with professional organisations and businesses, and developed curricula in relevant subject areas, applied sciences and professional education. Subjects like modern languages, literature and history also featured prominently. Students came predominantly from the locality and, although overwhelmingly from the middle classes, there were serious efforts to diffuse opportunities across the social spectrum, including women and the working classes. Leading figures from the colleges made a point of supporting co-operatives. When the Co-operative Congress met in Birmingham, Oliver Lodge, Principal of the city's Queen's College, hosted a social meeting for delegates.⁶⁷ Presiding over the meeting, his colleague, Professor Masterman imagined a time when each of the new universities would have a co-operative hostel where 40 or 50 could educate themselves and their peers. In the early stages of their formation, it is not to be wondered at that the nascent university colleges would seek to engage with the co-operative movement. As notable local organisations with a genuine commitment to education, there were opportunities for valuable mutual support. It was far more likely that a co-operator would gain higher education at a local college than in Oxford or Cambridge.

Nevertheless, elements within Oxford regarded their university as taking a lead in training an emergent working-class leadership.⁶⁸ All echelons of society, they claimed, could benefit from an Oxford education.

Concurrent criticisms were aired about the limited access to university study. Combining the disparate factors, a high-profile conference on the Education of Workpeople was held at the 1907 WEA Summer School in Oxford. Many warm words were spoken amid an aura of self-congratulation, but which were also met with chariness. Several working-class organisations suspected that behind the welcoming gestures was an attempt to assimilate elements of the labour movement, to acculturate them into the establishment and undermine any semblance of political radicalism. These suspicions took a dramatic turn at Ruskin College, where a perceived take-over by the university led to a student revolt and the formation within the college of the Plebs League, committed to a socialist-inspired curriculum. A College inquiry into the situation led to the college principal resigning, the secession of a number of students and the creation of the Central Labour College, with an openly socialist curriculum, supported by several prominent trade unions.⁶⁹ It may well have been the case that Oxford was seeking to assimilate working-class leaders, but it is equally doubtful whether those who attended WEA classes were taken in. In many respects, however, the crisis crystallised a fundamental question about whether a higher education, that could realistically only be the preserve of a tiny minority of working people, would really benefit the whole class, or in fact simply lead to the advancement of that minority out of their class. These debates gained traction within the co-operative movement.

The Ruskin affair and subsequent split in labour education reverberated around working-class organisations. Never in favour of overtly political education, the co-operative movement officially remained supportive of the WEA and Ruskin College, advancing a small financial contribution to the former and continuing to send representatives to sit on the college council.⁷⁰ Locally, some societies would work with labour colleges, an indication that ideological divides could be overstated. In the wake of the crisis, a report issued by Ruskin College and circulated by the CEC attempted to assuage any disquiet. It was underscored that the purpose of the college was that students would raise, not rise out of, the class to which they belonged, with teaching neither too academic nor too partisan. Residents were working people with financial aid from trade unions, and the students governed themselves. A few years later, when the situation had calmed down a little, the 1910 Co-operative Education Programme summarised the range of opportunities for co-operators to pursue higher-level study.⁷¹ Extension lectures and tutorial classes were

available wherever a class could be constituted, and local societies could help to facilitate them. The costs varied according to the university, but were all substantially subsidised, by the universities themselves, the Board of Education and local education authorities. Ruskin College was upheld as a place where co-operators, trade unionists and others could grapple seriously with the difficulties confronting workers and the social problems of the times. The Working Men's College in London was also identified as a familiar venue, now grown into a serious provider of education. Its teachers were mostly members of the universities or professions, giving their services free, making for low-cost tuition.

HERALDS OF A CO-OP COLLEGE

By the 1910s, there were several avenues by which a co-operator, suitably prepared through the graduated educational programme, could obtain a kind of higher-level education, some of which the movement had been instrumental in creating. Even where classes were in sympathy with the needs of working people, however, they were all run by another organisation. Of course, co-operators had kept alive visions of a co-operative centre of higher learning which stretched back to the Owenite period. For instance, in the 1870s, Nicholas Baline, a Russian co-operator, spoke at congress about the need for a co-operative university that should embrace the education of women in enabling the movement to respond to social changes. In 1904, the long-time co-operator Edward Owen Greening's inaugural congress address highlighted the need for a co-operative university as did Rae's in 1911. The educationist Margaret McMillan reasoned that a co-operative university would have the potential to 'change the whole future of England'.⁷² The zeal for a higher-level co-operative institution, with appropriate curriculum, aims, methods and ethos, began to coalesce into a serious possibility. Central to this discourse was Fred Hall, Professor of Commerce and Head of Department at Belfast Municipal Technical College.⁷³ From a modest background, Hall left school for work at age 13, but returned to study at Manchester University, gaining BCom, BA and MA degrees in successive years from 1908–1910. He was an experienced co-operative educator, having taught junior and adult classes in Co-operation and Co-operative Management, and running the correspondence classes in economics before his move to Belfast. In the last years before the outbreak of war, Hall led an energetic campaign for

a distinctively Co-operative College, which quickly gathered significant supporters.

The opening manoeuvre of the campaign was an article penned by Hall, specifically broaching the question of a co-operative college, which was published in the Belfast local pages of *The Wheatsheaf* in March 1911.⁷⁴ On the basis of this, Hall was invited to speak at the Easter weekend meeting of the Central Education Committee, held in Leicester in April 1912. A resolution was passed, almost unanimously,

[t]hat this conference of educationalists approve the idea of the establishment of a Co-operative College, and instructs the Central Education Committee to carefully consider the proposals contained in the paper read to-day and issue a report to all co-operative societies for further consideration.

To maintain the energy from the conference, a coterie of adherents agreed to keep in touch and, a few weeks later, Hall circulated an initial letter to them and some known sympathisers.⁷⁵ Adopting the designation of the ‘College Herald Circle’, well-wishers grew rapidly.⁷⁶ Within a few months, a list of 33 members was printed and, a year later, the fourth edition included 78 names, mainly acquired through personal contacts and appeals. Members signed up as individuals, but soon came to include representatives from co-operative organisations, including the Men’s and Women’s Guilds, national and local educational committees and secretaries, students’ bodies, as well as the Productive Federation and AUCE. Inspired, the College Herald Circle launched a vigorous campaign, writing letters to the co-operative press, distributing copies of Hall’s Leicester paper and urging local societies to confer over the issue and to endorse officially the resolution in favour of founding a college.⁷⁷ Hall himself wrote piece after piece raising awareness about the need for a bespoke college and countering potential objections, insisting that it was not a remote prospect, but could in fact be realised now.

Two main concerns were expected and, indeed, very quickly voiced. One was about the potential overlap of a co-operative college with existing institutions, and the other, the well-known problem of whether higher education simply resulted in raising a few working people out of their class. There was much support for Ruskin College and for the work of the WEA. The Principal of Ruskin himself, Gilbert Slater, entered the debate to argue that his college was for all working people and, if

a co-operative college did come into being, it should amalgamate with his institution.⁷⁸ Llewelyn Davies was sceptical of Ruskin's overtures, but saw the significance of the points raised.⁷⁹ While sensitive to the idea of a distinct college, she too questioned where it would fit. Should it just be for the movement or embrace a diversity of groups and perspectives? Should there be formal relationships with outside institutions? Should there be a more general working-class college in the north of England? She questioned what the position of women would be in any proposed college. Practical issues were raised about where the college could be located and how suitable teachers would be found.⁸⁰ Unsurprisingly, some feared that a college would simply spawn snobs and prigs, who would turn their back on the movement. In a trenchant criticism, W. J. Douse, chairman of the Midland Sectional Board, accused the whole proposal of being undemocratic.⁸¹ Even if the college admitted just 1% of the membership, it would have to cope with 20,000 students. The cost would bleed the poorest of the membership to enrich the 1% mentally and economically. Far better, he thought to work with the existing working men's colleges. Douse's specific argument was not widely endorsed, but the principle underpinning his disapproval remained.

Anticipating objections, Hall observed that Ruskin and the Labour College did sterling work in their own rights, but co-operators needed something different. Nor was there any suggestion of relieving public bodies of their responsibilities but, they too could not meet the special needs of the co-operative movement. Responding specifically to Slater, Hall counselled, in the friendliest of terms, that he had missed the point.⁸² Ruskin could not cater for co-operative employees, or women, nor be a centre of research for issues specifically affecting co-operation. The WEA seems to have taken no umbrage, and an edition of its magazine, *The Highway*, was devoted to celebrating the close links between the organisations, fully endorsing the college proposals.⁸³ Despite the reservations, the great majority of views expressed were favourable, and the idea rapidly garnered enthusiasm. The Herald Circle estimated that 50 meetings debated the matter, with about 40 passing the resolution in favour of establishing a college.⁸⁴ A tangential contribution to the debate, in the form of a report on the latest Cambridge Summer School, neatly encapsulated the problems of the existing situation.⁸⁵ Earnest dons had welcomed working people to their ancient college located in beautiful surroundings, and it had all been a most 'pleasant experience'. The whole event, however, epitomised stability and the status quo, divorced from the

exigencies of working-class life. The newer universities, which had a more modern view of life, might proffer better prospects, but there was still a danger of working-class people going through university and losing their values and outlook. Against that, it was clear that the movement needed a higher level of education and training for its leaders, managers and secretaries, to which the best solution was a co-operative college. In 1913, a start was made with the first co-operative summer school (Fig. 2.2).

After a year of letters and articles, meetings and debates, two position papers by Hall, printed and circulated by the Education Department, set out at length the aims and ideals of a college.⁸⁶ On a simply organisational level, the diversity of co-operative educational opportunities already available meant that some central institution was required, to act as a co-ordinating body and to encourage further effort. A college would ‘complete the scheme of Co-operative Education by providing a centre for higher education in the specialist subjects required ... to provide a centre for the cultivation of the co-operative spirit ... [and] to undertake investigations and research’.⁸⁷ The key component here was to provide



Fig. 2.2 First co-operative summer school 1913, Fred Hall standing in centre. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

a suitable environment within which co-operative education could take place. Although the specific knowledge and skills acquired were crucial, this was not the central purpose of a college. Co-operators needed to be taught by co-operators in a co-operative atmosphere. It was the habits of co-operative thinking that needed to be instilled, for example to understand history through a co-operative perspective. Public education, or other working-class institutions, could not deliver what the movement needed for its own purposes. Without an appropriate environment, knowledge on its own had little value unless it was wedded to some definite social end. Thus, the central purpose of the college was to inspire as well as to educate: 'Our motto should be the acquisition of knowledge in fellowship and through service for use in service'.⁸⁸

In practical terms, the college would primarily be aimed at teachers in the movement as they were the means of reaching the membership but lacked training and operated largely in isolation. It was vital to bring students together in a place where they could learn as much from one another as from books and classes. If co-operative teachers could be brought into the college, even for a week, with improved technical skills and renewed faith in their ideals, the quality of teaching would be considerably enhanced. For many, it would probably be impractical to attend a college for even as little as a week, but this could be alleviated by more systematic correspondence tuition. A permanent staff based at a college could provide correspondence courses and, with the experience of classroom teaching, relevant materials. Hall was always in tune with the liberal aspects of co-operative education, and content to leave many aspects of technical training to the local authorities. He recognised, however, that the co-operative movement needed education to help make it more efficient and effective. Better trained managers, secretaries, salesmen and general employees were essential, although he insisted that technical training still had to be carried out within a co-operative environment and ethos. Employees needed to learn that education was for the benefit of the movement, not solely for their personal advantage.

As the capstone institution of co-operative education, the college would become the equivalent of a university, which the movement needed if it was to progress. Universities were emerging as centres of research and expertise, increasingly central to generating the knowledge base for modern society, informing the training of teachers and the development of the educational system. Consequently, Hall envisaged the college as not merely a place for higher-level teaching, but as a centre for research and

investigation. The movement had become larger and more complex and needed basic information, not least about its own operations, to become more efficient. A more thorough understanding was required. At a fairly routine level, the college would be a centre for new knowledge and expertise. For instance, if a local society wanted to embark upon new activity, such as milk delivery, a central repository of information could advise on how to go about doing so, procedures and likely costs, based on concrete experience. This would not make the college a mere trade school, but actively promote co-operative activity in a co-operative way. In addition, the finances of the movement needed more attention, to understand what exactly there was in terms of capital, and what variations there were in managing the dividend. How could a large commercial enterprise function without knowing how much capital it had? There was also research to be done on changing trends and patterns of working-class life. Hall suggested that already there was a shift away from income being devoted to basic commodities towards services and leisure activities, some of which ought to be taken on by co-operatives. The essential point was that a large organisation needed to understand its own nature and operational context in a more informed way.

Somewhat optimistically, Hall envisaged no difficulty in financing the college. The movement already dedicated large sums towards education, the majority of which, he felt, went to less than desirable purposes. If some of this could be diverted to the college, then there should be no problems. Moreover, local societies, trade unions or the Central Education Committee itself could sponsor students, if not every year, then at regular intervals. Ideally, students would attend for a year or two, but shorter periods would also be beneficial. With appropriate finances, there should be sufficient students to make the college viable. Students might be attracted from overseas, which would enhance the experience. Hall took it for 'granted that the college would be established in some country district where the work could be carried on under the best conditions'.⁸⁹ Somewhere pleasant would be nice for summer and weekend meetings, where students might combine short spells of study with a holiday. In the interim, however, he acknowledged that modest beginnings were more likely. A few rooms in Holyoake House, constructed in Manchester to house the Co-operative Union in 1911, would suffice and the college would have to prove its worth before organisations would be prepared to fund it too lavishly (Fig. 2.3).



Fig. 2.3 Holyoake House, Manchester, head of the Co-operative Union where the College would start in 1919 and return to in 2000. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Before the First World War, a co-operative college remained an aspiration, but one with a good deal of momentum behind it. A concerted campaign led by an energetic circle of educationalists had propagated widespread interest in the idea from across the movement. Despite misgivings, there were few arguments against the higher education of co-operators within a distinctive setting and ethos. It is remarkable how far the movement had travelled in little more than a decade. At the end of the nineteenth century, while committed in principle, co-operative education had stagnated, its purpose apparently superseded by the general expansion of education. Throughout the Edwardian period, spurred by state measures that threatened the development of popular education, and by revived enthusiasm and leadership within the movement, co-operative

education was revised and expanded on a large scale that raised the possibility of implementing even more ambitious plans—the basis on which discussions of higher levels of education could take place. The higher education of the working classes was now an issue of growing national importance. How to foster a leadership cadre for the emerging labour movement exercised both those within the ranks, and the established authorities. Generalised institutions for labour education, though important, could not meet the requirements of the co-operative movement. What was needed, in the eyes of Hall and his followers, was a Co-operative College.

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The Formation of the Co-operative College and the Interwar Years

In the early summer of 1914, the prospects for a Co-operative College seemed set fair with many new supporters. No-one could have foreseen the devastation of the next four years, which profoundly affected the co-operative movement as it did the rest of the nation. Although wartime prevented progress towards a new institution, elements ‘of a college character’ were implemented which exemplified what could be achieved. Led by Hall, the nucleus of a college staff assembled at Holyoake House in Manchester. Summer schools specifically for co-operators proved popular, despite the war. The great wartime survey of co-operative activities drew extensively on the expertise and research capacity of Hall and his colleagues. On a broader front, the demands of the conflict highlighted the national need to enhance levels of education, and co-operators welcomed new educational legislation and government initiatives. In many respects, however, relationships between the co-operative movement and the state seriously declined during the war, prompting a fundamental re-think of the movement’s political stance.

During the interwar period, although co-operation expanded, the movement was somewhat embattled. The deleterious effects of the social and economic upheavals of the 1920s and 1930s were compounded by the power of corporate cartels, bolstered by influential press barons and acquiescent governments. It thus became even more imperative for the

movement to instil co-operative ideals and identity among the membership. An expansion of the educational programme was planned with the anticipated capstone of a college. In the optimistic aftermath of the war, the 1919 Congress formally passed a resolution to bring the Co-operative College into being. The timing was again unfortunate, as the series of interwar depressions made fundraising extremely difficult. Converting the desires of the Edwardian period into institutional reality was too much, and a bespoke college edifice in a pleasant rural location failed to materialise. Co-operators persevered with discussions about a college and what its role should be. Even so, a good deal was achieved through the interwar years, with considerable expansion of the educational programme. A functioning college did take shape, albeit on a relatively modest scale, with a body of students from around the world, studying and living together.

WORK OF A COLLEGE CHARACTER

By early 1914, after almost two years of energetic campaigning, the Herald Circle believed a college was now a practical possibility. Hall wrote to the Central Education Committee (CEC), requesting a conference to take the matter forward.¹ In turn, the CEC requested the United Board to convene a meeting to review the issue formally, which duly took place at Holyoake House on 9th May.² Following suggestions by Hall, several bodies sent delegates, representing various parts of the country and branches of the movement.³ Rae and Margaret Llewelyn Davies introduced the session, largely avoiding practical issues of cost, management and structure. They spoke of the need for modest beginnings, with teaching initially in Holyoake House and a rented hostel for students. Only when the value of the college had been verified, and funds had gradually accumulated, could a bespoke building be contemplated. For the most part, the conference recapitulated the views that had circulated through the co-operative press over the previous year. A few were apprehensive about costs, including one who thought the projections were too low. The familiar misgiving about the potentially divisive effects of higher education, which might reproduce class divisions rather than overcome them, was repeated but, overwhelmingly, the delegates were in favour. Resolutions were passed unanimously to approve the proposal to establish a Co-operative College and to form a provisional committee to undertake preliminary work. The United Board was tasked with continuing

to promote the project, and to begin appropriate educational work at Holyoake House and at summer schools.

The summer of 1914 was an unpropitious season to launch a great new venture and, as with so many aspects of national life, the outbreak of the First World War limited the extent of what could be achieved. Nevertheless, valuable groundwork was laid down during the war years. There was no let-up in propaganda, which was not left solely to the auspices of the United Board. Anticipating a renewed surge of interest from the May meeting, the Herald Circle launched a more professionally designed and printed magazine.⁴ A grandiose front cover depicted a classical portico fronted by impressive staircase, which sought to illustrate the steps by which a co-operator progressed, both in education and in aspiration (Fig. 3.1). Starting with early child-training in junior classes, the stages ascended through tutorial classes, the students' fellowships and the Men's and Women's Guilds. As they climbed higher, students steadily acquired greater powers of self-expression and association, finally reaching the gateway that led to full co-operative citizenship. The remodelling of the curriculum during the Edwardian period had already built the steps, what was required now was the college as their ultimate destination. The invocation of the ancient world no doubt added some kudos to the proposal although an imposing classical temple was perhaps not the most suitable image for the college, so it was probably as well that the publication was aimed at initiates of the Herald Circle. Inside the magazine, articles rehearsed the familiar arguments in favour of the college, to provide ammunition for debate and to buoy up morale.⁵ Incrementally, the Circle expanded through individual and organisational membership, helping to keep the college idea before the movement and adding useful subscriptions.⁶

Propaganda was invaluable, but the more important matter was to give substance to actual college work. Key to this end was the formation of an educational staff, especially the appointment by the United Board, in Spring 1915, of Fred Hall as 'Adviser of Studies'.⁷ It was an obvious, and fortunate, choice. His background and vigorous leadership meant that Hall was by far the most prominent exponent of the college idea, having energetically led the campaign for several years. The following year, Miss F. M. Bradley was recruited as 'Lady Assistant' in the Educational Department.⁸ She was an MA alumna of Manchester University, with a background in co-operative teaching and research, having worked as a research student at the Fielden Demonstration School and currently

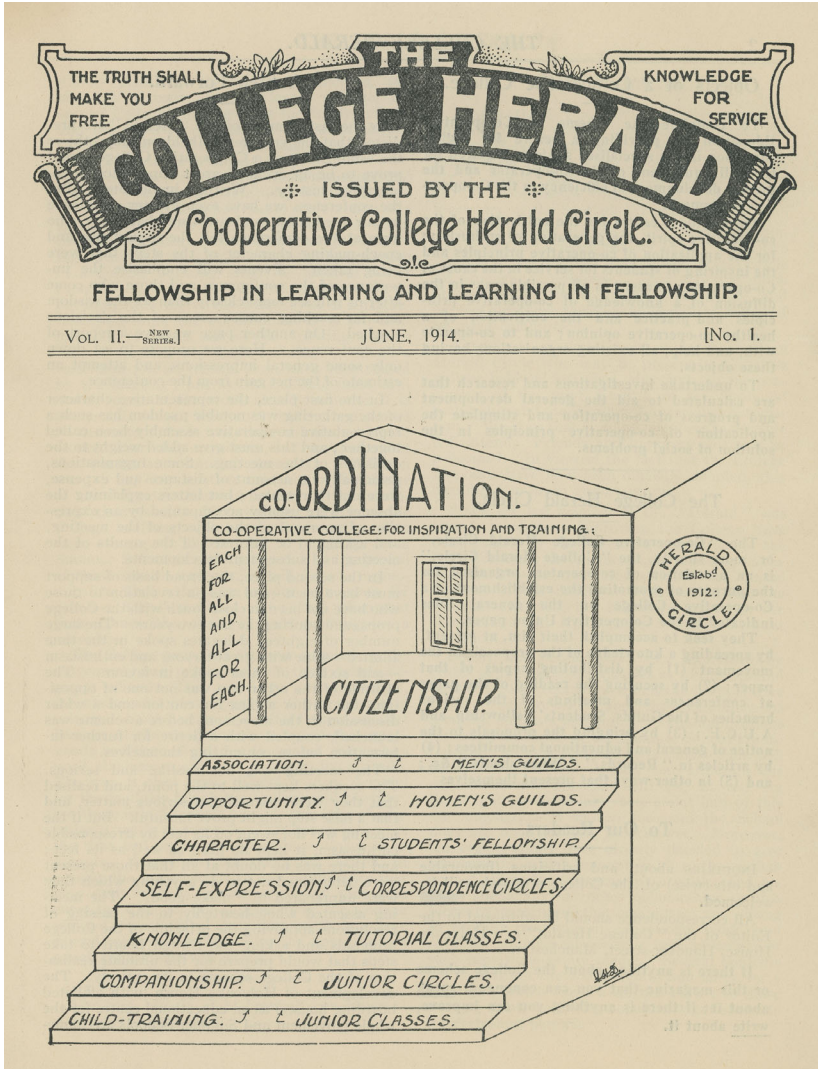


Fig. 3.1 *The College Herald* blending ancient metaphors with the proposal for a co-operative college. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

teaching at a pupil-teacher centre. The nucleus of a permanent teaching staff, with higher-level qualifications, was gradually forming at Holyoake House, where the Co-operative Union was based.

Through the war years, the most concrete form that college work took was an expanding series of summer schools, officially operated by the Central Education Committee, but drawing substantially on Hall and his colleagues. Working people, who could not attend the universities full time, could at least enjoy a week or two of a university-like environment, where they could attend high-level classes and socialise with students outside the classroom. They helped to articulate a sense of co-operative renewal. Following informal discussions, a small summer school for co-operators took place at Castleton in 1913.⁹ The next year, the *College Herald* advertised a far more ambitious undertaking for the whole four weeks of August 1914, to be held at Arnside in Lancashire, where a private school with appropriate accommodation in its own grounds had been secured.¹⁰ Charges were fixed at 28s for men, 26s for women with about 60 places available. Despite the unfortunate timing, the event went ahead and, although reduced on account of the outbreak of war, about 40 people showed up for each of the four weeks.¹¹ Students came from all four nations and all parts of England, including teachers, committee members, educational secretaries as well as employees. Classes included representatives of the Co-operative Union, Women's, and Men's Guilds, the CWS, International Co-operative Alliance, Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees (AUCE) and Students' Fellowship.

Building on success, the following year saw two summer schools, with a return trip to Arnside, and an experimental excursion to Dunblane in Scotland.¹² There were some misgivings about the Scottish version where there was less of a co-operative educational tradition on which to draw. Ultimately, however, with 20 students in the first week and 15 in the second, the event was considered a distinct success. Back at Arnside, numbers rose to 72 in the first week, just over 60 in each of the middle weeks, and 46 in the final week. Lecturers and staff added another 15 or so to the total. It was encouraging that more students came from Wales and the South of England than previously. A significant number were aided by scholarships from their home societies, amounting to over 70 of the total. Birkenhead was praised for making seven awards, with additional members making return visits at their own expense. Educators were not sure whether more than 50 people would undermine the friendly association sought by the summer schools. In the end, both events were

regarded with satisfaction, including welcome indications of a greater presence of those from the trading and administrative departments.

Besides an official report, the next edition of the *College Herald* featured some of the students' impressions. A participant at Dunblane described his initial apprehension that was soon banished by the warmth and earnestness of the occasion. He also felt comparatively unprepared, reflecting the relatively undeveloped state of co-operative education north of the border, which made some of the material a little difficult to follow. A selection of students' perspectives on the schools repeated tropes of serious study, healthy exercise and good companionship. The timetable revolved around a series of morning and evening lectures, with supplementary classes for the more advanced students. At a residential event, however, debate and discussion spilled over beyond the formal sessions, even long into the night, replicating a university experience. The social side of afternoon excursions and evening entertainments was undoubtedly important in bringing together different elements of co-operation from diverse parts of the country.

For the Summer School gives one a taste of university life at its best: the constant communication of kindred spirits. Life was one endless round of jolly friendship, in which shop assistant and public servant, clerk and school teacher, all eager to learn and to teach, fraternised in the common pursuit of knowledge under the light and kindly leadership of Professor Hall.¹³

Hall was the mainstay at most of the schools, ably assisted by Miss Bradley and speakers such as Rae. Hall was most impressed by the capacity of summer schools to intersperse 'formal instruction' with 'informal talks ... on the walks, on the picnics, at the dining-table, and in the innumerable talks in the little groups that form...'¹⁴ Hall must have been gratified by the student's report that participants returned to their home districts 'missionaries for the movement, makers of the co-operative State to be'.¹⁵

In 1916, demand multiplied, spurring the CEC to experiment with a third school at the Working Men's College in London. Being non-residential, there was no accommodation on site, although there were plentiful lodgings close by and all meals were laid on, so students could at least stay together during the day.¹⁶ The trial caught on and regular London meetings were planned.¹⁷ The main English school, still in Lancashire but relocated to Lytham, had about 250 in attendance over four weeks, and the Scottish event thrived. Increased popularity led

to some disquiet about how to accommodate different levels of experience and expertise, but it was a problem that the organisers were pleased to have. By 1917, a total of six schools spread across 16 weeks was in prospect, even if wartime exigencies meant that some did not go ahead. Comparable initiatives were also being explored. Plymouth organised a small, but successful, week-long meeting at its own holiday home.¹⁸ Few could regard central Manchester as an excursion destination but, catching the mood, Holyoake House experimented with a week-long school for students in the Manchester region, featuring a series of afternoon and evening lectures, averaging 37 students per session. Although lacking the social side of a residential school, it too was thought worthwhile.¹⁹ Stalwarts of the summer schools, Birkenhead and Liverpool societies, spawned the idea of a weekend school which quickly caught on, especially during the traditional Easter meeting season.²⁰ Of a more informal and sociable character, alumni of the summer schools began organising reunions, with meetings taking place in Glasgow, London, Birkenhead and Manchester.²¹

In addition to learning and sociability, a further aim of the College was to serve as a place of research and investigation into the issues and problems facing the movement. Serendipitously, an opportunity for research came with the survey initiated at the Dublin Congress of 1914, where the Central Board was instructed ‘to make arrangements for a great co-operative stocktaking’.²² To undertake this fundamental review of the movement’s operations and organisation, a General Co-operative Survey Committee was established with four sub-committees tasked with reviewing Production, Distribution (which were soon merged into one dealing with Trade), Education and the Constitution.²³ Hall, on his appointment as Adviser of Studies, quickly took on a central role in driving forward the survey, conducting some basic research on key statistical measures.²⁴ Members of the Herald Circle were enlisted to assist with the number-crunching, and the data compiled added appreciably to the impact of the survey.²⁵ In 1916, when an interim report on trade was presented to the Lancaster Congress, the value of the statistical research was evident, even when making unpalatable points. ‘It is not pleasing to know’ one delegate observed, ‘that the average sales per member are no higher than they were in 1881, that working expenses are increasing, that the sales per distributive employee have fallen and that societies seem to use only half of their total capital in their own undertakings’. That knowledge, however, was crucial in raising awareness of key

issues.²⁶ Suitably impressed, the CEC found resources for two short-term research scholarships.²⁷ The contribution made by Hall and colleagues to this major survey of co-operative activity undoubtedly added materially to the arguments in favour of a college. The case became more compelling against the deteriorating environment in which co-operation more generally found itself.

Inevitably, the vicissitudes of war infiltrated the co-operative movement.²⁸ In a direct sense, co-operative activity was affected by members and employees joining up for the armed forces and premises being commandeered for war work. An organisation substantially based on retail suffered from shortages of commodities and the effects of rationing. Strangely, although state intervention and co-ordination of national life expanded prodigiously during the war, there was little attempt by the government to draw on the widespread networks, expertise and collective ethos of the co-operative movement to help co-ordinate supplies or regulate prices. Representatives from local societies were eventually included on food control bodies, but with little apparent effect. At a local level, some societies felt that they were unfairly treated by recruitment tribunals, which exempted employees from private shops, but not from co-operative stores. On a national scale, the Prime Minister from 1916, David Lloyd George, incorporated businessmen from private industry into the national war effort who were openly hostile to co-operation. One specific move by the government epitomised the problems facing the movement. The Excess Profits Tax was designed to curb profiteering by businesses that had benefitted from huge orders during the war. The co-operative dividend, which was re-distributed to ordinary members, however, was also defined as a corporate profit drawing the same swingeing taxes. The state and business co-ordinated assault upon co-operation provoked a radical re-think about the long-held refusal to enter the political arena. In 1917, overturning decades of formal neutrality, the Co-operative Party was established, to defend co-operative interests in parliament.

The all-consuming demands of the conflict impacted educational provision.²⁹ Paradoxically, as the provision of education deteriorated, the issue began to grow in national consciousness as a priority for post-war reconstruction. The war itself made huge demands on specialist knowledge, especially in scientific, technical and commercial areas, including accounting. Peace would bring even greater requirements for experts and a more highly trained workforce. The Board of Education drew up ambitious plans to enhance higher and technical education and the

1918 Education Act proposed to raise the school leaving age from 12 to 14 and create day continuation schools for 14- to 16-year-olds, so they could continue in part-time education as they began their first jobs. Co-operative educators enthusiastically welcomed the legislation, although they sounded a note of caution.³⁰ Previous experience around the 1902 Education Act made many within the movement suspicious of state intervention, and the singularly poor treatment of co-operation during the war added to the scepticism. State models would inevitably promote capitalist messages of education for individuals ‘getting on’, rather than for collective improvement. By contrast, co-operative employees needed to understand that they were ‘employed not to produce private profits, but to provide social advantage for the community’.³¹ The 1918 Act opened up some opportunities for co-operation. Educational authorities would have to engage with employers, and there might even be scope for drawing on public resources for adult education classes. When the implementation of the act was delayed by the post-war economic downturn and devastating cuts to reforms introduced, co-operators suspected the government of seeking to evade its promises to working people.³²

Although the day continuation school initiative was not quite dead, indeed a successful co-operative-backed venture in Manchester went on to thrive, co-operative educators recognised the need to use its own resources to develop co-operative education.³³ The war years, however, had confirmed the need for greater appreciation across the movement of what co-operation was all about even if ordinary members had not all apprehended the threat from the state. From a grassroots level, members needed to understand what was distinctive and valuable about co-operation, beyond the store and the ‘divi’. As the new Co-operative Party had a responsibility to defend the cause in the political sphere, a major undertaking was required to educate members in the nature of co-operation, and to train employees to be both technically proficient and fully imbued with co-operative values. In 1917, Hall avowed that the ‘present situation has made us realise, as never before, that our educational work is not something separate and apart from other forms of co-operative activity, but a form of activity closely related to all others’.³⁴ A fully-formed college would help to drive forward this vital work for the movement.

REALISING THE COLLEGE

Developments during the war helped to cement the importance of what a college might achieve. The embattled position of co-operation during the war highlighted the need to preserve distinctive values and for enhanced levels of expertise among employees able to confront growing, and increasingly hostile, competition. The success enjoyed by the summer schools offered clear evidence of demand for concentrated and higher-level education. On a purely practical level, the popularity of the summer and weekend schools signalled that it would make financial sense to acquire a suitable building in which to accommodate them. In addition, the co-operative survey and related statistical research demonstrated the potential value of a research arm. Active campaigning resulted in an accumulating number of resolutions in favour of a college.

As the conflict drew to a close, there was a concerted effort to make progress towards a college. There were deliberations about whether a college could serve as a living national co-operative war memorial, a more progressive and forward-looking acknowledgement of the sacrifice made by co-operators, rather than a lifeless monument.³⁵ Seizing on the idea, the Central Education Committee pressed the United Board to adopt the proposal, submitting a fully worked out and costed scheme, combined with an emotional appeal.³⁶ Making the college a memorial, they urged, would impress public opinion, garner enthusiasm and induce generous support. Although largely in favour, the United Board was apprehensive that a call for donations to a college fund at that time might undermine their own appeal for subscriptions, and so deferred the decision. Educational campaigners were unimpressed by this stance and took to the press to air their views, resulting in another round of somewhat inconclusive meetings, which confused matters by conflating a potential college with the refurbishment of Holyoake House.³⁷ Ultimately, the matter was forced at the 1919 Carlisle Congress, at which Walsall and District society drew together several strands into a clear resolution, which moved:

That this Congress is of opinion that a co-operative college is essential to the welfare and development of the co-operative movement, and that no worthier memorial of the peace and of those co-operators who have served and fallen in the war could be established than an institution for the dissemination of the principles of co-operation and harmony in individual and international relationships. It, therefore, instructs the Central Board to

organise a fund forthwith for the establishment of such a college to which co-operators and co-operation organisations may be invited to subscribe.³⁸

The resolution was passed and the movement was committed to the creation of a Co-operative College.

The College was set up under the administration of the Central Education Committee with a threefold set of objects:

To complete the scheme of co-operative education by providing a centre for higher education in the specialised subjects required for the full equipment of the co-operator, and the further development of efficiency in the co-operative movement.

To provide a centre for the cultivation of the co-operative spirit, the generation of enthusiasm for the application of co-operative principles, and the inspiring of students for service in the cause of co-operation ...

To undertake investigations and research that are calculated to aid the general development and progress of co-operation, and stimulate the application of co-operative principles in the solution of social problems.³⁹

The first object made clear that the college was never intended as a stand-alone institution but rather as the apex of the entire co-operative educational endeavour. Hall's role as Adviser of Studies embraced the whole of the movement's educational activities of which the College was a part. The breadth of activity had expanded markedly from the turn of the century and his appointment presaged an even greater expansion. Hall's priorities for co-operative education and its future needs were to re-educate the membership in core values and principles, to link education more firmly with trading effectiveness and to open up co-operative and social issues.⁴⁰ In practical terms, the curriculum had to expand further, with careful sub-division of subjects and those interested in education had to be mobilised more effectively via a special educational magazine. The latter need would be met with the formation of a new Educational League and the launch of *The Co-operative Educator*.⁴¹ Its campaigning work done, the College Herald Circle dissolved into the new League and their circular incorporated into the journal.

Reworking the curriculum took longer, and became a continuous process, undertaken with enthusiasm and ambition. Setting out his aspirations just after the war, Hall avowed that co-operation had to remain central to the whole educational programme, since comprehending the

underlying history and principles was essential grounding for more practical and advanced work.⁴² History and Economics retained a high profile, with Hall aiming to build on his summer school classes in ‘the welfare of the group’ as a foundation for a theory of co-operative economics. More space was allocated to Citizenship and Sociology with classes in Education and Propaganda. A novel category of Emergency Classes to deal with urgent issues was proposed and the first sessions were devoted to Income Tax and After-war Problems. Likewise, there were plans to introduce a programme of special co-operative subjects that could provide a focus for debate. In many respects, the revised programme built on the foundations laid before the war, but accentuated the centrality of Co-operation, while adding social topics and studies of contemporary issues. In keeping with pre-war approaches, graduated steps led from elementary introductions to an honours level, each stage accompanied by appropriate syllabuses, textbooks and examinations, devised and largely written by Hall and his colleagues.⁴³ Hall would pursue this work and, in 1934, with W.P. Watkins, would publish *Co-operation*; over the coming decades students would affectionately refer to ‘Hall and Watkins’ as a sort of co-operative bible.

In the challenges facing co-operation after the war, Hall saw the immediate priority as shoring up co-operative values and confronting social issues. Overt hostility to co-operation was a fact of life, fanned by vitriolic outpourings in sections of the popular press.⁴⁴ The problems, however, were not solely of ethos and morale, but were directly threatening to the basic co-operative business model.⁴⁵ Although co-operation continued to grow, with notable expansion in the Midlands and South of England, the economic upheavals of the interwar period had a profound impact on the traditional strongholds in the Northeast and Northwest. At the same time, capitalist industry was becoming more organised with the ominous emergence of powerful cartels, actively encouraged by government. The growth of state technical education ignored co-operative models and major corporate employers were investing in the training of their workforce.⁴⁶ It was essential for the co-operative movement to augment the skill and efficiency of their employees, and to keep pace with capitalist competitors. During the 1920s and 1930s, the vocational side of the programme was comprehensively revised, especially for junior recruits.⁴⁷

Traditionally, senior posts and store managers had been promoted from within the ranks yet, typically, juniors entered employment with an inadequate elementary schooling. Training for new entrants, then, really

had to start with remedial classes in English and Arithmetic, plus some basic bookkeeping. This was followed up with an Introductory Course, which took the employee to a point where training began to specialise into either front-of-house salesmanship, or back-office administration. Each branch had a four-stage programme going up to full managerial levels. On the shop side, an Apprentices course was succeeded by one for Salesmen, leading to an Ordinary and Honours Managers' Course. For office workers, there was a Clerks' Course and then one on Book-keeping followed by a Secretarial Course split into two parts. In principle, a complete scheme of training proceeded 'from the day of their first entry as a junior employee ... to the day when they secure the highest diploma the movement can offer them as a certified manager, secretary or auditor'.⁴⁸ At each stage of their career, however, from office juniors to store managers, co-operative employees had to demonstrate their understanding of the history and principles of co-operation before they could proceed from one level to the next.

In the decade after the First World War, the prodigious efforts put into revising and expanding the educational programme paid dividends, as the number of classes and students rose.⁴⁹ In keeping with the main emphasis of the programme, the single most important subject was Co-operation, especially at junior level where 538 classes were formed enrolling 19,379 students in 1921/22, growing to 728 classes and over 25,000 students in 1930/31 (Figs. 3.2 and 3.3).⁵⁰ Adult Co-operation also rose from 281 successful students just after the war to 249 classes enrolling 6,152 a decade later. A noticeable new area of growth was the intermediate classes in Co-operation. In 1921–22, 53 candidates were successful in History, Economics and Citizenship. By 1930–31, there were 124 classes enrolling 3,809 in the social sciences. In addition, there was take-up of the vocational subjects, and from the beginning of the 1920s, a total of 2,753 were enrolled; after ten years, there were 725 classes catering for over 14,000 students. Despite success, educators still complained about the lack of commitment from members, employees and societies.⁵¹ Although the object of education was not to pass examinations, woeful results were frequently commented on with the examiner's report on Bookkeeping making 'dismal reading'.⁵² Failure rates were indeed horrific. In 1931, of 2,948 entered for examination in Intermediate and Adult Co-operation only 1,031 were issued with certificates.⁵³ Less than half of the almost 12,000 candidates in the technical subjects that year achieved a certificate.



Fig. 3.2 Two certificates showing stages of achievement in the study of Co-operation across the age range—here a junior certificate. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Most classes were delivered at a local level by societies, especially the junior classes in Co-operation.⁵⁴ Suitable teachers for youngsters could be found, especially when materials were readily available. Lists of potential teachers were circulated with the annual Educational Programme for more advanced courses. On the vocational side, employee training was regarded, sometimes contentiously, as the responsibility of store managers rather than societies' educational secretaries. Again, classes in basic book-keeping or salesmanship were not deemed too onerous for stores to facilitate. For most of the advanced level classes, tuition was based on correspondence, which fell to the Holyoake House team. In 1930–31, they dealt directly with 1,608 students in 37 different subjects. In 1920, two men and two women were appointed but they had a prodigious workload which included direct teaching for the college, summer schools, correspondence work and occasional lectures, producing syllabuses for

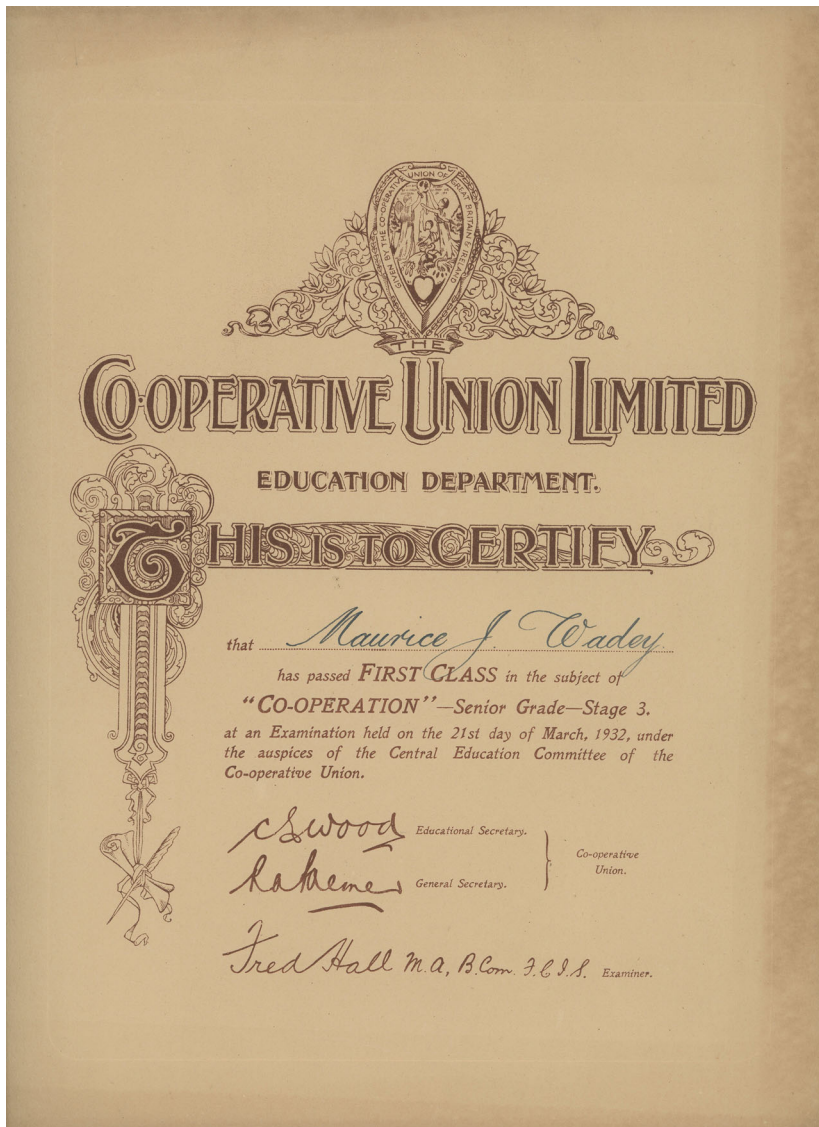


Fig. 3.3 An adult certificate. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

the multiple-level courses in a plethora of subjects, writing and marking examination papers, and developing educational materials and textbooks. Despite some criticisms, it is doubtful whether the educational team could have done more. Some respite arrived during the 1930s, when several societies clubbed together to organise regional systems of itinerant expert lectures in the more specialised technical topics.⁵⁵ Many societies also formalised agreements with local authorities to administer technical courses.

During the interwar period, co-operative education expanded impressively, in breadth, depth and reach. Building on solid foundations laid over the previous decades, the curriculum was considerably enhanced, especially with classes of an advanced level in historical, social science and commercial subjects. A core team of academic staff was crystallising around the Adviser of Studies, day and evening classes were running at Holyoake House, and research work was underway. All this contributed to work 'of a college type' and effectively constituted a Co-operative College of a kind. Yet, it was not really what either its supporters, or the resolution passed at the Carlisle Congress, envisaged as a Co-operative College. Although no-one publicly advocated an elaborate edifice, still a college was thought to require some form of distinct physical existence. This necessitated a fund, which Congress had instructed the United Board to establish. The campaign had not referred to the scale of resources required. Hall seems to have given the matter little consideration, confident that requisite funds would be forthcoming.⁵⁶ A figure of £50,000 had been floated and, without any detailed costings and some doubts about whether it would suffice, this was set as the target, to be divided between a building, equipment and endowment.⁵⁷ Towards the end of 1919, an appeal was issued and a joint committee of the United Board and the Central Education Committee was created to manage the fund and to seek suitable premises. Well-wishers were sure that a special college building would soon be in place—'it is unthinkable that a single co-operator will refuse to agree to pay at the rate of 4d per member, if the case for the co-operative college is clearly stated...'⁵⁸

A year after the appeal launch, the college fund stood at a disappointing £15,000 worth of promises from about 200 societies and individuals.⁵⁹ Somewhat deflated by the initial response, the College Sub-Committee conceded that it would take time for societies to deal with the matter where local circumstances had to be taken into account. They reassured themselves that the appeal had been well received and had fostered a

huge amount of activity to advertise the scheme. Some larger societies, such as Leicester, Walsall, Kinning Park, and Sheffield and Ecclelland, quickly agreed almost £500 apiece and smaller societies were proportionately generous. But throughout 1921, as the recession began to bite, progress slowed. A serious blow landed when it appeared that the CWS had agreed a donation of £10,000, only for the decision to be rescinded following serious trading losses.⁶⁰ With the ongoing depression in trade, no further appeals were made and the fund grew only marginally.⁶¹ By 1925, the promises had climbed to just £17,621, of which £8,766 had actually been received, and the figure did not rise above that level for the rest of the decade. In the early 1930s, there was a slight increase, after which the fund was not separately reported. Undoubtedly, the timing of the appeal amid straightened economic circumstances was unfortunate, although it was still a bitter rebuttal of the sanguine assumptions made by Hall and his collaborators just a few years previously.

In fact, there was enough to make a start. From the beginning of the campaign, acquiring a special building was a key goal. Holyoake House was primarily an administrative centre, the Headquarters of the Co-operative Union, not an educational establishment for advanced teaching and research. Hall had dreamed of a pleasant rural spot, but later saw the advantage of a more urban location.⁶² As soon as it was formed, the College Sub-Committee began searching for suitable premises and got so far as organising a delegation to view a property in Didsbury, a few miles south of Manchester city centre.⁶³ The site was summarily dismissed as 'hardly suitable or in keeping with their conception of what the college should be'.⁶⁴ As fundraising stalled, sights were lowered towards continuing teaching at Holyoake House, but looking for a smaller house that could be used as a hostel, which might encourage more students to come into residence.⁶⁵ After several viewings, an appropriate location was found in 'Thorncliffe', a villa in Vine Street, Kersal, a short tram ride from Holyoake House on the edge of the moors. The hostel was decorated by Pendleton Society's Painting Department, fitted out by the CWS to accommodate about 36 students, and formally opened in 1924.⁶⁶ Purchasing and equipping Thorncliffe cost £5,679, halving the £11,926, which had actually been paid into the building fund.⁶⁷ Although not a full college as initially conceived, a hostel at least allowed for the development of some kind of collegiate atmosphere and ethos. 'Until a common home in which the students could live together was provided, they were not able to get the full advantage of studying together'.⁶⁸ A few years later,

in 1932, a good deal of the remainder of the building fund was spent on acquiring and refurbishing the adjoining house, 'The Heath' and its grounds, to expand accommodation.⁶⁹

Teaching staff, buildings and equipment were one side of the collegiate equation; attracting students to take advantage of them was the other. Fees for a year's tuition were 12 guineas and lodgings in the district about 30s a week, so working co-operators also needed resources if they were to undertake a period of dedicated study.⁷⁰ Starting with £500 from an anonymous benefactor, termed 'infans', and £500 from the Kinning Park society, the number and range of scholarships grew steadily during the interwar period.⁷¹ By the mid-1920s, there were nine offered by or through the Co-operative Union, including the two original donations and two scholarships named after Thomas Blandford. In 1925, a special appeal was issued by the Union for scholarship funds, and the £180 received paid for three National Co-operative Scholarships of £60 each. Individual societies sponsored six students of their own and the CWS paid for two scholarships. Any society donating over £60 was entitled to have a scholarship allocated to their area, and the CEC hoped that all societies would ultimately sign up for the scheme. The national appeal became an annual feature for educational secretaries and helping local students became a popular educational outlet for societies which made use of named memorials to individuals even though they were not always renewed and might not allow for a full year's tuition. In the mid-1930s, the national fund stood at just over £300, which allowed for three scholarships of £60 and another of £90.⁷² Meanwhile ten societies between them funded 15 scholarships, with two each from London and Bristol and four from Royal Arsenal. An additional three were paid for by the CWS and SCWS. Although the sums were not princely, indeed rather less than the Neale and Hughes scholarships tenable at Oriel College Oxford, and far from what was aspired to, there was enough in the pot to sustain active college life in north Manchester.

COLLEGE LIFE

Holyoake House was not an ideal location, but it did mean that work could begin straight away. There was a teaching staff, and plentiful materials for advanced work. As soon as the College was called into being, a prospectus was issued for the first session and students attempted to represent the College visually (Fig. 3.4).⁷³ There was instruction in subjects

from across the educational programme. Students were able to choose which subjects they wanted to study and classes were put on at convenient times. Evening classes could also be put on for local students who could not make it during the day. Fees of 12 guineas were payable for a full session, from October to June, comprising 12–15 hours' tuition a week; for a term of three months, five guineas and special arrangements could be made for those who were only able to attend for shorter periods. The course included site visits to a variety of co-operative works in the area. Five teaching staff were listed, with Hall as Principal, two male and two female lecturers, plus occasional lecturers, a library and librarian. Unsurprisingly, despite the student-centred flexibility, College work began rather modestly with just a few students.⁷⁴ One of the lecturers, W. P. Watkins, provides an invaluable insight into life at the college in the early years, describing it as

rich in experience but poor in having no money or house of its own ... students worked in the boardroom as this was one of the least used rooms ... The tutors had their desks in a corner room on the second floor divided from the meeting room via a folding glazed scheme. When the boardroom was required ... the students migrated to the library where there were large tables. If the library was already occupied by a meeting, they might be able to use the room of the Union's solicitor ... if all three were occupied there was nowhere else. The students had no common life. They lived in private lodgings in different parts of the Manchester conurbation.⁷⁵

Despite the lack of separate facilities and limited head count of students, Watkins clearly perceived the College to have started.

Opening the hostel marked a turning point, allowing for the development of a collegiate life, which in turn encouraged the growth of scholarships.⁷⁶ During the 1925–26 session, there were 26 full-time students on the books, including four women, of whom 18 were in receipt of funding.⁷⁷ UK students were predominantly from the north and midlands of England, with outliers from Edinburgh, Bristol and Portsmouth. At the end of the decade, numbers had grown to 32, although there were just two women.⁷⁸ Twenty-two students were in receipt of scholarships or were paid for by their home governments, and the rest came at their own expense. Not everyone attended for the whole session. Under half were able to stay for a full nine-month period, 15 for two terms amounting to 6 months, and four for just three

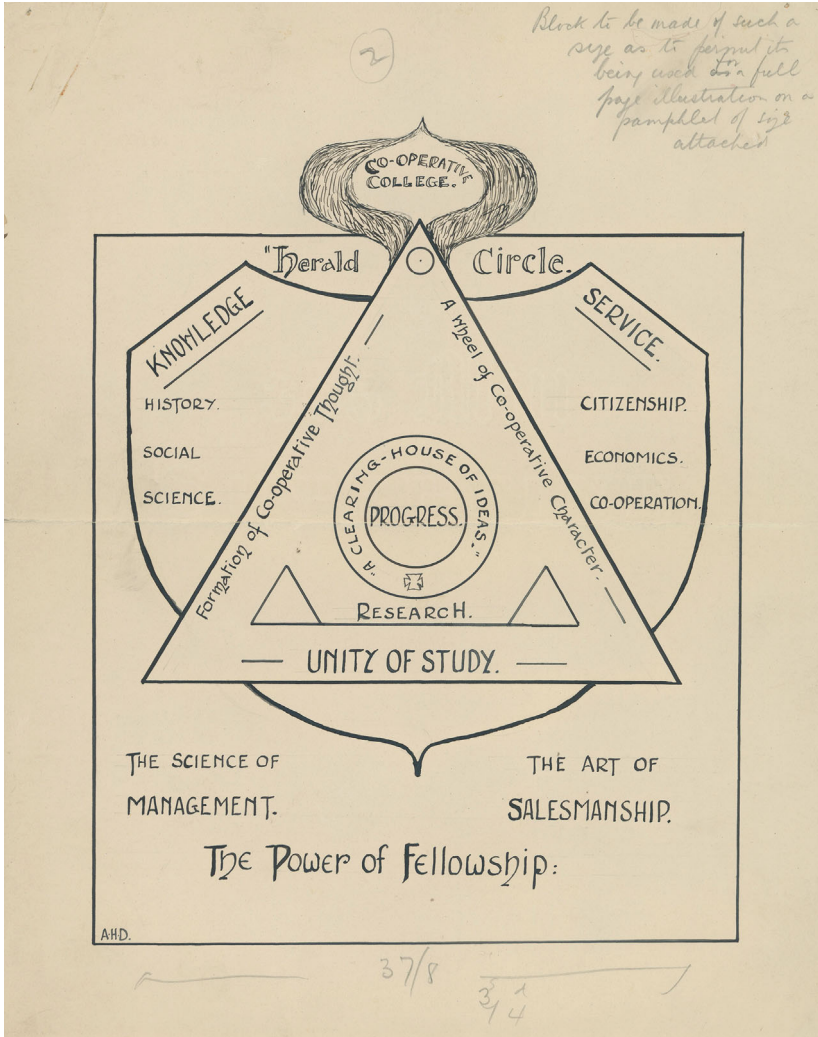


Fig. 3.4 Co-operative College logo in the 1920s attempts to capture a sense of the College as the apex of a complex multi-dimensional movement. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

months. Numbers faltered a little during the early 1930s depression but began to pick up again by the middle of the decade. In the 1935–36 session, 35 students were in attendance, only one of the home students paying privately.⁷⁹ About half of the students came for nine months, the other half for six or, more rarely, for three months. Successes at the College were reported in the local press.⁸⁰ There were only three women, and two of those for three months. It is not very surprising that there were few women at the College, although less than 10% was perhaps disappointing.⁸¹ It may be that, on top of the expected restrictions on women studying, they were overlooked as recipients of scholarships.⁸² However, some were able to buck the trend including Joan Robinson who gained a Co-operative Union scholarship for the College, before going on to lecture in the Potteries and gain a scholarship to Ruskin College in 1928.⁸³ Women teachers were also an important component of the College staff. As the 1930s drew to a close, patterns of attendance stabilised.⁸⁴

From its inception, there was an important international dimension. This had not figured much in the campaigns for the College, but it soon became recognised as a significant feature. Appeals to societies for funds for scholarships highlight the presence of international students and, by the 1930s, the benefits of the ‘international character’ of the college are strongly emphasised in the appeals letters.⁸⁵ One of the very first students, T. E. Shonk, was from Australia, having arrived in England after serving during the war.⁸⁶ In a farewell account, he explained that Co-operation was not deeply rooted in his native land and he particularly welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues not immediately apparent from the textbooks and to explore the application of principles to everyday life. He had arrived as a student, but left as an advocate, keen to spread the gospel of co-operation in his home country. Another early arrival was from India.⁸⁷ Legislation in 1904 had created an Indian government bureaucracy to promote and manage a new co-operative sector with registrars heading up large departments whose staff needed training in both co-operative principles and practice—a model that would be applied elsewhere in the empire primarily in the years following the Second World War (Fig. 3.5).⁸⁸ Most were trained locally, such as at the Bihar and Orissa Co-operative Institute, but it is clear that the UK College drew in a steady flow of students from India during the interwar years.⁸⁹ Many went back to become inspectors or assistant registrars and, in one case, to manage a co-operative training institute in Madras.⁹⁰



Fig. 3.5 Bombay Co-operative Department (Bombay State was later renamed Maharashtra and Poona (renamed Pune)). Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Egypt and China often sent students at government expense. For the former, legislation was introduced in 1923 and 1927 and one of the students from 1928–30, Abdel Latif Fahmy Amer, later became Chief Inspector of Co-operatives.⁹¹ Students also came from Europe, especially Scandinavia, and from North America. From the 1925 session, a regular exchange started between the College and the International People’s High School at Elsinore in Denmark.⁹² Towards the end of the interwar period, there was a notable increase of international students to a dozen, out of a total of 37, and from a broader geographical area, ranging from the USA to South Africa, Iceland and Hungary.⁹³ Writing in 1952, Watkins commented on the international influence of the college model during the interwar years:

The idea that the national Co-operative Union should have a permanent school either at, or easily accessible to its headquarters, was swiftly appreciated and applied. Within a very few years Finland, Germany, France and Switzerland had emulated Britain or surpassed her in the provision made for co-operative teaching institutions. Somewhat later, but before the Second World War, the USA, Denmark, Austria, and Holland followed suit.⁹⁴

By September 1926, over 400 visitors had stayed at the hostel from over 14 countries, which helped the hostel to become almost self-sufficient.⁹⁵ Soon, of course, international travel became more difficult.

Closer to home, correspondence classes were a central feature of the College's work, and evening classes were available for local students. College staff ran extension-style classes.⁹⁶ Higher-level studies were channelled through the college authorities, for instance when benefactors donated funds for an annual lecture. The Kibble Lectureship fund was donated by the Co-operative Permanent Building Society, in honour of a former president, to deliver a lecture on some aspect of housing.⁹⁷ The annual Greening Lecture enjoyed large numbers. In 1925, the topic was 'From Capitalism to the Co-operative Commonwealth' and the lecture was published as a pamphlet.⁹⁸ Research work was endorsed by the statistical department. In 1919, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Congress, and in recognition of the value of the statistical work carried out for the Co-operative Survey, the Co-operative Union commenced two Jubilee Research Scholarships and the holders of these added to the presence of the College at Holyoake House. One of them, H. J. Twigg, produced two major studies on the history and the current state and organisation of co-operative education.⁹⁹

For Watkins, lecturing at the College was both a rewarding and a frustrating experience. There were challenges posed by students' lack of previous preparation, especially among those benefiting from scholarships who did not have to demonstrate academic competence but might be chosen for their job performance. Some students might well have left school at 14 with little more than elementary levels of education. This resulted in the need for a considerable amount of catching up and could be a very hard slog for students and lecturers. Another source of frustration related to the teaching methods, which Watkins thought to be behind the times. He was interested in seminars and discussions in line with European co-operative colleges but was over-ruled by Hall. For

Watkins, co-operative education was not just a matter of acquiring knowledge but also of the skills needed to become an effective co-operator.¹⁰⁰ He enthused that education should not be a ‘pallid reflection’ of a school class but should involve working and playing together (see also Fig. 3.6).¹⁰¹

The hostel created these opportunities through its collegiate environment and ethos. From the 1924–25 session, approximately 25 to 30 students remained in residence throughout the interwar period, representing the great majority of those pursuing full-time studies. It was a diverse household, including women and a significant proportion of overseas visitors, most of whom resided for two or three terms. One rare description of the hostel mentioned that it was not without its beauty and that its industry contrasted with the seclusion of a neighbouring convent.



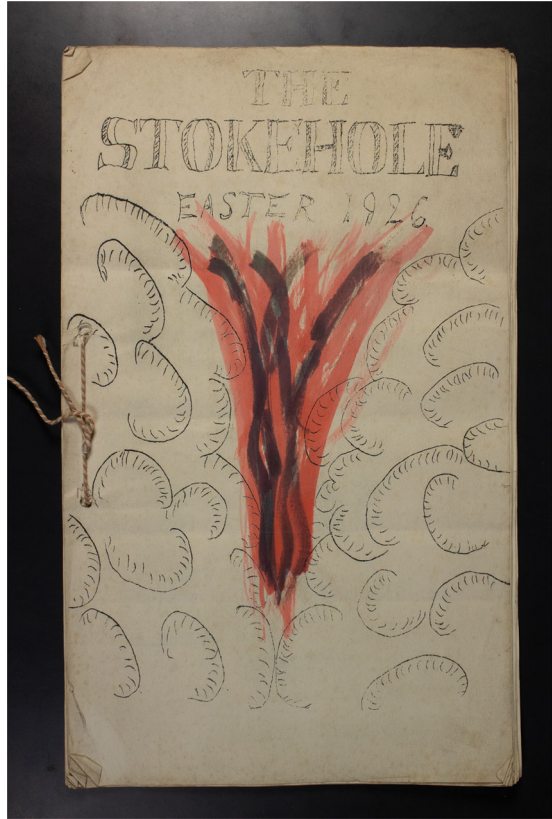
Fig. 3.6 A tutorial at the College with W. Walker. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Leaving the hectic pace of Manchester, the article explained, '[a] tram ride brings us back to Vine St, down which if we walk far enough we may leave for ever the bustle of this world by entering the peace of the Convent ... we are content to turn in at the less romantic, but more lively College Hostel'.¹⁰² Students had their own bedrooms, but study and recreation were in communal areas. Evening meals were provided and there was a domestic staff. When a neighbouring property was purchased to extend the hostel, a member of College staff started to live in.¹⁰³

The new student community soon produced a college magazine, *The Stokehole* (Figs. 3.7 and 3.8).¹⁰⁴ One of the most prominent topics of the early editions was the need to keep stoking the heating boiler, which explained the title and fiery illustration on the front cover.¹⁰⁵ Initially somewhat rough and ready with hand-drawn illustrations, from 1930 it took on a more professional design with two issues per year. It featured a standard set of tropes for such publications, including ruminations on college life and study, a record of hostel social activities and in-jokes, observations on the state of the movement and current affairs, and poetry of varied quality. For the most part, the articles were tongue-in-cheek and intended primarily for the residents who would understand the nuances, although matters of weightier substance were also aired. Altogether, the magazine contains invaluable insight into the experiences and perceptions of the pioneers of College studies.

The magazine in itself characterised corporate life among the students, with an editorial team and opening comments by the hostel chairman.¹⁰⁶ Within a few years, an unofficial College badge and tie was designed by one of the Egyptian students, and a College fund established on appropriate co-operative lines to pay for communal activities. A students' association was formed to maintain contact between former students, and the end of year issue published forwarding addresses. As might be expected, the social side of life was given attention. Monthly social evenings were a highlight and there was a varied sporting scene, including a regular football team, and less committed gymnasium group although, in 1939, Ahmed Al Demerdash Touny from Egypt, would achieve honours in the sport, go on to found the Arab Games and become a member of the International Olympic Committee. Country walks were popular, invariably, according to the accounts, through rain and mud. Indoor activities included table tennis and, by the early 1930s, a gramophone replacing, it seems thankfully, the College band. Bridging the social

Fig. 3.7 A makeshift cover of the *Stokehole*, the student magazine, for 1926. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College



and academic was a series of visits to factories and co-operative establishments and, on one recorded occasion, a less than reverent trip to Toad Lane. Academic studies do not feature as highly, although panics around examination time and the incomprehensibility of some of the lectures do get a mention. Informal lectures in the hostel were also a mainstay, if not always taken too seriously. Speakers could be college staff or external speakers, but students were encouraged to take a turn.

The very first editorial made it clear that students did not all share the same views, 'positivist and fundamentalist, flaming scarlet communist and pale pink social reformer has each had his say'.¹⁰⁷ A variety of viewpoints were raised from weighty topics, whether human nature was a

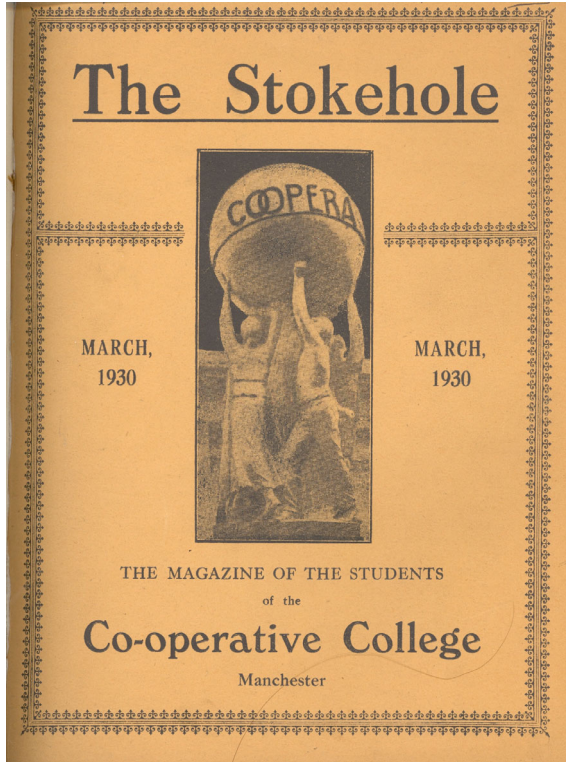


Fig. 3.8 *Stokehole* cover for 1930, experimenting with a more professional and international look. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

cause of war or the failings of capitalist economics, to social issues such as temperance, the position of women or cycling. Forthright views on the present state of co-operation were expressed, with a vigorous exchange on whether London had overtaken Manchester as the leading centre of the movement. Observations on ‘why I joined the Co-operative Movement’ by 15 contributors indicate diverse social and personal motivations: from the aspirational, ‘I started work in the movement on being interested in the movement, and later found that social progress could only be achieved by co-operation’; to the coquettish, ‘[h]aving a consuming passion for flirting, the co-operative movement provided an organisation

to suit my needs'; to the exasperated, 'God knows'.¹⁰⁸ There were criticisms that the College was not sufficiently supported, with over-worked staff and under-regarded students. A comparison with Hillcroft, a residential college for women in Surbiton, made the gendered assumption that the Co-op College was at a higher academic level with a serious curriculum that fitted people for a role in the movement.¹⁰⁹

The presence of overseas students added an important international dimension, ranging from accounts of the People's College in Denmark to observations on village life in India. One commentator thought there was not enough consideration of international affairs, although this aspect became more common as the international situation deteriorated through the 1930s.¹¹⁰ Students were those with the means to fund travel or gain scholarships and were part of the circulation of ideas, people and movements within the British Empire and beyond. During the interwar years, changing ideas of empire were taking place with the Commonwealth being formed in 1931, following the Balfour Declaration of 1926 which had conceded equal status to the dominions. Independence movements were becoming a more visible part of College life. Students able to come to Britain might spend time at the College as well as other places. In 1938, J. V. P. da Silva critiqued the oppressive British imperial state in Ceylon (later Sri Lanka) which kept wages low to defend British economic interests. Questions were raised about the co-operative movement's tea plantations. Equally critical, Touny remonstrated that Zionism in Palestine was a form of British colonialism attached to capitalism and slavery.¹¹¹ Many of the students, including from overseas, spoke outside the College at local co-operative meetings and events. 'Some of these students have rendered excellent service in lecturing for the Educational Fellowship, for branches of the Guilds, and for societies, on the co-op movements in their respective countries'.¹¹² There was also a lack of knowledge about the colonies. Dr K.S. Shelvanker, a member of the India League, speaking to co-operators, had been taken aback at the lack of understanding and found himself having to explain the difference between dominions 'which were more or less independent' and 'colonies like India which were still under the imperialist domination of this country'.¹¹³

With the decade drawing ominously to a close, the Co-operative College experienced its own upheavals. In February 1936, a stalwart of co-operative education, W. R. Rae died.¹¹⁴ Rae had served on the Education Committee for 37 years and had been its chairman for 34. He had led the revival of co-operative education in the late nineteenth

century, with a substantial foundation upon the teaching of co-operative subjects. An uncompromising advocate of ‘serious mental food’, he had been scathing of how educational funds were diverted to frivolous ends and was exhorting the movement to commit properly to education up to the end. Just two years later, Hall also died.¹¹⁵ As the linchpin of the College from its foundation, his untimely death threw the institution into disarray, damaging recruitment, and the educational session for 1938 was suspended. In the face of this turmoil, a special committee of inquiry reviewed the character and organisation of the department before taking further action.

A NEW PRINCIPAL

The passing of the founder of the College led to the venting of anxiety and criticisms which had been simmering beneath the surface—‘ideological conflicts... blossomed’ in which the ‘broad principles of Co-operative Education and its organisation’ were mulled over.¹¹⁶ A committee of enquiry into co-operative education recommended separating academic from administrative functions; appointing an administrative officer alongside a director of studies; developing research by students and staff; and making use of local universities for non-co-operative subjects. The systematising trend to create a united educational force rubbed up against the defence of local democracy. Co-operative visions could heighten the sensitivity about perceived attacks on actually existing democratic structures. A proposal to co-ordinate the work of education committees could feel like a controlling hand. J. T. Guest, the secretary of the National Association of Co-operative Educational Committees (NACEC), argued that the College was one of the ‘minor activities’ of the Union, ‘for each of its students, there should be at least a thousand in the classes of retail societies’ where the main focus should lie. Purely academic and research qualities were all very well but, to replace Hall, he wanted someone with ‘qualities of leadership ... a man who is at once a scholar and a great teacher, a competent organiser of men and ideas, one able to visualise co-operative education not as staff instruction but as the weapon with which men can create a new world’.¹¹⁷ J. P. M. Millar from the labour college, descended from the Plebs League, weighed in, repeating his misgivings about the conformity induced by university education.¹¹⁸ The educational secretary from Ashington was circumspect about a young

well-educated co-operative elite rebuking his defence of local societies. Referring to a columnist in the *Co-operative News*, he warned that:

You will have “Democritus” and the Central Education Authority, with its chairman, thirsting for your blood; the whole of the fledgelings in residence at the Co-operative College trouncing you with words, and in quite up-to-date modernism challenging you to debate.¹¹⁹

He decried the ‘smug satisfaction and contentment’ he found in the annual education reports and wanted a commission, selected by ballot, to examine the role and function of the College.

With a rising tide of criticism, Democritus feared that, unless a successor was appointed soon, ‘a process of disintegration will undoubtedly set in’.¹²⁰ The passing of the ‘strong man of co-operative education’ had indeed created a lacuna which critics and doubters of the College were exploiting although it might be an opportunity for the ‘air to be cleared’.¹²¹ Democritus corrected misconceptions about finance—the bulk of expenditure on education was controlled by local societies. In 1937, £278,000 had been allocated to retail societies; £64,000 to the Union; and £12,000 to the Education Department and College. This was reflected in the numbers. In January 1939, there were 38 students at the College, 13 of them from overseas while approximately 20,000 sat for co-operative exams each year.¹²² So, in terms of enrolment and finance, the College was already a ‘minor’ player that punched above its weight.

The long-time ally of the co-operative movement, Albert Mansbridge, favoured a robust independent college; the importance and power of the movement meant that it had ‘not only a duty to itself... but a duty to the nation’.¹²³ Co-operators certainly aspired to secure a national presence, and to gain recognition for it, without losing the essential connections to local activity. The movement had grown to such proportions that representative structures and apex bodies could make the national feel distant from work taking place in societies and sections. There was, for instance, a debate on whether teachers could attend the annual congress and education convention but only one representative was allowed at the latter.¹²⁴ Representative democracy on a large scale could potentially stifle participation not just by teachers but also students and ordinary members. In 1939, College students requested the executive to arrange a lecture by the labour movement activist and communist Tom Mann on ‘phases

of working class emancipation in which he himself took part' but the proposal was turned down and no explanation was forthcoming.¹²⁵

After a period of reflection, a new Principal, John Thomas, was engaged to start work on 1 June 1939. Thomas was 48 and had been selected from 75 applicants, all of whom were men.¹²⁶ He had been an elementary school teacher and had gained a degree in economics in 1911 from the University of Wales, winning the Cobden Prize from Cardiff University College where he also qualified as a teacher. He went on to gain an MA and doctorate from LSE and was a silver medallist of the Royal Society of Arts.¹²⁷ Thomas had been brought up in the co-op, his parents having been members of the Aberdare Co-operative Society. From 1911–19, he had been a district secretary for the South Wales WEA and served as a miners' agent and as a member of the South Wales Miners' Federation Executive from 1918–25 and was on the South Wales Coal Conciliation Board and Miners' Welfare Fund. Thomas was a member of the WEA National Executive and of the Joint Advisory Committee on University Tutorial Classes. In the Potteries, he served as a resident Tutor for Oxford University, teaching business organisation, administration and scientific management. He was widely travelled and had published jointly with G. D. H. Cole on British trade unionism. References for Thomas came from Cole, Professor Henry Clay of Manchester University, Provost W. D. Ross of Oriel College and G. H. Hall, MP.¹²⁸ The appointment committee was impressed.¹²⁹

The executive urged Thomas to address signs of declining interest in education, become president of the Co-operators' Educational Fellowship and participate in more than one event per section in the next six months in order to emphasise the national remit of the College and no doubt to assuage some of the conflagration in the wake of Hall's death.¹³⁰ Thomas was to concentrate upon educational and academic matters and R. A. Palmer, general-secretary of the Co-operative Union, would handle administrative affairs.¹³¹ Following W. I. Edwards, who died, and W. J. Rogers, who fell foul of the age limit, L. A. Hurt was appointed to the chair of the Education Executive, a relatively rapid rise after coming onto the Central Board in 1935. Like W. R. Rae, who had filled the post in the early twentieth century, Hurt was also a teacher. Democritus pleaded for longevity and durability in senior positions. Hall and Rae had worked together effectively for 21 years; he hoped the new pairing would follow suit and:

be allowed that tenure of office which alone can make for continuity of policy ... it is important, in order to obtain the desired results, there should be a degree of permanence so far as the chief places are concerned.¹³²

A further crucial debate surrounded the nature of the College curriculum. Democritus announced that Thomas had to bridge technical and member education:

In past years it has been the policy of co-operative education to build up its resources round the interest in technical education and to carry social studies along with the stream. Employee education has provided at one and the same time the sympathy of the management side of the movement, and the cash nexus. If Dr Thomas can preserve and develop the scope of technical education and re-condition and extend the education of members he will accomplish a great work.¹³³

While encompassing the education of employees, managers and members, Thomas had to foresee the direction that co-operative higher education was going to take. Fluid ideas about universities had not yet solidified into actual proposals. One discussion scrutinised whether it would be better to follow the line of European countries like Belgium, and ‘establish Chairs in the subject of Co-operation at Universities in place of a special college’, for instance, Louis de Brouckère was at Brussels University and Laval University in Quebec had created a Chair of Co-operation.¹³⁴ Hall had himself been aghast that there was no chair of co-operation at any British university and the proposal would simmer in co-operative debate.¹³⁵ There had also been suggestions for the College to join forces and create a labour movement college.¹³⁶ Yet, the urge for independence in the movement remained strong and reflected a determination that its future should not be unduly influenced by outsiders.

There had been attempts to work productively with universities via sympathetic academics. For instance, the London Education Scheme, in the words of the *Co-operative News*, ‘reached a university standard’, and featured a series of lectures by figures such as Cole on ‘the co-operative movement in its social, political and economic environment’. The scheme was run by six London societies in conjunction with London University for those in ‘ordinary occupations’—clerks but also civil servants, bricklayers, school teachers, electricians, engineers, musicians, carpenters and many women, primarily ‘housewives’. Most of them took the examination

and the examiner's report noted, 'Some work of distinctly high quality showing both knowledge and ability; some was creditable for intelligence ... and some though not of a high quality was sufficient to reach a pass standard... Not only a satisfactory idea of the economics of co-operation as such but some grasp of general economics shown'.¹³⁷ In giving these lectures, Cole himself called for closer relations on both sides:

I hope that we shall not only see the co-operative movement receiving the attention it ought to receive in the study of modern economic problems, but much more closely related to the University to see it does its democratic job properly.¹³⁸

Despite these overtures, it could not easily be developed nationally by co-operative societies and the movement did not capitalise on the opportunity. In fact, universities were partly happy to keep adult education at a distance—extra-mural in the accepted parlance.

Thomas himself initially avoided referring to the College as an 'apex', favouring instead 'nerve centre' and 'clearing house'. The bulk of students were on correspondence courses, 3,000 in the previous session and most of the 19 tutors and 12 clerical staff were preoccupied with 16,000 examination papers. He refuted any supposed limitation of 'co-operative ability' and held out great hope for the future of co-operative education.¹³⁹ By August 1939, he wrote in the *Co-operative News* that the Education Executive had agreed a Ten Year Plan which included new slogans, a pamphlet, posters and press campaign, support among the auxiliaries, conference plans, a special issue of the *Co-operative Review* and, crucially, the 'provision of a National Co-operative College worthy of the British Movement as a feature of the 1944 Centenary Celebrations' which would include 'a well-planned handsome block of self-contained administrative and teaching buildings ... would become the Mecca for intellectual co-operators'. He allowed his vision-free rein, expressing a faith in the co-operative movement to handle its own educational needs:

Such a college as I vision it would house not a handful of co-operators, 30 or so as at present, but a minimum of 300 as a start. Some of this 300 could be enrolled, say, for a co-operative graduate course of at least two or three years' study to produce co-operative leaders of thought and action, co-operative teachers – and how sadly we are in need of them

to meet the demands of our 1,094 retail societies! – and auxiliaries, co-operative administrators, managers, secretaries, and what the Americans call ‘Executives’.

The co-operative movement as a democratic organisation cannot afford to hire out its thinking and research to any outside organisation, however sympathetic such ‘outside’ help pretends to be.

If there is a history of co-operation or a theory or science of co-operative economics to be written, expounded, or interpreted, only a Co-operative College owned and controlled by the Co-operative Union can do it for the British Movement. It cannot be done by proxy by establishing a Chair of Co-operation in any other outside college or any university, however sympathetic.¹⁴⁰

The urge for independence was spurred on by Thomas’ politicised view of universities, influenced by a labour college perspective:

Think of the hundreds of thousands that pass through British Universities and Colleges to serve capitalist enterprise. Shall British co-operators with a membership of over eight millions be content with 20 to 30 students trained annually at their College? Not if I can rouse my fellow-co-operators to see a new version of co-operative education! (italics in original)¹⁴¹

The assertion of an independent College fitted with co-operative traditions of self-help and autonomy which must have reassured one group of co-operators about his intentions. Ceding territory to the universities might lead some to presume that there were already adequate educational facilities or that social subjects could be offered by universities that knew little about them so that ‘a firmly established residential Co-operative College would recede into the background’.¹⁴² The Co-operative Union’s responsibility was to defend what it viewed as the educational legitimacy and heritage of the movement as well as to safeguard the standard of scholarship winners.¹⁴³ Although its main focus was on teaching, research was seen as essential to this purpose, in alliance with the Union: ‘to establish its position it must always be extending the knowledge of co-operative history, co-operative philosophy, co-operative economics, and trading operations which it seeks to teach’.¹⁴⁴ With the Rochdale centenary now on the horizon, new plans for a college received serious attention. An approval in principle to re-build the Kersal site raised expectations.¹⁴⁵ Locations in Manchester were discussed alongside the Midlands, a seaside centre or a presence at Oxford or Cambridge.¹⁴⁶ With

so many ideas in circulation, the executive instructed speakers on the new college to liaise with the director of education who would help streamline proposals.¹⁴⁷ In a matter of months, these plans were to be thrown into disarray.

Through the 1920s and 1930s, a collegiate institution for the co-operative movement took shape and put down roots. Against the vicissitudes of war, capitalist hostility, state neglect and serial economic downturns, the educational programme of the movement was further expanded, organised and co-ordinated. Greater priority was given to training employees, and addressing social concerns, from elementary instruction to advanced study. Throughout, the centrality of the theory, history and principles of co-operation remained unquestioned. Building on the educational infrastructure, the experiences of wartime and dedicated campaigning, a Co-operative College was brought into being. Once again, the timing was unfortunate, and early enthusiasm was quickly dampened. Doubtless, some were profoundly disappointed. A suburban villa in north Manchester with classes in Holyoake House was not the shining edifice imagined on the front cover of the *College Herald*. Nonetheless, it fulfilled the purposes of a Co-operative College, which had been realised within a decade of it first being seriously proposed. It survived the upheaval of losing two key individuals and founders, Rae and Hall, within two years. An international body of students came into residence together for the extended and intensive study of issues and problems of co-operation. Across the interwar period, several hundred people, abetted by their home societies, countries or the movement at large, received grants to study at the College. They returned from whence they came, with much greater expertise and re-enthused for the cause of co-operation. The many plans for a future college were an auspicious sign.

NOTES

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9. 'Report of the Education Committee', *Co-operative Congress* (1914).
10. *The College Herald*, June 1914.
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12. *The College Herald*, May 1916.
13. *The College Herald*, May 1916, p. 7.
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23. *General Co-operative Survey, Special Co-operative Congress* (1920).
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33. Vernon, 'Co-operative Education and the State'.
34. Fred Hall, 'The Extended Programme of Co-operative Education: An address delivered at the Educational Conference at the Swansea Congress', *Co-operative Congress* (1917).
35. 'Report of Education Committee', *Co-operative Congress* (1919).
36. 'Progress of the College Scheme', *The Co-operative Educator*, April 1919.
37. 'The Congress and the College', *The Co-operative Educator*, July 1919; 'Report of Education Committee' *Co-operative Congress* (1919).
38. 'Report of Education Committee', *Co-operative Congress* (1919), pp. 46–47.
39. 'Co-operative College: Subjects of Instruction', Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1919, p. 3.
40. Hall, 'The Extended Programme of Co-operative Education'.
41. 'Ourselves', *The Co-operative Educator*, January 1917.
42. Hall, 'The Extended Programme of Co-operative Education'.
43. For a summary of the extent and organisation of the programme after a decade, see *Educational Programme Session 1931–32*, Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1931.
44. Peter Gurney, "'The Curse of the Co-ops': Co-operation, the Mass Press and the Market in Inter-war Britain", *English Historical Review*, 130:547, (2015), pp.1479–1512.
45. Wilson et al., *Building Co-operation*.
46. Michael Sanderson, *The Missing Stratum. Technical School Education in England, 1900–1990s*, London: Athlone Press, 1994.
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 56. Hall, ‘A Co-operative College’.
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CHAPTER 4

War and Peace

In April 1939, the *Co-operative News* pronounced that peace ‘is essential to educational progress’ but, a month later the veteran co-operator, T. W. Mercer, shuddered to think that the nation was ‘slipping into war’. ‘John Citizen’ had adopted the language of conflict and ‘the entire psychology of British democracy is being transformed with terrific speed’.¹ At that moment, Mercer did not realise that war would nourish a democratic spirit. Educational activity would be rapidly curtailed in a highly mobilised country which saw itself as fighting for freedom and the defeat of fascism although the College was operative throughout these years.² World war would also break many of the bonds of empire as colonial peoples asserted the need for their own freedoms which posed challenges for co-operators. In these difficult times, plans for the future were mulled over, not least for co-operative education. As hurried adjustments and contingencies were being put in place, the purpose and principles of co-operative education gained urgency. In the long term, the war gave impetus and vitality to the felt need for a new college. Two world wars within a generation had been a punishing experience that led to demands for a different type of peace. Co-operators were able to take advantage of the centenary celebrations of the Rochdale Pioneers to raise funds for a new base for the College, Stanford Hall, an eighteenth-century country estate.

EMERGENCY CURRICULUM

With the outbreak of war in September 1939, drastic plans were announced in *The Co-operative News*:

The closing of the Co-operative College is almost certain to be decided upon by the Educational Executive ... students from India and Canada ... will be unable to attend the next college session, and local societies are finding it impossible to give staff members leave of absence to attend the college ...³

Previous expectations about expansion evaporated as the movement haemorrhaged 'thousands of classes and tens of thousands of students'.⁴ The bombing of Holyoake House during the Blitz in 1940 compounded the distress as, overnight, the College lost its teaching base on the damaged upper floors which had to be moved to the hostel. A survey of societies revealed that many co-operative halls were commandeered and quite a few societies with education committees were planning to close them.⁵ One co-operator estimated that only 125–150 societies were carrying out 'proper educational work'.⁶ The Ten-Year Plan, on which progress had already been slow, went into cold storage, and meetings, classes and conferences were all postponed, cancelled or hampered.⁷

Despite the panicked response to war, those at the College were determined to continue with educational efforts to meet the pressing needs of the movement and its students. Given the inauspicious circumstances, ceasing temporarily might cause permanent damage. Debates were, for example, taking place with the National Union of Students, that was narrowly saved from closure.⁸ An editorial in the *News* modified its portentous statement about the College: 'If humanity is to emerge from the present tragedy prepared in mind and heart for the strengthening of those beliefs and institutions essential to peace, then the torch of social learning must be kept alight'.⁹ The education secretary of the Ten Acres and Sturchley Society emphasised that 'although we have to work to win the war, we have to work also to win the peace, from our point of view'.¹⁰ The College would be the only workers' college to keep going through the war and students from residential colleges and Ruskin were welcomed for the duration.¹¹

An emergency education policy was drafted. The 33 students expected in 1939–40 would be reduced to 15 and grouped in the Kersal hostel, the

other being given over to the military which, it was feared, might requisition both. By October 1939, there were 18 students at the College, including those from Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, South Africa and India. New correspondence enrolments stood at 1,098 compared with 2,191 the previous year but continuation was pivotal.¹² Although ‘normal’ teaching resumed, the syllabus was adjusted, for instance, with courses on the Efficient Employee in Co-operative Service and correspondence courses of ten sessions for wartime junior staff and new employees, known as ‘dilutees’, to help them ‘grasp the essentials of co-operative salesmanship and trading’.¹³ ‘War outlines’ for various co-operative departments included grocery, drapery, clothing and outfitting, boot and shoe, furnishing and hardware, and butchery and dairy.¹⁴ Women were viewed as essential to filling the gaps left by the men and many courses directly targeted them.¹⁵ At the Brightside and Carbrook Society in Sheffield, there was a ‘double advantage’ in training women because they would ‘endeavour to do as well as their husbands did, and ... will readily agree when the war is over to give place to their returning husbands’, which would ensure there would be ‘no question of men being without jobs when they come back’.¹⁶

An agreement with the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (NUDAW) led to courses for union members—the first time a trade union had actively collaborated with the Co-operative Union on education.¹⁷ The Union lobbied the government to allow College students the same exemptions from service as university students under the Military Training Act of 1929. It requested that the War Office recognise the College and its correspondence courses for conscripts during their military training.¹⁸ The College had also been certified by the Ministry of Labour as a suitable place for unemployed people to receive training.¹⁹

Members were catered for in new ways. Wartime Home Study Courses, adapted from Sweden, were initiated on 35 topics and 338 individual lessons ‘to enable potential co-operative students to make good use of the long, dark evenings through private study’.²⁰ These were piloted with 6–15 students meeting weekly or fortnightly with a leader who made use of study outlines and wrote up answers for the tutor to comment upon.²¹ Outline lessons on consumer co-operation focused on various topics including Principles and Practice of the Co-operative Movement; the Economics of Co-operation; Co-operative Movements under Democracies and under Dictatorships; and Co-operation in the British Empire. Despite a lack of take-up, Thomas proffered the need for hope—it was

an ‘opportunity for members to know the real strength of their movement’.²² He represented it as an inducement for members ‘even during war to think in terms of the peace co-operators would wish for, after victory has been achieved over Hitler and Totalitarian Tyranny’²³—he would ‘go about as a missionary to keep the flame of co-operative education burning in these dark days’.²⁴ Co-operation without education ‘deserved to perish’ and he was determined not to ‘betray the Pioneers ... the movement’s task was not only to sell co-operative goods, but to make good co-operators’.²⁵ He urged students to retain their ‘faith, philosophy ... gospel of Co-operation ... in civic life, in training camp, or in trenches’.²⁶ According to Arthur Hemstock’s archive sourced play on the College, Thomas was indeed ‘an evangelical personality with a propagandists (sic) fervour’ who publicised the Co-operative College in an imaginative way.²⁷

Although the pages of the co-operative press chart the decline in educational and social activity from 1939 through 1940 and into 1941, a constant stream of new initiatives emerged from the Union and College. The war nurtured an awareness of the need to anticipate and build on new needs, a typical comment being, ‘it is of little use awaiting a general demand for education. Our task is to set out creating that demand’ in which the College would act as a ‘vital centre of co-operative renaissance’.²⁸ Members were surveyed. The average age of pre-war students had been 20–23 but rapidly dropped to 17 years. Ten-week residential courses at the College were initiated and each student became a precious resource so much so that Thomas was expected to ‘prepare a suitable curriculum’ for each individual.²⁹ Ten-week courses were considered too long by some. Accordingly, Co-operative Union scholarships were allocated to specialist courses of one, two and three weeks which were open to members and employees, involving lectures, private tuition, access to the library and residence at the College.³⁰

In 1941–42, 11 students registered for the full term and were later to be joined by 24 one-week students, five of them from the Oldham Industrial Co-operative Society and seven from the Birmingham Society which offered free studentships. The latter also proposed a three-year certified course for guild members involving a month at the College.³¹ New courses were developed on Mutuality and Club Trading for Co-operators; USSR: Yesterday and Today; USA: Yesterday and Today; the Rise of Political Parties in Great Britain; the Rise of the Co-operative Party: Its Policy and Problems; and Electioneering Explained to Co-operators.³²

The following year China; Co-operators and World Peace; Empire; and Esperanto were added.³³ Correspondence students had numbered over 40,000 before the war but now stood at 4–5,000.³⁴ In 1942, the tightening up of the deferment of military and national service meant that fewer 18-year olds would be able to participate in the ten week courses.³⁵ The raising of the military age to 50 and conscription of women aged 20–30 for war work, further squeezed enrolments. Even though wartime home study courses slumped, short-term courses that helped to train dilutees were relatively successful.³⁶

In 1943, two model shops with dummies for intensive weekly courses were erected at the Kersal site and would be supplemented with film.³⁷ Courses expanded to foodstuffs, dry goods and clerical departments.³⁸ A new special Centenary College Course was planned to celebrate the Rochdale Pioneers and would be taken by 143 one-week students.³⁹ The following year, in 1944, 31 students enrolled at the College including eight long term and 23 one week students. One guild branch sent its youngest member and a 14-year-old arrived from the Grays Co-operative Society. Towards the end of the war, a special course on International Co-operative Reconstruction took place.⁴⁰

Summer schools enjoyed renewed interest, facilitating welcome opportunities for travel, socialisation and study in retreats such as Bangor away from the bombing. Ideas relating to co-operative organisation drew upon educational and intellectual trends. For example, the educationist, Shena Simon, spoke on access to secondary education while the sociologist Dr Henry A. Mess, who had been involved with the settlement movement, rehearsed eugenicist ideas about restricting the reproduction of ‘feeble-minded persons’.⁴¹ The educator, H. G. Stead, focused on the value of community as a basis for a democratic education and Hewlett Johnson, the ‘Red Dean of Canterbury’, talked about the USSR. The eclectic range was questioned by Hemstock who thought the summer schools were becoming too amorphous and drifting away from co-operative themes. It was a debate that would rumble on in the coming years. Echoing the earlier comments of W. R. Rae, Mercer contrasted the recent fad for ‘educational holidays’ with ‘systematic study’ of the past which dovetailed with Albert Mansbridge’s claim that the ‘spirit of adventure’ had been more discernible around 1900.⁴²

The upheavals of war brought new people to the College which had the effect of maintaining its international dimensions. The Union was represented on regional committees for education among the forces.

From 1943, contingents of Polish soldiers took courses, endorsed by the Polish government in London and arranged by Colonel A. Maruszewski.⁴³ In 1944, two of the student visitors would be appointed to the co-operative section of the Polish ministry in London.⁴⁴ Uruguayan citizens of Polish origin who had volunteered for the Polish army, and intended to establish a co-operative settlement in Montevideo, also studied at the College.⁴⁵ A similar scheme was drawn up with the High Commissioner for Canada for courses to circulate information ‘about one of the most democratic movements in the world [which] will be of great help in promoting international understanding’.⁴⁶ In March 1942, the College received a visit from Major J. J. Keen, the son of the Canadian co-operator George Keen who had emigrated from Stoke-on-Trent.⁴⁷ The first Canadian woman to attend the College during wartime was a nursing sister and political secretary who made the case for socialism and co-operation from the perspective of a ‘housewife’. In a BBC broadcast on capitalism and co-operation, she welcomed the ‘international attitude’ and ethos of the College that filled her with hope:

It delighted her to find that no distinctions were made, and she felt that here was a practical beginning in the art of living together that nations and peoples needed to develop.⁴⁸

Groups of 15 Canadian students enjoyed lectures, sightseeing of co-operative, public and civic buildings, factories as well as a film show, which was supported by the Lord Mayor of Manchester with social functions organised by College students and the British Council.⁴⁹ The students included a press photographer, bookseller, clerk, chemist, missionary and an Anglican priest who viewed co-operation as ‘applied Christianity’ and contrasted with one who thought the course to be an ‘excellent way of spending leave instead of being at a loose end’ (Fig. 4.1).⁵⁰

Throughout this period, the movement would grapple with its actual and symbolic position within a mutating national narrative. Co-operators were making a major contribution to the war effort and inhabited a national democratic language, infused with co-operative ideals, in opposition to fascism. William Temple, the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, propounded that the co-operative movement was well placed to train people ‘not only to be free, but to use their freedom in a social spirit...’.⁵¹ The College itself played a similar role within the movement, encapsulating a spirit of democracy and determination. The *News*



Fig. 4.1 Students and staff during the war. John Thomas seated centre. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

could be lyrical about the arrival of new students and their magazine, the *Stokehole*:

the young men and women enrolled as students at the Co-operative College in no way differ from their richer fellows who study or do not study! – at Oxford or Cambridge ...

Its name ... reveals the pure democracy of the tiny Commonwealth of Students, for a stokehole is a generator of energy, a place where the whole pace of democratic progress can be both warmed and speeded up.⁵²

As part of the war effort, individual stories were collectivised to bolster popular mobilisation. The ‘Tommy Gunn’ column in the *Co-operative News* reported on co-operators abroad including LAC (leading aircraftman) Alfred Perkins, a former College student and Leicester Society worker who was a leader and pianist in his unit dance band and organiser of co-operative study groups. As a ground wireless operator travelling across Africa, he met with two ex-students, Eric Simms and

Len Newman, who had also been to the People's International High School.⁵³ Those in the army and prisoners of war (POWs) were able to take correspondence courses with the College.⁵⁴ Private W. H. Davis, imprisoned in Germany, worked on his Co-operation stage 3 examination course via the Red Cross.⁵⁵ In January 1944, 83 POWs were taking courses in co-operation. At Stalag 383 in Bavaria, Bombardier F. Scoates, formerly of the Faversham and Thanet Society, had formed a co-operative study group involving lectures, private study and a few books. Eight students had successfully taken exams in Display, Co-operation III Sales, Grocery, Commercial Law and Bookkeeping, and a 'theory paper in window dressing' through London University.⁵⁶

Stories of survival and struggle were harnessed to arguments about the value of the College. Ex-students were tracked down and the *News* reported on Abdel Latif Fahmy Amer, who was now running a successful consumer co-operative in Cairo, having been a government employee and member of the Egyptian Government Mission to Britain.⁵⁷ E. B. Loveridge, from the Grays Society, had spent two years at the College, which had infused him with a holistic view of the movement which he recalled with fond memories: 'college students learned of the movement as a whole. Future managers, secretaries, and educationists, all lived and worked together in a team spirit which it was difficult to find in the outside movement'.⁵⁸ Current students helped to personalise the College and build a sense of purpose. Their individual ambitions harmonised with collective co-operative growth. Betty Heald, 17, from Dewsbury, 'blond, vivacious' (despite being photographed as a dark-haired woman) wanted to learn bookkeeping; Allan Horsfield had been promoted from office boy because of the war but eyed the position of branch manager; Ronald Firth, 18, a leakage clerk had been a 'little ashamed' of his previous job as butcher's boy scrubbing floors and intended to join the administrative grade of the Royal Air Force.⁵⁹ In 1942, Mercer, writing as 'Lawrence Graham', met students at the College which revealed much about the way they were perceived. Gwynne Burgess, 'a lively girl of 20', was an assistant in the Burslem boot and shoe department who aimed to gain a managers' diploma and become a footwear buyer. Jogneshwar Gogoi from Assam was 'a student of a very different colour', who had formed a co-operative 'somewhere in India', had been involved in social work in India with Gandhi, worked with J. J. Mallon, warden at Toynbee Hall and treasurer of the WEA, and studied at the International Co-operative Alliance as well as London University. His purpose at the College was to

‘work out a scheme for applying the co-operative principle in India’.⁶⁰ Mercer reflected wider attitudes to empire while underlining the ‘immeasurable’ service that students had given to the movement in Britain and overseas.⁶¹

Wartime sacrifices made young people very aware of the costs to their careers. Students weighed the relative merits of education and experience within co-operatives which could devalue qualifications. Hetty Jackson was awarded a 12-month Fred Hayward Scholarship, was an employee in the CWS National Health Insurance Department and a member of both the Burslem Society and on the education committee of the Ten Acres and Stirchley Society. As the students’ secretary, she asked for ‘fair consideration when applying for jobs’ and wrote of the hardship involved in attending College, reflecting a common wish to ‘get on’ in life.⁶² In the *News*, ‘Gee Emm’ wrote that students wanted ‘assurance that certificates of merit gained as a result of study will give them an advantage over the “have nots” when key positions are being decided’. This change would have represented a significant departure from ‘our old system of promotion by age, length of service, and other methods peculiar to our movement’.⁶³ In the same vein, an employee grumbled that, having taken many diplomas, he had seen ‘those who take no interest in such essential study selected by my society’s board for higher posts, based on length of service and favouritism’.⁶⁴ The future M.P., conscientious objector and youth organiser, Laurie Pavitt, had taken the secretarial course with honours but on returning to his society was disheartened at being given a job as a milk roundsman. It was feared that discounting secondary and university education might mean that the ‘best youth of the country will be lost to the movement’.⁶⁵ By contrast, defenders of the status quo were apprehensive about automatically placing College alumni in prestigious jobs which might engender ‘a snobbishness that speaks very disparagingly of a possible sweeping of a shop’.⁶⁶ Stalwarts bemoaned those who ‘believe three months at the College gives them a self-adjusted halo, and entitles them to a seat at an office desk. They fail to realise that part of their education is still to be won by experience’.⁶⁷ Officials might bristle at taking on someone with secondary education on the same salary as an experienced 18-year-old. Co-operators may also have harboured a fear about their own level of education at the same time as they were contributing to the educational revolution elsewhere. Co-operative leaders had been educated in elementary schools and had little experience even of secondary schools.⁶⁸ John Beavan, editor of

the *Manchester Evening News* reflected that co-ops had ‘done a lot for education, but have failed to employ the educated’.⁶⁹

HIERARCHY, DEMOCRACY AND THE MAINSTREAM

The suspicion that the College was provoking lofty attitudes and elitism could also be found in dissent over the ‘educational machinery’ and democratic structure of the movement. Wartime emergencies created space for grievances to be aired. Resentfulness between the Co-operative Union Education Executive and the National Association of Co-operative Education Committees (NACEC), which had been re-ignited by the selection of a new College principal, escalated into self-destructive bitterness. NACEC viewed itself as the true democratic representative of the educational side of the movement. In 1939, it had only been granted £138 in comparison with the £251,973 devoted to educational committees as a whole—their ‘imagination swelled with the thought of what might be done if that vast sum were controlled on a nationally-planned basis’.⁷⁰

The Executive refused to accept NACEC as a member so long as the sectional associations were already members because they would be represented twice. Various proposals circulated.⁷¹ In 1940, D. Mason, the newly elected chair of NACEC, wasted little time in urging ‘the desirability of reconstituting the educational executive of the Co-operative Union in a way that would give those responsible for carrying out educational work in societies a measure of control over policy’.⁷² In December 1941, a fragile truce was reached with the Union recognising NACEC as co-ordinating the views of educational and sectional committees, but it would not grant it a permanent position with full time staff which would have undermined existing arrangements.⁷³ The agreement did not last and frustrations soon broke out again which exhausted available energy. The *News* editorial was agitated at the internecine hostility, ‘Time presses. Time presses. The time to save the world is now ... take full advantage of this unprecedented opportunity to preach the co-operative gospel and proclaim the liberating word’.⁷⁴ Mercer was alarmed about this ‘sickness of the soul’ among co-operators.

carping and complaining, scratching and biting, standing idly in the wings
... while all the foundations of the civilised world were rocking...

The grand fault of present-day co-operative education is that it has organised itself to death, and encumbered itself with so much unnecessary machinery that executives, committees, sub-committees, and demi-sub-committees now seem almost incapable of taking full advantage of the living hour – the finest opportunity co-operative educationists have ever had, or will have, to proclaim co-operation’s liberating gospel...⁷⁵

In 1943, a new educational council was set up as a compromise although antagonisms rumbled on beneath the surface.⁷⁶ The positive proposals for the College that would emerge became a rallying cry that helped to salve the wounds somewhat.⁷⁷ In 1944, the College was formally made an educational charity with the Union as its trustee.

This internal bickering was one aspect of debates about the shape and future of co-operative education. Cultivating a mutually reinforcing and democratic structure at scale, in which the roots of the movement nourished national growth, that in turn bolstered local activity, was a co-operative perennial. The College had to be grounded in local forms of learning and sociability that cultivated activists and loyal members, but it also had to justify higher levels of learning. For Hurt, the College should encourage ‘the training of co-operative intellectuals, a group of co-operative thinkers’ who would need ‘a more careful system of selection’. For this reason, he was critical of single term scholarships that did not educate in adequate depth.⁷⁸ But while the College was viewed as a ‘power-house for creating leaders with a consciousness of the movement’s economic mission’, sceptics remained ‘baffled by the larger problem of educating the masses’.⁷⁹ The centre depended upon a structure to underpin it.

One way of addressing this democratic conundrum was seen to lie with discussion groups which might be led by a College trained tutor.⁸⁰ Education committees were encouraged to channel enthusiasm in order to create an ‘intelligent co-operative opinion’:

Men and women, more than ever before, have been able to experience group activity and discussion, and many of them will be able and eager to apply the technique of social living acquired in the war to the enrichment of their own and their neighbours’ lives in peace.⁸¹

Aspects of College education might be replicated to disseminate learning experiences and prefigure a new way of working in the movement. W. H. Bourne recalled his time at the College where learning took place

through ‘personal contacts’ with tutors so that they were ‘trained and imbued with the spirit of co-operation’. Not everyone would have access to the range and depth of this education, but he hoped that travelling teachers and correspondence courses could be allied to ‘the inspiration and practical exposition of the management’ so that managers might organise discussion groups on technical issues. Managers should be motivated by ‘mutual trust’ and ‘real leadership’ to ensure that information was no longer ‘locked away in the minds and offices of the officials’.⁸² Informal learning would form a basis for investigating qualities of leadership and those who might advance their training.⁸³ It was a tall order for a movement permeated by structure and seniority.

W. P. Watkins identified opportunities by pointing out that if study groups were run on a comparable scale to Sweden there would be 700,000 of them in Britain.⁸⁴ The College helped him to re-think the movement as a whole. Discussion groups could become ‘nerve cells of a reviving movement’:

Co-operative education cannot be truly national unless it is first of all local. It must thrust its roots deep and wide amongst the common people if it is to flourish and bear fruit. The amorphous and inert mass must and can be vitalised by group organisation. A dozen members meeting regularly in the place where they live will serve as a unit, provided they are intelligently supervised and supported. Such groups of neighbours can be multiplied without end. They would constitute the nerve-cells of a reviving movement ... centres of enlightenment on national and international co-operative affairs. By the regular discussion of the movement’s problems they would broaden their vision of co-operation as a method capable of many applications.

... The chief need of the Co-operative College is not and never was cash, but a constant supply of well-grounded students. Societies must ... muster the bodies of co-operators eager to learn, who will not only demand the advanced teaching the College will provide, but, will be fit to receive it. The essence of a national education system resides in the circulation of students, a constant flow of co-operators from the localities to the College, and from the College back to the localities.⁸⁵

For Watkins, members were capable but needed to be activated via co-operative organisation and networks that would, in turn, create a greater demand for the College. The general manager of the Murton Colliery

Society and an ex-student, wrote into the *News* to agree with these sentiments and call for 'intensive propaganda' in support of the College; the problem was not the financial position of societies but their willingness to back the College.⁸⁶

From 1942, on a broader canvas, educational systems and structures were increasingly a topic of national debate. Co-operators detected 'a stirring and a ferment' as various educational bodies were being sounded out about potential legislation. The movement had been a founding member of the Council for Educational Advance along with the WEA, TUC and NUT, chaired by Mallon.⁸⁷ The following year, the Educational Executive presented a memorandum to the Board of Education Departmental Committee on Public Schools which fancied that these schools might become national institutes that would fit in with a common school system.⁸⁸ Hurt hoped that common forms of education would see 'the sweeping away of the class barrier ... every child must travel side by side as far as their own capability, not the incomes of their parents, will carry them'.⁸⁹ The supposition about differential abilities was to become a contested issue in post-war selective education but, in the early 1940s, it was being linked to a common system of education within a democratic nation.

This was a fast-moving stream in which co-operators evinced the need for a common system of education but, in doing so, left the exact position of the movement in an ambiguous position. From 1941, as President of the Board of Education, R. A. Butler, had made promising overtures to the movement in consultations but was later reticent to recognise the Union 'for grant earning purposes' because he saw it as 'an adult educational institution provided by an organisation that is not primarily an educational organisation'.⁹⁰ In addition, the raising of the school leaving age from 14 to 15 was formally supported by the movement but had created problems for societies that had traditionally recruited school-leavers. The notion of the multilateral school appealed to co-operators who would 'naturally come to regard all types of skill, whether of the hand or of memory, as equally valuable'.⁹¹ Equality of opportunity was being understood in such a way that 'the academic type was not to be considered to the exclusion of all' and even the *Norwood Report*, which alleged there were different types of children, could be welcomed on these grounds, albeit somewhat mistakenly given its assumptions about the different natural abilities of students.⁹² Mansbridge, surprisingly given

the history of the WEA, also thought there was an ‘over-emphasis upon literary education’.⁹³

Related changes to mainstream vocational qualifications were on the horizon. Hurt and Mrs M. Allen attended the conference of the Institute of Grocers which proposed that training and qualifications be a ‘pivotal point’ for post-war technical education for the grocery trade. Hurt arrived with a ‘watching brief’ but rapidly became more involved, partly to uphold the independence of co-operative qualifications. He supported new qualifications ‘in so far as it would refer to other than co-operative concerns ... their aims were identical – the lifting of the educational standard of grocery trade employees’.⁹⁴ Stanley Maudsley of the Education Executive joined the education committee of the Institute to help draw up a curriculum for submission to the Board of Education and local education authorities which was partly modelled upon a co-operative statement. Again, he pronounced that, where sufficient students were available, separate classes in co-operative bookkeeping and business organisation should be arranged. The urge for autonomy remained strong although the confidence in the ability of co-operators to go it alone would lead to their marginalisation in the post-war years.

Engaging with the mainstream helped to rekindle debates about the role of universities in co-operative education. The movement rightly claimed its position in the nation as contributing to the war effort but equally it did not want to lose its unique educational provision. The co-operator G. A. Holland found it very significant that, just as the 1944 Act was going to ‘bring the whole population into the national system of education’, the re-organisation of co-operative education was taking place. He intimated that ‘A comprehensive co-operative theory of education must accompany a theory of world political and economic democracy’:

through close relations of reciprocal influence and dialectical interchange of ideas ... continually vitalised by developments in university teaching. It would be a weakness in the co-operative educational system to try to live a narrow life of its own; and not to share to the full the rich experience, formulated in economics and politics, of the life of the whole community.⁹⁵

Plugging co-operative learning into the national current of university education was a rationale for Holland who looked forward to a time when

voluntary co-operation became the official distributive agency for the importation, wholesale and distribution for all consumer goods. Research and higher education were essential pre-requisites of these developments and he advocated that the College might form a constituent part of the University of Manchester in order to work out 'scientific methods and university standards in the study of co-operative problems'.⁹⁶ Another commentator intuited that a separate college would 'segregate and separate' students rather than allowing them to 'mix freely' for which reason the movement should endow a chair in co-operation at Manchester University and set up a post-graduate college with some allowance for short courses.⁹⁷ The impulse for independence could appear as 'veiled hostility' to the universities.⁹⁸ A co-operative policy of 'splendid isolation' meant that university students knew little about co-operation.⁹⁹ Harold Laski, a sympathetic commentator on the labour movement, perhaps uninformed, ridiculed the College and its text-books at a Co-operative Party summer school in Nottingham, as 'an insult to the student'. Laski recognised the value of vocational education but denied that education could be carried out 'in bits and pieces' rather than as 'a continuous process'; the College was encouraged to make use of teachers located in 'bourgeois colleges'.¹⁰⁰ There were also many examples of joint work with universities: the Dean of the Faculty of Economics at Manchester University was willing to accept students from the College; co-operative educationists were frequently university-educated—Fred Hall, Thomas or J. A. Hough, the Union research officer; and the College in the USA, the Rochdale Institute, had been chartered by the State University of New York; and so on.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Mansbridge thought the College might operate as a university college like Nottingham, Hull, Exeter and Southampton, offering degrees through the University of London.¹⁰²

The tension in co-operative education between involvement and independence echoed proposals relating to common ownership. When Dr. Warbasse of the Rochdale Institute accused British co-operators of capitulating to statism, Jack Bailey countered that the divide between politics and economics was not as great as Warbasse assumed. For Bailey, the debate in Britain had moved on so that 'the situation which faces us in this country is not a choice between co-operative and State ownership of the key industries, but between more powerfully entrenched private monopolies and some form of collective ownership'.¹⁰³ Building upon the distinctive purpose of the co-operative movement without becoming isolated was a difficult dilemma to handle.

COLONIAL DEVELOPMENTS

The war shone a light on the relations between the co-operative movement, its College and the social forces enveloping the empire. Co-operators were conflicted in relation to the colonies. The movement had long sourced its produce from the British Empire and even had its own tea plantations. In 1939, the *Co-operative News* featured a photo on a co-operative tea estate with the caption ‘dusky beauties, who play an important part in “filling the nation’s teapot...”’.¹⁰⁴ Fred Hall’s book for children, *Sunnyside*, described the production of tea as a co-operative endeavour. An uneasy feeling about empire stirred a craving to discern and work with it. From the late 1930s, more articles in the *Co-operative News* focused on various aspects of empire.¹⁰⁵ Many criticisms of colonialism circulated in the movement. A College student, Laminah Sankoh, found the ‘ignorance’ of the average Briton about the colonies ‘inexcusable’ but thought that co-operatives could provide democratic training and economic security.¹⁰⁶ Mrs F. M. Whatley condemned colonial exploitation and demanded self-determination for India.¹⁰⁷ In 1940, the Co-operative Congress debated a resolution on the colonies to give India the right of self-determination along the lines of the dominions.¹⁰⁸ Within the Guild, colonies were a regular topic of interest. Mrs Bamber belittled ‘Colonel Blimps’—the empire ‘was nothing to be proud of’. She wanted to make contact with women in the colonies ‘to understand the problems of their Colonial sisters’.¹⁰⁹ The journalist Hebe Spaul was invited to the Hornchurch Women’s Guild where she informed her audience that some people in India were looking to the co-operative movement which ‘placed a special responsibility on co-operators to try to understand India’s needs, so that they might be prepared to hold out a helping hand when the occasion offered’.¹¹⁰

The war had forced the colonies into public attention with renewed vigour. In 1942, a writer in the *News* recalled the openly racist language of his otherwise ‘excellent sergeant’, a set of attitudes he felt was shared by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, as well as ‘the majority of the British people’. Although the white man was perceived to be an ‘exploiter’, the writer made inflated claims for the co-operative movement despite that fact that it had taken ‘little interest’ in the subject:

Colonial reform is the co-operative movement's business. We can assert, boldly and plainly, that our movement has the key to solving the colonial problem. War has made such problems not less, but more important. Hitlerism and its counterpart in Japan will not be destroyed by Europeans alone.¹¹¹

A *News* editorial urged the government to 'settle with India now' before the communists or Japanese became an influence.¹¹² Indeed, the war surfaced a contradiction between the freedom from fascism and the freedom of the colonies; the latter would have to wait. Gogoi wrote in the student magazine about the hypocrisy of British imperialism that subjugated three-quarters of the population of the empire while claiming to fight for freedom—he questioned were 'democratic rights only the privileges of white people?'¹¹³ In 1942, with revolt in India, the *News* was confused in its response, reiterating that the British had introduced democratic ideas to India, that independence would come, in time, but that there was a need to suppress the rebellion in order to concentrate upon the war effort and ensure that India did not fall into the hands of the Japanese.¹¹⁴ It was a thorny position to be in favour of independence for India as well as the internment of Congress Party leaders who were campaigning for that independence.¹¹⁵ The College itself developed a home study course on India which included a section on Indian nationalism and recent political changes.

The educational role of the co-operative movement drew sustenance from debates on the colonies and plans for peace on which there was a fair amount of interparty political consensus until the early 1950s.¹¹⁶ The Minister of Labour and National Service, Ernest Bevin, speaking at an International Labour Office (ILO) conference in London, stated that, 'You cannot have a decent civilisation if you leave the peasant of the world underpaid and underfed'. Co-operation, he intimated, was 'the one universal principle that has proved successful in every part of the world in improving the conditions of peasant producers...'.¹¹⁷ Arthur Creech Jones, who was shortly to become Secretary of State for the Colonies, spoke at a summer school and to the Brighton Co-operative Society where he underlined that Britain's trusteeship was comparatively benign, that Britain was attempting to avoid exploitation and was becoming conscious of its

responsibilities to less fortunate peoples, and was already doing much to assist the colonies in their struggles against disease, famine, and ignorance. The Government has also planned to spend large sums of money in future years, so that any economic wealth gained from the colonies might be paid back to them in services which would enable them to attain a higher standard of life.¹¹⁸

This was a version of ‘developmental colonialism’ and created a route through which the post-war Labour government could engage with the colonies which was ‘no mean feat’ given the attitudes of many members of the Labour Party, and indeed many in the co-operative movement, towards imperialism.¹¹⁹ In 1943, Creech Jones attested that ‘the importance of co-operative enterprise in the healthy development of colonial areas’ had been underestimated.¹²⁰

The wartime Colonial Secretary, Conservative Oliver Stanley, outlined the policy of ‘trusteeship’ that would ‘guide Colonial people along the road to self-government within the framework of the British Empire. We are pledged to build up their social and economic institutions, and we are pledged to develop their natural resources’.¹²¹ A capacious notion of learning was needed for the colonies:

The education I have in mind goes far beyond the classroom walls, far beyond the teacher’s voice. It cannot only be found in books. It cannot be learnt by heart. It does not end with schooldays ... The sort of education that we want as a basis for political development is education by life for life. It must, of course, include the more formal kind of literary education, and therefore I shall deal with higher and elementary education in the Colonies. I want, too, to deal with subjects which I consider just as important - education through local government, education through community effort, such as trade unions and co-operatives, and education through actual practice in administration.¹²²

The 1944 white paper, *Mass Education in African Society*, was to emphasise that co-operatives and trade unions were a ‘powerful incentive to mass education’ partly because they ‘depend for their existence on the initiative and effort and community spirit of their members’.¹²³ For M. O. K. Onwuli, an official in the colonial administration, colonialism and the cash nexus had upset the informal co-operative living of ‘primitive people’ and it was the task of co-operation to support reconstruction and

‘rural uplift’.¹²⁴ These hopeful overtures were looking to growing independence as an ordered and partial transition, but the expectation was that it would be given not taken. This was part of a long history of experimentation in colonial settings in ways that might not be countenanced at home even though ideas about community development would later be re-imported into Britain.¹²⁵

The Co-operative College was seen as having a crucial role to play in this uplift. Mallon, became excited about the proposed College which represented ‘The combination of Owen’s “Utopian idealism”, with their own practical business sense ... to make a new start at a dark hour in English social history’. Mallon took an international approach contending that the College should ‘aim at leading the world in co-operative thought and research’ especially in ‘backward countries, and particularly some of our own colonies’:

We cannot have freedom from want without having a high level of active prosperity in all lands, including those which have hitherto been most depressed. If this is to be realised in Africa, the West Indies, and elsewhere a firmly rooted co-operative movement is essential. A British Co-operative College might well be a power-house of co-operative energy throughout the world by the influence that it could exercise through students drawn from these infant movements.¹²⁶

Pervasive developmental thinking assumed that elite groups might be trained up to take the lead in new nations. In 1940 a Fabian Colonial Bureau had been set up. A Fabian Committee for the Study of Co-operation in the Colonies suggested the College might play a role in training ‘young British co-operators and young native students willing to undertake co-operative organisational work in the Colonies’.¹²⁷ By April 1943, the College was actively conferring over potential collaboration with the Colonial Office

The principal is also in negotiation with the British Council and the Colonial Office, with a view to establishing a scheme whereby Indian and Jamaican students now training in this country could attend the Co-operative College on Government scholarships.¹²⁸

The Committee was chaired by the Labour politician and later governor of Cyprus, Lord Winster, and included Creech Jones, Percy Redfern as

well as colonial co-operators, Claude F. Strickland, author of *Co-operation for Africa*, and Hubert Calvert, former registrar for the Punjab.

The embrace of co-operation, which presented opportunities for the College, revealed elements of hierarchy. In 1944, the Fabian Bureau recommended the formation of a co-operative department within the Colonial Office. *Co-operation in the Colonies* argued that ‘co-operative methods’ could help to ‘overcome the poverty of millions’ via ‘practical help to the struggling co-operators in the colonies’. Despite the impulse to help the less fortunate, co-operation was not proposed on a benevolent or relief basis but to foster self-help. It recommended that ‘a definite number of scholarships could be allocated so as to enable Colonial students to study British co-operation in theory and practice at the co-operative college (sic)’.¹²⁹ The *News* editorial endorsed the report and illustrated the way that co-operation could serve multiple purposes: ‘Everywhere the native populations are in need of credit, machinery, markets, schools, and friendly oversight and guidance ... the main aim of British policy must be to help the peoples of these large areas to help themselves, and thereby to rise to higher standards of life and civilisation. No one who knows the facts can doubt that the self-help and mutual aid stimulated by co-operative work and efforts is the policy best fitted to achieve these aims’.¹³⁰ In September 1944, an Office Committee on Co-operation in the Colonies held its first meeting. Follow-up meetings were held with the College through 1945.¹³¹

VISIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR A NEW COLLEGE

Amid rapid transformations, new proposals were being floated for a different type of college. The primary concern of the Union was to establish the Co-operative College on a solid footing. Post-war futures were imagined, informed by the shortcomings of the First World War period when the movement had been short-changed by government and business. In 1941, the *Co-operative News* opined that there had been too much ‘scuttle’ and abandonment of educational policy among co-operators but, out of these ruins, new possibilities were arising:

It takes courage and real co-operative conviction to discuss the place of co-operation in the post-war world, when your present world is in ruins around you and you cannot be sure whether either meeting-room or members will survive the night!¹³²

Bringing the College into a new palpable form was spurred on by the appearance of co-operative colleges which may have paid homage to the British model but were now in some respects outstripping it. The ex-College student and later lecturer, May Goulding, had given a glowing report about Vår Gård in Sweden which had ‘forged ahead’ with its college that served just 60,000 members, at a time when the British movement had been ‘basking too comfortably in the warm sunshine of prosperity’.¹³³ It was not just Sweden—Switzerland had a ‘palatial’ college at Freidorf; in 1937, the Rochdale Institute had been founded under the leadership of Warbasse¹³⁴; and Venezuela had its own Institute of Co-operative Studies.¹³⁵ H. Kemp, a member of the Educational Executive and former College student, also judged Denmark, Switzerland and Sweden to be ahead of Britain which ‘should endeavour to set an example to the rest of the world instead of lagging behind’.¹³⁶ Such accounts added grist to the College campaigning mill and heightened the sense of urgency.

The general agitation around education and the future suffused planning for the College. In May 1942, Hurt deployed a horse racing metaphor, that they had ‘rounded Tattenham Corner’ and he identified ‘distinct signs of recovery’.¹³⁷ Thomas testified to the enthusiasm, affirming that he had never witnessed ‘such a deep and widespread interest ... in the existing educational structure which had partly resulted from the work of voluntary bodies such as the trade unions and co-operatives’.¹³⁸ Co-operators were taking stock: by June 1942, 439 students had been in residence at the College, 108 of them from overseas who represented half the countries of the world.¹³⁹ A special correspondent reported on plans for a new college, ‘one of the most splendid and exciting day-dreams in which a co-operative educationist can indulge’. The Union reviewed co-operative colleges abroad, the ancient universities and the formation of a co-operative community, all ‘essential preliminaries to construction’.¹⁴⁰ The Executive had also researched various experiments in community education stretching back to Owenism:

Members of the Executive have visited or considered many educational ‘dreams-come-true’ ... the Dartington Hall Estate, the Cambridge Village College Schemes, modern technical colleges such as those which have been built in South-East and South-West Sussex, and the Danish Folk High Schools. These varied experiments led to consideration of whether one

favourite proposal among co-operative educationists was a practical possibility – the co-operative community or agricultural estate with a college as part of the scheme.

But the experience of the past, they thought, was against this project. Community estates of this kind have not been remarkable for success, and failure of the community scheme would mean the collapse of the college itself.¹⁴¹

Although the Owenite community idea was viewed as impractical, a strain of utopianism was retained. The proposed ‘training and research centre for members and employees’ was to form the embryo of a larger vision in which a central college would be surrounded by sectional ones as the ‘nucleus of a co-operative university’.¹⁴²

The *News* confirmed that what was visualised ‘is no mere tinkering’ but ‘a real College, for serious study and research ... From this College could develop a miniature university, which would provide immense stimulus to the movement’s thought and philosophy’.¹⁴³ The Education Executive expressed its hope for the College to become a place ‘where people on the trading and educational sides of the Movement could come together to discuss post-war problems, with a view to issuing reports similar to those being published by the Nuffield College’.¹⁴⁴ The Co-op College was to be fully equipped for teaching and also include dining rooms, common room, gym, hall and stage, and playing fields so that weekend and summer schools could be accommodated. There was a broad agreement that the whole Education Department of the Union would be transferred to the new site, that it should be within striking distance of a federal co-operative body, a large retail society and an established university but beyond this the question of location remained ‘vexed’.¹⁴⁵ Some eyebrows were raised by the proposal for a separate fund for the midlands section which proposed to build a separate college of some type.¹⁴⁶ Arguments were put forward for London where there were now many co-operators and a ‘people’s college’ for the labour movement might be created.¹⁴⁷

In 1943, a fund for the College was formally launched, as part of the centenary celebrations planned for 1944 (Fig. 4.2).¹⁴⁸ Without wanting to undermine what had already been achieved, Hurt still yearned for a new college because ‘we have never yet had one – at least not one we dare to present before the public eye’. The previous appeal for the college had resulted in ‘dismal failure’.¹⁴⁹ Difficulties with tax could be overcome via a trust deed which would bind societies to pay a sum over seven years.¹⁵⁰

It was an auspicious time to make this request as many societies were sitting on unspent educational budgets which, it was hoped, would be channelled into the College Fund. A goal of £250,000 was set and, by March 1945, the Fund stood at £154,477.¹⁵¹

Making a success of the College depended on scholarships. Thomas, now deputising for E. G. Haskins of the Educational Executive, said that plans should be made ‘in the light of the experience of the last 23 years, which was that the College had never been able to draw more than 30 to 40 resident students’.¹⁵² However, in 1944, to mark the centenary of the movement, the CWS Board responded to this challenge by agreeing to award 20 annual scholarships of £100 each at the College—ten through open competition among members of retail societies and ten to CWS employees.¹⁵³ These could not be taken up in 1944 due to the National Service Acts but were available thereafter.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the Women’s Co-operative Guild aimed to create a chair in international relations in memory of Margaret Llewelyn Davies for which £12–15,000 would be needed.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps in order to encourage generosity, the *News* reported that many scholarship funds had in fact originated with the service and sacrifice of individual co-operators: William Lowe from Warrington who gave £150 that his society supplemented with £250; Hall’s fee of £250 for three textbooks had been transferred to a Pioneers Scholarship fund; the Florence Davies Scholarship was dedicated to summer schools; and so on.¹⁵⁶ In November 1944, a Friends of the College scheme had been launched although, by April 1945, only a few had joined.¹⁵⁷

Unexpectedly, the next steps for a new College were not to be taken forward by Thomas who quietly disappeared from official records after the autumn of 1943. It is noted some six months later that he had not been in office for a time. In fact, Thomas had been sacked; his hearing at an employment tribunal scrutinised some ‘unfortunate incidences’ and turned down his appeal. He had lost the support of some staff in re-arranging workloads and making staff redundant in wartime. He also fell out of favour with key figures in the Union, who expressed unease at some of the things he wrote, for instance, in *Two Approaches to Co-operation*, which expressed some sympathy for the Soviet Union and outlined voluntary, municipal and state socialism as a challenge to capitalism.¹⁵⁸ The trigger came at a summer school when Thomas’ wife gave an unauthorised after dinner speech in which she objected about her husband’s terms and conditions. Thomas refused to apologise and his employment was terminated.¹⁵⁹ Thomas was lost to the College and went on to work for

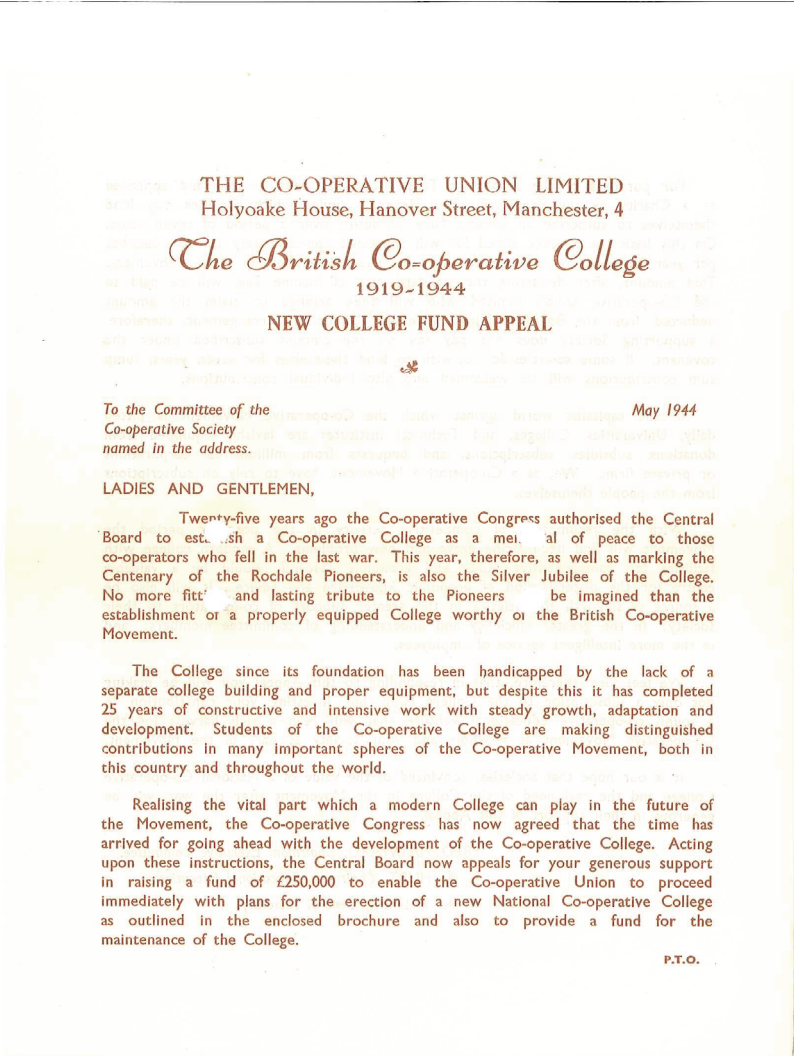


Fig. 4.2 An appeal letter for the Co-operative College. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

For purposes of the Appeal, a Trust Deed has been created and approved as a Charity by the Board of Inland Revenue, under which societies may bind themselves to subscribe an amount they so desire over a period of seven years. On this basis the amount aimed for will represent approximately 1d. per member per year for seven years if spread over the present membership of the Movement. That amount, after deducting the standard rate of Income Tax, will be paid to the Co-operative Union Limited who will then arrange to claim the amount deducted, from the Board of Inland Revenue. Under this arrangement, therefore, a supporting Society does not pay tax on the amount subscribed under the covenant. If some societies do not wish to bind themselves for seven years, lump sum contributions will be welcomed and also individual contributions.

In the capitalist world against which the Co-operative Movement is pitted daily, Universities, Colleges, and Technical Institutes are lavishly equipped from donations, subsidies, subscriptions, and bequests from millionaires, corporations or private firms. We, as a Co-operative Movement, have to rely on subscriptions from the people themselves.

With the resumption of competitive activity in the post-war period the Movement will find itself facing grave and new problems. A modern college with facilities for comprehensive study and economic research would be a valuable centre for the dissemination of economic knowledge and advice. It will also be a source of strength to societies in the greater support of co-operators to their society; in the greater efficiency and understanding of committee members; and in the more intelligent service of employees.

We feel sure, therefore, that in responding to this Appeal you will be making not only a subscription to the College Fund, but investing your contribution in a sound co-operative educational venture that will reap a rich harvest for the Co-operative Movement as a whole and your society as part of the Movement.

It is our hope that societies, convinced of the value of a National Co-operative College and the real need of the College in the Movement after the war, will be generous in their support of this Appeal.

FRED HAYWARD, *Chairman, Executive Committee.*

L. A. HURT, *Chairman, Educational Executive.*

R. A. PALMER, *General Secretary.*

Fig. 4.2 (continued)

CO-OPERATIVE COLLEGE TRUST

I/WE, the undersigned
 on behalf of.....Co-operative Society Ltd.,
 of.....in the County of
hereby covenant with the
 Co-operative College Trust, the offices of which are at Holyoake House,
 Hanover Street, Manchester, 4, that for seven years from the date hereof, and
 thereafter from year to year until otherwise determined, the Society will pay
 annually to the said Trust from the Society's taxed income such a sum as will
 after deduction of Income Tax at the current rate yield the sum of.....
 net, and so that the Society shall receive no personal or private benefit in any
 of the said years from the said annual payments or any part thereof.

In witness whereof we have hereunto set our hand and seal this
day of.....Nineteen Hundred and
 Forty.....

Signed, Sealed, and delivered by the
 above-named in the presence of
 Witness.....
 Address.....

 Occupation.....

Fig. 4.2 (continued)

the BBC and civil service.¹⁶⁰ The Education Executive initially planned to recruit but, on second thoughts, delayed. Hurt certainly thought that 'too much haste' would be unwise.¹⁶¹ The lack of a principal, however,

was no barrier to progressing the work of the College and Maudsley took up the slack in driving this forward.

STANFORD HALL AND PEACE

New opportunities arose as attention turned to the use of stately homes during wartime, a topic covered in the co-operative press. The movement was aware of convalescent homes taking over large houses in Scotland or Herne Bay in the south.¹⁶² At the 1942 Bangor Summer School, Sir Richard Livingstone identified opportunities for residential adult education after the war when ‘many big houses in pleasant surroundings, even historic buildings, will be vacant’.¹⁶³ The *News* editorial recommended this idea to educational committees as ‘large mansions’ might become a ‘centre for co-operative life’.¹⁶⁴ Residential people’s colleges were seen as ‘the one supreme chance ... for establishing adult education as an essential feature of our national life’.¹⁶⁵ The labour movement was consulting on similar options and trade unions would also acquire houses. In 1943, Tong Hall near Huddersfield was purchased for the movement.¹⁶⁶ It was followed by the acquisition of the baronial Dalston Hall near Carlisle for use by the Co-operative Youth Centres which had burgeoned during the war.¹⁶⁷ *Picture Post* soon photographed a group of young co-operators listening to poetry under the branches of a spreading tree, set in ‘rare pastoral loveliness’ (Fig. 4.3).¹⁶⁸ Enfield Highway Society purchased a Hertfordshire Priory, Arlesdene Cheshunt, as part of a ‘centenary gesture’.¹⁶⁹ The Union was getting itchy feet, especially as it was now unconvinced that a new College could be built around the Kersal site, which was sold, and a new hostel purchased, Ashforde Grange in Wilmslow, as a ‘temporary expedient’ if a new-build had to be constructed (Fig. 4.4).¹⁷⁰

When the opportunity arose, the Union moved fast with the purchase of Stanford Hall in Leicestershire for £54,000. It was represented as a seismic change and reported with great fanfare. Maudsley thought that the ‘hopes and aspirations of generations of co-operative educationists had been realised ... the common people coming into their heritage after centuries of economic oppression’.¹⁷¹ The Hall was a significant stately home, a ‘millionaire’s mansion’, dating back to the late eighteenth century, which had most recently been occupied by Sir Julien Cahn, spread over almost 300 acres; it boasted tennis courts, swimming pool, cricket pitch, seal pit, lake, nine-hole golf course, swimming



Fig. 4.3 *Picture Post* in 1944, featuring a 'co-operators' castle', the tutor reading a T. S. Eliot poem at the newly acquired Dalston Hall



Fig. 4.4 Students at Ashforde Grange towards the end of the war. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

pool and a 300+ seat theatre. It was so vast that staff did not know how many reception rooms there were which ‘must number at least a dozen’ while bedrooms had ‘bathrooms almost of Hollywood magnificence’, laid out in black and pink marble. The theatre alone had been built at the cost of £75,000.¹⁷² ‘Old masters’ adorned the walls—Gainsborough, Rembrandt, Van Dyck and Reynolds on loan from the Earl of Huntington, although they were due to be returned. Two Arthur Spooner paintings, one of the Nottingham Goose Fair, were purchased to replace them. The sporting facilities were to be restored although this policy was ‘not likely to extend to re-equipping the seal pit with performing mammals!’¹⁷³ The *Daily Mail* announced the Co-op Union was ‘Lord of the manor’.¹⁷⁴ Mrs L. Johnson, a Newcastle guildswoman was also impressed by the cinema which was the ‘last word in luxury and very modern’. She enjoyed the artworks and furnishings as well as the breakfast:

We went out on the terrace, which was blue and gold Italian mosaic. This is surrounded by huge pillars like an ancient temple. The terrace at the front was surrounded by lawns and flowers and commanded a glorious view of the valley.¹⁷⁵

The Executive had to act fast to get the deal and ‘decided to think afterwards where the money was coming from’.¹⁷⁶ Later Hurt would warn the movement about the full costs of the College which were going to be ‘colossal’, no doubt to encourage further donations.¹⁷⁷ When news of the purchase reached the education convention, the excitement was raised to a ‘high pitch’; the WEA representative proclaimed that ‘democracy on the battlefield’ had been built up by voluntary organisations. J. T. Davis from the CWS postulated that ‘if we cannot raise the cultural level of the people and lift their eyes to see the greatest things, we can never bring about the Co-operative Commonwealth’. Only J. T. Guest summoned old ghosts in questioning whether the College might ‘divorce the student from the background of ordinary people’.¹⁷⁸ There was also some potential disappointment facing those who planned a purpose-built college—‘Such enthusiasts may fear that the College’s syllabus and social life may be fitted to the building, rather than the building being designed to express the co-operative educational purpose’ (Fig. 4.5).¹⁷⁹

More prosaically, there were the ‘tremendous practical advantages’ of being able to commence the College immediately. In October, 30 students joined the new college which was now a ‘working reality’ and even heralded as the ‘first Co-operative university’.¹⁸⁰ The military were still in occupation of Stanford Hall and, frustratingly, did not vacate it fully until November 1946.¹⁸¹ By July 1946, most of the staff had been appointed including Arnold Bonner, the resident tutor; W. Eason teaching managerial subjects; W. Walker (see Fig. 3.6) and Mr McGilp in dry goods; T. Young and H. Davies, secretarial subjects; Goulding and T. Gore, co-operative subjects. It was initially set up with 60 resident students and weekend and summer schools raising the number to 100. Throughout this period, new curriculum was being developed with one week refresher courses in foodstuffs and non-foodstuffs, specialist instruction in grocery, butchery, dairy, greengrocery, drapery, boot and shoe, outfitting, furnishing and hardware.¹⁸² Visits by sections and leaders enjoyed concerts and films, notably *Song of the People* which celebrated the Rochdale Pioneers.¹⁸³ In August 1946, there were summer



Fig. 4.5 Stanford Hall from the back, with the Italian gardens on the left. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

schools on drama, for employees, educational secretaries and management committees.¹⁸⁴

Initially, students filled in for domestic staff. John L. Brown from the Station Town Society in County Durham had kept up his studies from the age of 15 and, having attended Kersal, was now on a 10-week scholarship. His new surroundings filled him with

a feeling of something big and a feeling of pride that it belongs to the movement ... You look about you, and express amazement. Then you think of the system under which the mansion was built and realise the fine use to which the movement can put it.¹⁸⁵

Jackson, the student, was ‘scarcely past the admiration stage ... but it would be a mistake to let the immensity of this place overawe us’.¹⁸⁶

The Polish Cadet Officer S. Kwiatkowski, ‘never imagined the British co-operative movement could provide such opportunities for study’.¹⁸⁷

Parallels with the notion of a New Jerusalem were hard to avoid as co-operators, trade unionists and adult educators were coming into their inheritance. Stanford Hall was certainly an audacious purchase. J. Cook captured the historical moment in poetry, representing the fulfilment of the early desires of the movement which were even linked back to the Middle Ages:

They that meet
 Within your stately precincts have as good
 A Birthright as our vanished lords could hold
 Theirs is a heritage of worthier strife
 Than all the ballads of mediaeval life
 And knightly chivalry have ever told.
 Spirit! Your heraldry may boast a line of peers,
 We boast the spirit of the Rochdale pioneers.¹⁸⁸

Cliff Berry had visited Stanford Hall in 1942 as a private when only officers were allowed to use the front entrance; returning on a CWS scholarship in 1949 he was able to walk in the front door and did not have to salute. He was confident that the movement ‘had scored a victory over capitalism’ by enabling students to be educated.¹⁸⁹ His emotions had not dimmed by 1982 at the first educational convention held at the College: ‘I, as a long visiting student, still experience the same thrill of expectation whenever I drive through the gates’.¹⁹⁰ The workers’ movements of the twentieth century managed to derive flourish and promise from the landscape gardeners and builders of the eighteenth century.

The College persevered through the war and created a powerful legacy for co-operators and for co-operative education in the post-war world. There had been serious challenges with bombing and shortages, a significant depletion of students and the loss of a capable leader of the College which meant the Education Executive had to pick up the slack. Internal conflict consumed co-operative education but was overcome by determined voluntary effort. Continuing in hard times appeared to have paid off as the College gained succour from the mobilisation of the British public. Visions had been conserved and cultivated, stimulated by the general ferment and solidarity nurtured by the war. These visions informed concrete plans, and it was fortuitous that the war coincided

with the centenary of the Rochdale Pioneers which enabled a considerable fund to be accumulated and enabled the purchase of Stanford Hall. The movement appeared ready for new challenges.

NOTES

1. *Co-operative News*, April 8, 1939, p. 12 and May 13, 1939, p. 11.
2. See debates on ‘people’s war’: Jose Harris, ‘War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front During the Second World War’, *Contemporary European History*, 1:1, (1992), pp. 17–35; David Egerton, ‘The Nationalisation of British History: Historians, Nationalism and the Myths of 1940’, *English Historical Review*, 136:581, (2021), pp. 950–985; Sean Dettman & Richard Toye, ‘The Discourse of “The People’s War” in Britain and the USA during World War II’, *The English Historical Review*, 138:594–5, (2023), pp. 1089–1117.
3. *Co-operative News*, September 9, 1939, p. 5.
4. *Co-operative News*, September 21, 1940, p. 7.
5. *Co-operative News*, March 1, 1941, p. 3; April 12, 1941, p. 1.
6. *Co-operative News*, April 19, 1941, p. 5.
7. John Thomas, ‘Co-operative Education and the War’, *Co-operative Review*, 130:10, (October 1939), p. 357.
8. Brian Simon, *A Life in Education*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992.
9. ‘Editorial’, *Co-operative News*, September 9, 1939, p. 6.
10. *Co-operative News*, September 23, 1939, p. 4.
11. *Co-operative News*, July 13, 1940, p. 5.
12. Minutes of Education Executive, Co-operative Union, 21 October 1939; also, 21 October 1939, National Co-operative Archive (NCA).
13. Thomas, ‘Co-operative Education and the War’, p. 357.
14. Minutes of Education Executive, Co-operative Union, September 16, 1939, NCA; L. A. Hurt, ‘Educational Re-organisation at Holyoake House’, *Co-operative Review*, 13:9, (September 1939), pp. 305–06. The Co-operative Educational Fellowship was no longer part of department work. Originally it had provided contact with ex-College students who were now to be encouraged to join the local societies and auxiliaries.
15. *Co-operative News*, October 14, 1938, p. 10.

16. *Co-operative News*, November 16, 1940, p. 5.
17. *Co-operative News*, December 30, 1939, p. 1.
18. *Co-operative News*, July 29, 1939, p. 3.
19. *Co-operative News*, August 19, 1939, p. 1.
20. Co-operative Union Education Council and Executive Report 1939–40, NCA.
21. *Co-operative News*, December 7, 1940, p. 7.
22. Thomas, ‘Co-operative Education and the War’, p. 357.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 358.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 358; *Co-operative News*, November 4, 1939, p. 6.
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A Short Golden Age? The Post-War Years

The euphoria of peace and hopes for a post-war democracy had to be translated into practical solutions. The co-operative movement had secured itself a ‘real’ residential College in a rural setting. On his post-war traversal of England, the working-class writer from Rochdale, Jack Hilton, was curious about the movement’s new College. He was bedazzled by Stanford Hall and Sir Julien Cahn, the opulent buildings, cricket pitch, seal pit and surrounding land. ‘I don’t think the Chartist weavers of Rochdale, who had turned to the self-help of Co-operation, ever thought it would become so big that it would buy a millionaire’s mansion to use as a place in which your men and women could engage in the full-time study of the social, business, economic, legal and administrative factors of Co-operation’.¹ Bringing this to fruition was the formidable task that fell to the new principal, Robert Marshall. The College would thrive during these years. Stanford Hall played an important symbolic role in representing the movement. Its acquisition coincided with a new social settlement, what has been characterised as a ‘golden age’, marked by political consensus, remarkable economic growth, a mixed economy and a corporatist state promising full employment.²

Yet, the very forces of the labour movement, of which co-operatives formed an important part, were moving in a direction that would create dilemmas for co-operators. In fact, within a more restricted nation facing the end of empire, the introduction of the ‘welfare state’ and

nationalisation of the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy gave rise to incongruous feelings in co-operative circles.³ At the same time as contributing to emerging national ideas on education and welfare, co-operators had to adjust to a world in which centralised planning was becoming part of a new consensus. Competition in the high street and hire-purchase represented a further impediment. Astute observers pointed out the many challenges for a movement beset by long-term structural problems, its physical location and ways of working which all placed it at a disadvantage. The College was active in chivvying the movement to respond actively to these changes.

THE NEW JERUSALEM?

Post-war democracy simultaneously embraced and marginalised the co-operative movement. That newspapers like *The Times* might misconstrue co-operation was not surprising but misunderstanding from sympathisers was less palatable.⁴ It had often been described as the ‘third wing’ of the labour movement—‘our’ government was in power, and democracy was ubiquitous, evidenced by the fact that Joseph Reeves, the ex-education secretary of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS), was elected MP for Greenwich. Co-operators still clung on to their nineteenth-century liberal roots—co-operative voluntarism had historically been wary about state action as opposed to autonomous organisation on democratic lines.

In theory, the Labour Party recognised the potential role of co-operatives in democratising economic power.⁵ But, despite shared sympathies, there was little space for co-operative democracy within the post-war New Jerusalem. Common ownership via centralised boards were being pushed through in a short space of time, partly out of political necessity and some labour politicians even proposed nationalising the insurance industry. It was too much for some co-operators. According to the ex-College student and co-operative educationist, Bert Youngjohns, the post-war Labour reforms constricted the movement to ‘a husk of a trading institution and a pressure group’ and he called for a breach with the Labour Party.⁶

Moreover, co-operators had always prided themselves on the size and scope of the movement which had been built from the ground up. In the new context, however, the movement started to appear smaller in relation to national economic and welfare priorities; its mentality more defensive

than innovative. Noah Barou, in the Left Book Club publication, *The Co-operative Movement in Labour Britain*, irked some co-operators in stating that the importance of co-operation in the national economy was ‘comparatively modest’ with a ‘relatively small number’ of stores stocking ‘a narrow range of commodities’.⁷ Co-operators could be dumbfounded by the scale of ambition of state expenditure on education and related services. For G. D. H. Cole the movement was organised in a haphazard way and needed systematisation.⁸ Co-operative policy documents, such as *The Co-operative Movement in a Collectivist Economy*, highlighted that co-operative ownership constituted a form of ownership in line with a planned welfare society but were less clear how this would be translated into general practice.⁹ Cole favoured more creative thinking on diversifying the nature of public ownership although he found co-operative democracy to be characterised by ‘active laymen’ who had a certain ‘parochial quality’.¹⁰ Detailed and radical proposals had not been forthcoming from the movement; Cole lamented that the ‘idealistic teaching of the Co-operative educators’ was out of synch with the ‘day-to-day business affairs of co-operative trade and production’.¹¹ Voluntarism and monopolistic central control could not be combined easily. As a result, the co-operative movement ploughed its own furrow which left it isolated. In his 1947 Presidential Address, G. L. Perkins rebutted a ‘suicide pact’ to transfer any of the movement’s resources to national boards or state corporations; instead the movement and the state might travel along ‘parallel lines’.¹² One commentator at Congress repeated a strongly shared impulse when he declared that, ‘We cannot say that we believe in nationalisation except for our Co-operative Movement ... we are quite capable of running a fine Socialist movement without being nationalised’.¹³

Critical friends thought the movement should be more proactive. Barou suggested that an intensive process of adult education by the labour movement would be required to generate community participation in the great transition taking place in ownership. For Cole also, co-operative proposals for common ownership were undeveloped. The movement was avoiding the tricky issue of the need for leaders and the education of the public if there was to be any hope of delivering a new form of co-operative ownership. Instead, the movement was being marginalised, as was the College:

...a single College cannot – and could not if it were many times as big as the Co-operative College – provide more than a fraction of the types

of course that are needed to give the many and diverse forms of higher training required in the Co-operative Movement. Nor would it be good, even if it were possible, to isolate all the men who were to take higher courses in order to fit them for key positions in Co-operative management in a single institution away from other students, and also, necessarily, away from most of the best teachers in their particular fields of study.

The Co-operative Movement has never taken seriously the training of its own men for technical and administrative positions of the kinds needed for a great democratic structure that ought to aim at least as high as the best of capitalist industry...

The Co-operative movement needs to reconsider its entire attitude to the higher education and training of its employees, and to be prepared to spend on it at least ten times what it is spending today – quite apart from what it needs to spend on better educational opportunities for its members generally.¹⁴

While welcoming post-war changes, he remarked upon the still unfulfilled needs of an ‘educated democracy’, a key concept that was being contested as it was being built.¹⁵

Co-operative educationists argued for the importance of education and training based upon the distinctive nature of the movement while struggling to sustain a vision of the co-operative commonwealth. The movement was unexpectedly side-lined by the changes it had campaigned for. The 1944 Education Act brought in ‘secondary education for all’ which had the effect of directing attention onto compulsory schooling. The much-vaunted county colleges, which were to have offered part-time vocational training, never got off the statute book. The College’s request for formal recognition from the Ministry of Education received no reply, signalling the ambivalent priorities being accorded to co-operatives.¹⁶

The commercial and utopian aspects of co-operation could align and pull apart at different times, a tension at the heart of a movement grappling with rapid change. College students became aware that the movement was starting to ‘lag behind its competitors’.¹⁷ In 1950, D. J. Walmsley, managing secretary of the Bradford Society and alumnus of the College and International People’s College, cautioned that the movement might be in danger of clinging to the past: ‘so closely wedded to the old forms and so dependent upon precedent to guide its actions that it is unable to go out with confidence in a new world’. He encouraged students to question the ‘superficial evidences of co-operative progress’ based on sales during inflationary times and out of date membership

figures, and he asked whether the dividend was a ‘compensating element in a declining service to members’. The movement was fragmented and its investments dispersed; he questioned whether the seniority system and an unresponsive administration could harness the ‘enthusiasm, the energy and the courage of youth’ or ‘meet the requirements of a changing world with its new and specialised techniques and revolutionary political conceptions’.¹⁸ Self-service shopping had not been implemented fully, allowing competitors to steal a march upon the movement. These analyses could point in different directions. The College student, Jane Beatty, placed the economic at the forefront: ‘it is only through obtaining greater efficiency that our trading members will respect and begin to want to know more about the ideas of the Movement and the contribution it can make towards the evolution of a new social order’.¹⁹ Students would debate these issues in the serene setting of Stanford Hall (Fig. 5.1).



Fig. 5.1 A staged photograph of students in the common room, one in uniform, many women and no visible overseas students, indicate it was taken soon after Stanford Hall was purchased. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

In turn, these problems were debated in relation to transformations in national and international spheres. Intense feelings of nationhood during the war effort created new dilemmas in the post-war international scene. The British nation, symbolically and materially, was undergoing substantial change as it solicited cheap labour from its colonies. The curtailment of the once-expansive nation impacted upon the daily life of the College which was selected to train co-operative officials from overseas. Moreover, Cold War regimes of control based on the 'first' or developed, communist and 'third' worlds changed the rules of engagement. From around 1948, with the hardening of mentalities, certain leaders in the movement would re-emphasise voluntarism and democracy as key co-operative traditions deriving from Rochdale which were distinguished from central state control in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. Jack Bailey and the Labour and Co-operative M.P., A. V. Alexander, robustly rejected communism which they contrasted with the co-operative movement. J. A. Hough, the Co-operative Union research officer and statistician, was actively recruited by the anti-communist Foreign Office Information Research Department (IRD). He compared voluntary co-operation and Soviet collectivisation to the 'flower and the weed'.²⁰ In 1949, Arthur Jacques, a student, was described as a 'violent anti-communist'.²¹ It is possible that the inclination towards voluntarism inhibited more creative thinking about state nationalisation in Britain.

Concurrently, democratic economic visions, permeated by an internationalist flavour, emanated from the College. W. P. Watkins, an ex-student of the College, writing in the College magazine, called for 'internationally-minded' students:

capable of seeing the local in its national and international setting and, in reverse, understanding how international forces must inevitably work themselves out in the national and local spheres.²²

To some, the coming of the Cold War was a harsh tragedy that prevented communication and positive relations among co-operators. In 1948, Denys Woodward wrote in the College magazine that many British young people helped to build the 'youth railway', which had influenced the British historians, Edward (E. P.) and Dorothy Thompson. Woodward also attended a Youth Festival in Prague, proscribed by both the Trades Union Congress and the co-operative movement.²³ In particular,

the College would be an arena in which these debates, dilemmas and confusions were played out in the coming decades.

A NEW PRINCIPAL AND A NEW COLLEGE?

More immediately, with the cessation of hostilities, at a time of utopian enthusiasm, a fully functioning College had to be fashioned out of a stately home. Marshall, the new principal was chosen from 90 applicants and took up post in August 1946 (Fig. 5.2). The advert in September 1944 had called for a principal ‘sufficiently broad in their academic character to embrace a knowledge of the various subjects now being taught at the Co-operative College’.²⁴ He originated from a mining family, having been born in Lanarkshire in 1913. A Miners’ Welfare Scholarship, a competitive university bursary and a grant from the Carnegie Foundation enabled him to attend St Andrews where he studied medieval and modern history as well as English and became the union president. This was followed by a Harkness Commonwealth Fellowship at Yale to complete a two-year MA in politics. Before the war he worked at the Scottish Office for two years. From 1939–46, his military service comprised time in the Royal Army Service Corps and, following evacuation from Dunkirk and a period of hospitalisation, the Royal Army Education Corps where he rose to a lieutenant-colonel. He was awarded an OBE for services to army education, commissioning and editing the influential *British Way and Purpose* pamphlets that formed the basis of informal discussion groups and may have helped to secure the Labour 1945 election victory. In 1944, he married Commander Beryl Broad of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) who was to become a lively figure in the daily life of the College.²⁵ Marshall’s character encompassed organisational adroitness, high educational standards and a principled co-operative purpose. He called for co-operation to be a ‘moral faith’ and that co-operative education should be concerned with the ‘study of human values’.²⁶ The College should ‘prepare and equip the voluntary leaders of our democratic movement’; ‘educate and train future responsible officials; act as a ‘centre of research into the history of the Movement, and into its present and future function in society’; and be a ‘source of British experience in Co-operative development, readily and helpfully available to the students from other countries’.²⁷

The expectations facing Marshall were varied and high. One of the appealing aspects of Marshall’s experience was his work in organising



Fig. 5.2 Robert Marshall, centre, in a meeting. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

educational activity among soldiers. In theory, this might enable him to bridge the tensions in co-operative education between structure and informality, between hierarchy and local democratic initiative. Internal battles that had exploded during the war had left scars and, in 1948, the National Co-operative Educational Association (NCEA) was formed to represent education committees that would cast a wary eye over the Union. From 1950, it would enjoy direct representation on the Executive. But the College did not easily embrace informal education. Raymond Williams would later rue the dissipation of political purpose and voluntarism of the 1930s in the contrasting context of the post-war years.²⁸ Marshall's approach to wartime education had been based on 'learning without tears' in which students were 'surrounded with information presented in an attractive form' and self-expression in discussion groups was encouraged.²⁹ Hopes were expressed that he would introduce some

of the informal practices used by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs.³⁰ However, Marshall's new focus was on the College as the apex of a democratic movement comprising educational committees, a youth movement, classes, correspondence courses and auxiliary organisations, each of which might help prepare students for the College, a line of reasoning that helped to soften charges of elitism.³¹ The general educational impulse was to be met through societies rather than the College which should not 'dissipate its resources on preliminary training'.³² There was no easy solution to this conundrum. The professionalisation of co-operative education depended upon the flourishing of informal co-operative initiative. Wheatley Straw, writing in 1950 in the *College Magazine*, avowed that education was now 'a specialist job' and that lay people should join education committees leaving the day-to-day work to those with 'the knowledge and qualification to cope with all the problems facing voluntary agencies in education'. Simultaneously, he verified that there was a shortage of trained co-operative tutors with 'faith, enthusiasm and knowledge'.³³ The formality and structure of the College meant that it fed from the stream of educational enthusiasm as much as contributing to it.

Although there was to be an expansion of students, tenacious gendered assumptions and a new business model led the College to concentrate upon a group of better-educated full-time participants at the expense of those less able and willing to attend, including women. While the College had been in formal existence since 1919, many commentators wrote in a way that implied a new building represented a new college. From 1919 to 1945, nearly 600 full-time students had passed through the College; many summer schools and part-time courses had been organised and 3,000 were enrolled annually on correspondence courses, over 40,000 in total.³⁴ After 1946, the 'College' rapidly became coterminous with 'Stanford Hall' which in turn was strongly associated with full-time residential students. Nonetheless, short courses would help to meet needs and bring in income. In the first year, short-term and mid-week courses were initially organised for the Women's Co-operative Guild which favoured flexible forms of provision, although during the war fewer women than expected had attended the College.³⁵ The Women's Guild itself tended to be based upon a model of collective education rather than training leaders.³⁶ One-term students were soon to be discouraged and scholarships for shorter time periods were discontinued where possible—these students were encouraged to study through correspondence.³⁷ Letters of dissent came from two women. Amy Woodall wrote in favour of ten-week courses

and Margaret King from Castle Green Youth Club, thought that one-year scholarships were only good for single men with no dependents—cutting down on shorter courses would exclude the rank and file.³⁸

The priority in 1946 was to see a viable institution in operation. Transforming the building for educational use posed many logistical problems and meant that, in some cases, six students shared larger rooms rather than individual study rooms. The College soon became overcrowded and it would not be until 1956 when the Abbotts Wing, with 35 study bedrooms, was completed and some of the pressure would be eased (Fig. 5.3). Running a large estate for just over 100 students would present ongoing financial problems. There were challenges for a small organisation to carry out all the necessary tasks which inevitably led to higher unit costs than those found in a larger institution, a drawback that would be felt keenly in the coming decades. Staff turnover could be rapid in a society with a great demand for teachers. There were misgivings that the building and current expenses were being met out of the covenanted College fund.³⁹

In 1954, Marshall wrote about the ‘costly business’ of the College. Since 1944, the movement had raised £230,000 which he thought would all finally be spent within a few years with the various works being carried out. The movement was keen to set the College on a sustainable footing and combined accounts were intended to achieve this.⁴⁰ Societies agreed to pay increased subscriptions so that a 50-year covenant could be taken out. Charging the Union rental costs helped to subsidise the College and, from 1953, the Co-operative Union paid £12,000 per year to meet the annual deficit. Student fees were subsidised which, for each overseas student, amounted to about £100 a year.⁴¹ Ensuring an annual cohort was a priority. Co-operative societies were apt to give verbal support to the College and had donated as part of the Centenary celebrations, when funds had been plentiful, but making regular contributions had to be weighed against other priorities and restraints. However, with hundreds of consumer co-operative societies in existence, if each society sent a few students every few years, a realistic cohort for the College could be expected. Sponsorship from societies and some local authorities were thus vital. In local councils, the anti-co-operative lobby quibbled about grants: in 1951, two scholarships to the Co-operative College, awarded by Labour controlled Durham County education committee, were opposed



Fig. 5.3 Making do in opulent surroundings. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

on both political and economic grounds that ‘The co-operative movement has a definite political bias. It is essentially a trading concern with an educational branch’.⁴²

A COLONIAL OPPORTUNITY

A significant source of funding and students emerged from the turmoil of the fragmenting British Empire and attempts to develop the Commonwealth (Fig. 5.4). The empire had been an absent presence in British life—ubiquitous but taken for granted. As colonial rule mutated into the Commonwealth in which the independence of countries was claimed, resisted and fostered, co-operatives had long appeared attractive to the British state. Co-operation fitted multiple agendas during the period. For many in the movement it offered a means of empowerment and freedom, yet it was inherently tied into colonial administration. An

extremely complex set of relations between governments, institutions and international movements has been debated by historians who sometimes over-simplify the role of co-operatives in a system of 'colonial rule' or their 'co-option' into state machinery.⁴³ The movement was playing with diverse agendas and motivations which aimed to nurture democratic control but inevitably became caught up in the politics of a declining empire.



Fig. 5.4 The cover of *Spectrum* 1957, College students, looking to the future. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Cold War tensions rapidly infiltrated the colonial context at the College. Robert Southern of the Co-operative Union, raised alarm about the ‘calamitous division’ of the post-war years and the ‘ideological conflicts’ which meant that the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) should safeguard ‘the integrity of true co-operative principles’. Newly independent countries ‘have realised that Co-operation must be the tool employed to give freedom and security to their peoples’ and he quoted Ceylon (later Sri Lanka) India and Israel approvingly; he was hopeful the ‘inviolable principles of true and voluntary Co-operation’ would win through.⁴⁴ By contrast, the Soviet Union was presented as a threat to free co-operation in the colonies. This was a difficult path to tread because centralised state planning was a rising force, especially with the Registrar model of co-operation in colonial countries which gave powers of regulation, supervision and control to government employees. Enabling self-sufficiency paradoxically appeared to necessitate strong central direction. A student, Elsie Vince, from RACS, made just this point in warning about the dangers of applying ‘a set of rigid and universally applied principles’ which might exclude the colonial movement. Voluntary association was indeed important but ‘where State recognition implies assistance in developing and extending the organisation, a more flexible interpretation is indicated, as indeed is apparent in our colonies’.⁴⁵ The movement would continue to wrangle with these dilemmas over politics and empire.

The Colonial Office agreed to sponsor students from the colonies/Commonwealth which fitted in with its policy of ensuring a smooth transition, controlling open rebellion and retaining British influence.⁴⁶ The Colonial Secretary, George Hall, invited the Union to participate in a short course for Labour Officers in the Colonies and Hough gave three lectures on a course arranged by the Colonial Office at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Trade unionists, doctors, sociologists and employees of the Ministry of Labour all spoke.⁴⁷ A joint award with the British Council enabled a voluntary worker from a colonial country to attend the College.⁴⁸

Hall’s 1946 Circular to Colonial Governments extolled the benefits of co-operation that were no longer a matter of dispute—they provided ‘economic advantages’ as well as ‘educational value’ by inculcating thrift, self-help, fair dealing and training in democratic co-operative processes. It affirmed the model of governance based upon a government appointed Registrar of Co-operative Societies with authority over co-operatives as well as a legal framework with ordinances and rules.⁴⁹ The Memorandum

on Recruitment and Training suggested that general training for recruits might contain elements of co-operative teaching and perhaps a specialist course following a period of work experience. At the time there were 120 colonial cadets in training at Oxford and Cambridge Universities and some at Aberystwyth.⁵⁰ Initially, it was thought senior officials might go on short visits to the College but the existing provision would not meet their needs.⁵¹ In October 1947, a special six-month course for colonial students commenced with a new tutor in colonial studies, Captain Stainforth, a former assistant registrar for Nigeria, who was selected with the agreement of the Colonial Office (Fig. 5.5).⁵² The initial cohort settled down well and Stainforth reported that they were 'without exception, a first class lot of gentlemen'.⁵³ Character and conditioning mattered more than technical expertise.⁵⁴ The scheme would become an important source of students for the College and, from 1946 to 1964, 320 people from the Commonwealth attended.⁵⁵ Students from non-colonial countries also took the 'colonial course', three of them in 1949.⁵⁶

There were close relations between civil servants, politicians and co-operatives in colonial and commonwealth countries as well as co-operators in Britain. In June 1950, Marshall joined the Consultative Committee on Co-operatives which reported to the Colonial Office on co-operatives and received country reports from co-operative registrars throughout the colonies. Occasionally, Co-operative College colonial programmes were discussed. B. J. Surridge, the adviser on co-operation to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, lectured at the College as did Captain Walter Cheesman who had been a registrar in Nigeria.⁵⁷ As a College student, May Goulding had held a Jubilee Research Scholarship and later served as Acting Registrar of Co-operative Societies in Basutoland (now Lesotho).⁵⁸ Surridge made contact with many newly forming colleges and, by the mid-1950s, there were schools and colleges in Kenya, Uganda, Western Nigeria, Ceylon, Poona (later Pune), Kuala Lumpur and Saskatoon.⁵⁹ This was essentially a second wave of colleges in the colonies and former colonies mainly across Africa, the Caribbean and Asia. Although they had strong connections with Stanford Hall, most resulted from government initiative and financial support. In total, 18 co-operative colleges were set up in these regions in the decades following the war.⁶⁰ Co-operative internationalism as well as the British Empire/Commonwealth provided a basis for networks in which individuals could travel and learn.



Fig. 5.5 Captain Stainforth's lecture to 'colonial students' in a cramped room. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

The work of the College fitted into international agendas, not least UNESCO's 'fundamental education'. Co-operatives appeared to align traditional ways of life among the poor with the promise of modernity. In 1950, Maurice Colombain, recently retired from the International Labour Office (ILO), carried out a UNESCO research project published as *Co-operatives and Fundamental Education*. He viewed co-operatives as capable of bridging traditional ways of life in developing countries, 'instinctive solidarity and habits of mutual help', and the imperialist and rapidly modernising forces unleashed by the west:

old traditions of community life, of collective property, of mutual help, of joint labour, can serve as a starting point or basis for a modern co-operative construction.⁶¹

the co-operative movement offers a means of building upon the traditional basis of customs a new set of institutions, and thus enables the less developed populations to make the transition from their old world to the new one.⁶²

However, an obstacle for Colombain was that modern co-operatives did not in fact advance organically, rather ‘the action of an outside agent is nearly always necessary to promote this development’ which might be a registrar, public or private authority. The registrars of course had to be trained and this was to be one role for co-operative education.

Britain had mature co-operatives where visitors could learn about the movement, spend time at key co-operative sites, and also travel to Ireland where there were more agricultural co-operatives. English agricultural co-operatives were not connected to the College at that time—Margaret Digby recalled that the College was too preoccupied with consumer co-operation and ‘ideologically too far left’.⁶³ Hall had wanted to encourage consumer co-operatives which had achieved so much in Britain but the supposed modernity of Britain’s consumer and productive societies may not have been best attuned to co-operatives in colonial settings.⁶⁴ Indeed, there were a multiplicity of co-operative structures in developing countries, for instance, British Guiana (later Guyana) had savings societies, credit societies, thrift societies, producers’ societies, consumer co-operatives and settlement societies.⁶⁵ Yet meanings were fluid and great hopes were broadcast in government and co-operative circles. Shirley Gunatilaka, from Ceylon averred that ‘the recent growth of Co-operation in my country is restoring our native self-reliance’. The government had acquired tea, coconut and rubber estates to distribute to the landless who were to run them on a co-operative basis and a College there had 200 students. He hoped that co-operation would help in ‘overthrowing capitalist exploitation and every form of obscurantism’.⁶⁶ The binary antagonisms of the Cold War might be less significant from this perspective.

COHORT AND CURRICULUM

Out of these strands of activity, the College was able to secure a cohort of students. In 1946, rapid adjustments were made in order that 65 men and 12 women could join—they included women from Denmark, China, Norway and Britain as well as men from India, Egypt, West Africa, Poland

and Britain. The cost of a year was £105 12 s plus a £1 a week and £20 for books. Many came with scholarships secured from within the movement and some with grants from local authorities or from the forces via the Vocational Training Scheme of the Ministry of Labour (Fig. 5.6). It was reported to Congress that the ‘cloistered calm’ of the College had ‘not lacked vigour and excitement’ given that the annual intake of residential students increased from 33 to 110. Core courses in social study, retail management and secretaryship were revised and new ones created on general management and overseas co-operation—a pattern that was to persist.⁶⁷ In 1955–56, 104 men and seven women attended, the average age was 27 and 11 returned for a second year. Two students were from British Guiana; two from Cyprus; two from the Gold Coast (later Ghana); nine from Nigeria; six from Tanganyika (later Tanzania); two from Trinidad; three from Uganda and one each from Sierra Leone, Iceland, Iraq, Jordan, Sudan and Vietnam. Of those overseas students, 19 were government employees and 13 were involved in co-operatives. Of the British students, 72 out of 79 were employed by the movement. There were 12 Scottish students and 11 had financial assistance from local education authorities which were becoming important educational institutions in the post-war landscape.

Students were divided into faculties: Management, Secretaryship and Social Science, as well as the ‘colonial course’. Four diplomas were on offer: Co-operative Honours; Social Science; General Managers; and Co-operative Secretaries.⁶⁸ It was expected that applicants would have prepared themselves through classes, correspondence courses and examinations (Fig. 5.7). Colonial courses included a one-term certificate in co-operation; a diploma in co-operation with additional subjects; and a diploma with honours that required a thesis.⁶⁹ In 1954, Marshall reported that there were 103 long-term students in residence, made up of 21 in social science; 42 in management; 21 in secretarial; and 15 in co-operation overseas. A further 15 students participated in five-week courses for training instructors for short courses in member service. By comparison, in 1957–58, there were eleven in the social science department; 27 in the secretarial; 20 in the management; nine on the Intermediate Certificate in Management Studies; and 33 on the overseas course.⁷⁰

In 1950–51, the Colonial Office Consultative Committee on Co-operatives reviewed the fourth colonial training course which had just been extended to three terms and had 13 students. In 1950, Stainforth



Fig. 5.6 A 1953 display advertising opportunities at the College for members of the Walsall Co-operative Society. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

left and was replaced by another former member of the Nigerian Colonial Service, Mr J. E. Jull. As in previous years, the syllabus covered credit societies, other types of co-operative society and a written test on colonial law. A successful innovation was the organisation of two study groups to focus on current problems. There was a regular programme of visits to UK co-operatives. In one year, students from Tanganyika all failed their examinations and did not contribute much which was attributed to their lower level of prior education.⁷¹ In future, the situation would be reversed.

Having a secure base helped the College to look outwards. In 1952, an agreement with the British Institute of Management led to the provision of an Intermediate Certificate in Management Studies, favoured by the CWS. A Diploma in Political, Economic and Social Studies, awarded



Fig. 5.7 Correspondence courses, head of department, Phyllis Rogers, on the right. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

by Nottingham University, replaced the Union's own award. Partnerships were secured with University College, Leicester and local technical colleges including Loughborough College and the Leicester College of Art and Technology.⁷² It was affirmed that the 'status and distinctive service of the College is that of a centre of "higher" education' which involved 'exacting preparation'.⁷³ This helped to diffuse apprehensiveness about appropriate standards of qualifications for commercially oriented co-operatives which in turn echoed discussions about standards in adult education.⁷⁴ The aspiration for higher study was facilitated with the J. J. Worley memorial library which, by 1952, boasted 10,000 volumes. It had been augmented by the acquisition of the 2,500 books from the library of George Alfred Holland, an ex-tutor of the College.⁷⁵ Worley,

an activist in the Co-operative Productive Federation, had seconded the 1919 resolution leading to the formation of the College (Fig. 5.8).⁷⁶

The sheer breadth and scope of the movement posed challenges for the College. It was not possible to run courses in all the areas of trade and commerce where co-operators were active and in the various departments such as meat, pharmacy, drapery and grocery. The Ministry of Education encouraged ‘common denominator courses’ to which specialist providers would add ‘supplementary specialist items’ so that a national award in technical training would be followed with training in the ‘principles and techniques of co-operative service’. Doubts remained about how this would pan out in practice and whether the co-operative difference might prohibit collaboration.⁷⁷ In 1957, the government backed Certificate in Retail Management created an ‘environment of challenge’.⁷⁸



Fig. 5.8 Students in the library, 1956. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

In tune with the history of the movement, the College spanned social studies and technical training. Marshall grasped the importance of the College as a constituent part of a democratic movement:

the vital relationship between the Co-operative College and the Co-operative Movement, and that relation of an educational institution to a great voluntary democratic organisation is one of our most distinctive features.

We are, I think, unique among Adult Residential Colleges in this combination, and this opportunity of linking 'Social' and 'Technical' studies. The days have gone when it was assured that 'social' students were concerned with ends and 'technical' students with means. All are men and women concerned with both ends and means. All are men and women concerned with the problem of living according to their beliefs, and their circumstances and their education, social or technical, must treat them whole, and in the round.⁷⁹

Marshall reconceptualised vocational education as a route into the education of the 'whole' person.⁸⁰ The attempt to stitch together forms of education that had been severed elsewhere was indeed an ambitious undertaking. Vocational education was largely on the job and educational institutions devoted to it were quite separate from those on academic routes. The adult educational movement had historically eschewed technical training, wary that working class people were being told how to do their work more efficiently rather than claiming power or raising the working class collectively.

Despite the historical side-lining of vocational education, post-war modernity lent it some prominence even if liberal education was not discounted. Students had the option of supplementing academic training with work in local schools.⁸¹ The National Institute of Adult Education Report, *Liberal Education in a Technical Age*, which was keen to retain liberal learning, cited the College as an 'interesting' example which blended the vocational and general.⁸² Co-operators commented on the 'down with the barricades' approach which mirrored their educational beliefs

For a longer time we have been saying in Co-operative education that employees, salesmen or clerks, managers or secretaries, must be educated not only in the techniques of their jobs, but in the principles and objectives

which these jobs serve ... technical education must not be limited only to ways and means, but must also concern itself with ends and purposes.⁸³

The 'unique combination' within the College of social and technical studies meant that technical students should share in 'a conviction of the larger purposes which the Movement serves ... there is still scope for attention to co-operative principle...'⁸⁴ A committed and inspired workforce was to be mirrored by technically able members of societies:

Can the social student read a balance sheet; does he have the will and ability to serve on the Board or Education Committee of his local society? ... We have to keep the idealism and stiffen it and point it with a recognition of immediate practical necessities.⁸⁵

Moreover, producing engaged co-operators was not seen to conflict with liberal learning. For instance, Marshall harnessed it to personal commitment and the purpose and values of co-operation

Apart from questions of standards, in content of the curriculum, in approach and in method, there must be a personal qualification. The fully-fledged student must be armed with confidence in the ideals of the Movement, and conviction, born of compromise, which is in turn, born of discussion.⁸⁶

Faith was to be buttressed with critical thinking as part of a vision of adult learning that would have been familiar to proponents of liberal, adult and university education:

Our purpose is not the imposition upon students of any predetermined conclusion; it is to encourage a student to consider on any issue a balanced range of information and argument to help to train him in the discipline of study and thought, and finally, to insist that the judgement is his responsibility. He must express and justify his claim to adulthood by his capacity for independent thought and conclusion.⁸⁷

Thus, elements of technical and liberal education were melded within the environment of 'an active social movement' which meant that students could make connections to the 'needs of the community' which, it was hoped, would prevent the 'danger of too exclusive a withdrawal into itself'. Marshall aimed to produce a distinctive College student via the

ethos that would impart commitment as well as intellectual and moral qualities.⁸⁸ Weighing up the value of these competing notions was a delicate process and debates could easily fall back into binary contrasts. For example, calls to build connections with left intellectuals like Harold Laski and R. H. Tawney could be met with doubts about over-extending, ‘our educationists are not academically-minded. Remember we sprang from humble sources and we have to educate ourselves from within first, before we can go outside with our gospel message’.⁸⁹ The line between proud independence and self-isolation was a fine one.

In attempting to scaffold diverse areas of knowledge and practice, the College challenged students to think in new ways. In 1946, one speaker at a summer school reassured his listeners that educationists outside the movement ‘were looking towards co-operation with great hopes. The movement had made the first step to combining academic and technical education, and if it succeeded in doing this ably it would have a unique opportunity of leading the whole country in the educational sphere’.⁹⁰ The second year social science student, W. J. Oakden, similarly addressed his fellow students with misgivings about over-specialisation: ‘the spectacle of students of the arts and those of the sciences abusing each other, accusing each other of causing the world’s ills. This ignorance often leads to irresponsible action’.⁹¹ Co-operative debates thus prefigured wider discussions on the topic and were less blinkered than C. P. Snow’s celebrated Reith Lectures on *The Two Cultures* and the caustic response they received from F. R. Leavis.⁹²

Thinking across prevailing distinctions became a feature of College life. The introduction of common core courses attempted to bond the diversity of students together. Co-operative principles and institutions were examined through a course on ‘Western Civilization’ which responded to both colonial and Cold War sensitivities.⁹³ Oakden welcomed this course, the ‘virtue of a broad education’ and a ‘balanced outlook on life’.⁹⁴ In 1947, Marshall defended the concept of Western education and distinguished it from his rather stereotyped ‘Communist-Marxist argument’ that insisted upon economic forces and the necessity of violent class struggle in which education served to convince the minority of the need for violent revolution and to induce the majority to be loyal to revolution.⁹⁵ By contrast, the ‘Western tradition’ was presented as democratic, based less on acquisitiveness than co-operation and toleration. Education had traditionally served the ruling class but Marshall introduced a twist to this tale—the ‘new ruling class’ was now represented by the ‘common

man'. Against the centralising tendency of experts and officials, 'voluntary co-operation' was a 'sphere in which the individual being may find fulfilment'.⁹⁶ Marshall re-emphasised that students were to examine problems 'fairly and completely' and, having evaluated the facts available, would form a judgement.⁹⁷

The notion of civilisation was prevalent in the post-war years, both as a generic part of human evolution and as a tradition among Western countries that could be applied to 'less developed' nations. To the twenty-first century ear this sounds inappropriate and anachronistic although the widely credited retort of Gandhi that Western civilization would be a good idea was indicative of the loaded nature of the concept at the time. Indeed, there is also some evidence that colonial students challenged presumptions and interpretations that were presented to them. In 1953, a student, Ali Kharusi, wrote for the College magazine on Islam which, if followed resolutely, would 'result in man (sic) achieving the highest possible standard of civilisation' which he defined not as 'the existence of factories, skyscrapers, or congested roads and ... the deteriorating atmosphere of Western streets' but in terms of 'a society living in peace' having built institutions based upon principles.⁹⁸

PEDAGOGY AND ETHOS

These ideas radiated within a rich pedagogical residential environment. Formal classes were supplemented with individual tuition, seminars, project work, trips, exchanges, participation in external educational institutions, informal dialogue and private study—most forms of teaching found in higher education (Fig. 5.9).⁹⁹ The small staff body had a greater proportion of women than might have been expected. Despite a heavy workload and high turnover, with a staff-student ratio of approximately 1:10, there was certainly scope for innovation and experimentation.¹⁰⁰ For instance, in 1950, for another core course on the Ethics and Philosophy of Co-operation, students were divided into seminar groups where they discussed 'systematically with the tutor the social significance of Co-operation in terms of personal and social behaviour'. Slogans such as 'Co-operation as a way of living' and 'a good Co-operator' were evaluated by raising philosophical questions that not only enhanced the coherence of College life but also linked social and political action with personal belief and behaviour.¹⁰¹



Fig. 5.9 A lecture and role-play on a ‘labour problem’ for management students. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

The personalised approaches of individual tutors meandered through co-operation, empire and the Cold War. The College tutor, F. W. Pick, was author of numerous books including *Co-operation and Human Rights*, and whose appointment may have been linked to the Women’s Co-operative Guild plan to endow a College chair. He was a German émigré who defended Western civilization against the Nazis and married this to what he viewed as the peaceful collaborative nature of the British Empire.¹⁰² On Pick’s death in 1950, Marshall recalled his work with students: ‘As a teacher his way was to treat his students not as empty vessels to be filled, not even as material to be moulded but constantly as living beings to be encouraged and cultivated to their full powers’.¹⁰³ Students described him as a friend and felt confident to raise any matters with him. Cold War loyalties did not preclude open relationships at the College.

With a relatively fixed and small cohort, everyone rapidly got to know one another within a structured community of learners. The College at Stanford Hall swiftly adopted distinctive ways of working, building a tradition and institutional identity. The renaming of the *Stokehole* as the *Co-operative College Magazine* marked a shift in emphasis from an internal to external audience in a new setting. The cover featured the College crest with the Latin inscription *Salus populi suprema est lex*—the health of the people should be the supreme law, which also made an appearance on College blazers. The academic season was opened with an act of worship at the Parish Church at Stanford-on-Soar known as ‘College Sunday’.¹⁰⁴ Sport was actively encouraged, often competitively, with football, hockey, tennis, cricket, billiards and snooker, golf, table tennis, swimming, chess and draughts, badminton and squash all on offer. Collaboration with Ruskin and Fircroft colleges led to exchange visits, football matches and debates. Sport and leisure activities helped to form co-operators within the College. Geoff Williams, a student from 1948–50, recalled wanting to cut down on cricket to revise for his exams but his tutor, Arnold Bonner, later author of *British Co-operation*, advised against it as he was a valuable member of the team and Bonner’s advice, that he would make it through the exams, proved accurate. Duty rotas for students to volunteer in the kitchen, library and grounds fulfilled a practical need and generated bonds of belonging. Duties could of course be stretched too far and tensions arose when visitors and performers in the theatre expected students to look after them and be available on Sundays rather than studying.¹⁰⁵

Cultural events also infused College life. Williams’ eclectic memories encompassed sunbathing on the flat roof, a concert by the clarinettist Gervase de Payer and a speech by the Communist Harry Pollitt, all of which he found exciting and which created an openness to the multi-faceted aspects of learning.¹⁰⁶ Arts Council funding for the theatre helped to enable a programme of events including recitals, plays and ballet.¹⁰⁷ In part, this represented the tail end of the cultural participation that had been popularised during the war by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), the forerunner of the Arts Council.¹⁰⁸ A College Eisteddfod was initiated, involving the reading of poems, prose, a business report and an improvised stump speech, all apposite to the diverse co-operative curriculum.¹⁰⁹ Burns Night became part of the College calendar, no doubt connected to Marshall’s Scottish heritage. In January 1953, 20 Scottish students and 40 guests attended

the ‘Nicht wi’ Burns’. There was a film club and flourishing Christian Movement (Fig. 5.10).

The College was a base from which learning and organisational initiatives were propagated. There was a thriving branch of the British Federation of Young Co-operators which would form a launch pad for many successful careers in the co-operative movement. The fluid, diverse and innovative pedagogies of the College nurtured democratic practices. One participant described how student committees deliberated over democracy as well as more frivolous aspects of daily life which were all inducting members into a co-operative communion:

the normal deficiencies of democracy ... The topics that are discussed are many and varied, ranging from whether we should be allowed two biscuits with our tea to whether we should join the National Union of Students.



Fig. 5.10 The original College chapel. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

The ones which raise the most discussion are food, times of meals, food, general administration, food – and the greatest of these is food.¹¹⁰

The interest in food spoke to the experience of rationing during the war years which was inscribed in the popular imagination.

Dialogue within the College was encouraged via the student union, the annual College magazine as well as the weekly wall-newspaper, the ‘Stanford Scrutineer’, a cultural form found in diverse places, including communist China.¹¹¹ Furthermore, examinations at the College did not mark the termination of educational activities, rather students took short courses on applying for jobs, speech training, youth leadership as well as working in the grounds and visiting co-operatives.¹¹² Despite the fact that most students were adults in their 20s, there was no bar on site and alcohol was not allowed although it did not stop students slipping out for a drink. On one occasion, a porter caught three of them out late, at 11.30 pm, and reported their names to the relevant authorities: George Jacob Holyoake, Edward Vansittart Neale and Catherine Webb, all historical co-operative activists familiar to students (Fig. 5.11).

LIVES AND LEARNING

The formal organisation and identity of the College made for creative interactions and learning. The diversity of people in close proximity gave rise to unexpected friendships. Coming out of a war, communal life was nothing new. W. Hugh Sparks’s scholarship had been delayed by military service but, on arrival, he found the mix of work and play ‘swept us along’. Intensive work routines ‘trained us to work hours which would have made the “sweat shops” of the Industrial Revolution look like rest homes. But we worked because we wanted to’.¹¹³ R. H. Plant derived emotional strength from studying at the College:

We, who are privileged to study here, assume a pardonable air of superiority and justified pride in the grand building and its amenities, the progressive and original teaching methods, and the very real spirit of co-operation that prevails. To us, Stanford Hall is far more than just a college ...

We see it as a mecca, a forum, where Co-operators from all over the world can meet and study under ideal conditions, equipping themselves for future participation in the task of creating the Co-operative Commonwealth.



Fig. 5.11 A typical student prank. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Co-operative pedagogies experienced in social and opulent surroundings fed the conviction and belief of co-operators.

In addition, mutual understanding advanced despite obvious limitations. In 1948, Marshall, mixing his countries and cities, reported that one bedroom was shared by students from 'China, Iraq, Birmingham and Wigan' (Fig. 5.12).¹¹⁴ Overseas students lectured on co-operation in their own countries.¹¹⁵ Colonial students made a significant contribution which enriched the College, not just in terms of finance and numbers:

It is ... important to emphasise what the overseas students bring to the College. Their experience shows that the principles on which our own movement is based have a range and variety far beyond our particular institutions. One of our most familiar slogans in the British Co-operative Movement is that Co-operation is 'a way of living'. In very varied forms of Co-operative organisation represented by our overseas students, that claim is given substance and example. And we should note the personal enthusiasm shown for Co-operation by its representatives from all corners of the earth – a quality that warms our hearts and minds. They are in many ways the modern-day Pioneers, and their earlier and illustrious predecessors would appreciate the initiative and the devotion brought to the task. We are proud of these Co-operators from many lands, and of the service the College is able to offer them.¹¹⁶



Fig. 5.12 Students in front of Stanford Hall, 1955–56. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Marshall adopted pervasive suppositions about stages of national development in comparing colonial students to the originators of the movement in Britain which encouraged him to think in terms of core principles which could be applied globally across time and space.

Students experienced supportive relations and camaraderie. Jack Collins revealed the way in which colonial, internationalist and co-operative ideas circulated which led him to reject the idea of ‘foreigners’ and the way in which ‘the civilised man’s heart grieves for the poor, unintelligent, backward people he has never seen, and the excitable, unstable and (greatest crime of all) un-British foreigners whom they have not seen’. But under conditions prevailing at the College, ‘ideals of internationalists’ became a reality:

The playing fields, bedrooms, common room, dining halls and even the corridors become ‘lecture halls’ in this interchange of ideas, problems and ways of life...

If every student, whether from home or overseas, returns to their own job determined to work for a sane Co-operative World Structure – they will have justified their stay at Stanford Hall. The ordinary citizens of the world can shape its destiny.¹¹⁷

Broad utopian statements of co-operative solidarity emerged from the daily life of the College which at times highlighted difference in order to profess a sense of equality between people. W. D. Bailey had been born in Germany but came to England in the 1930s. He questionably welcomed the colonial students to ‘Our Co-operative College’—‘Most of us have met your countrymen before whilst serving in the Armed Forces, but never on such intimate terms as we do here’. Contrary to eugenicist and selective educational assumptions, he drew the conclusion that ‘human beings whatever their colour or creed, are equal mentally and physically if they are given the same opportunities in life’. Bailey tied colonialism into capitalism: ‘the system under which we are living is to blame not only for the inequalities existing in the European countries under its domination, but also for the conditions under which the people in your countries have been and are forced to exist’. Following a common theme of intellectual life, like Marshall, his account coupled the struggles of the pioneers to those in developing countries and he looked forward to a time of peace and security based upon the ‘Co-operative System’.¹¹⁸ He underplayed the role of British imperialism but intended to reach out in friendship.

British students learnt as they gave names and meaning to the generalities of empire and world geography in which they had been socialised, for Beatty:

Idealism is thus translated into realism when one sees about the College students from Viet-Nam, from Germany, from Kenya, mixing with Danish, Icelandic, Finnish, and Cypriot students. Jamaica, British Guiana, and Zanzibar are now no longer mere names on a map, they are almost as familiar as are Scotland and Wales to the English. India and Africa have some meaning instead of being enormous and distant continents; Canada is no longer an enormous and distant prairie. Students from all these countries have been brought together in 1953-54; all are aware of the value of Co-operative education and all cannot but return to their homes with a strengthened realisation of the necessity for a "new world democratic society" through Co-operative methods.¹¹⁹

1955 marked the year in which Marshall started to categorise students as 'commonwealth' rather than 'colonial' and the course as 'co-operation overseas'.¹²⁰ Marconi Robinson from Tobago viewed the College as a 'meeting place almost as international as the United Nations, but one with a spirit of friendship and brotherhood'; Theo Vardon from the Gold Coast found that 'students mix freely and exchange ideas'; and C. A. O. Makanjuola from Nigeria thought that Nigerians would stare at a white person, whereas British people showed no outward signs of doing so.¹²¹ Students, of course, continued to proffer criticisms. M. M. Tell from Jordan adopted a more critical tone: 'whilst admiring our democratic system in Britain wishes that we were as democratic overseas as we are at home'.¹²²

There were unsurprisingly many examples of difference, misunderstanding, exoticism and confusion, as well as misplaced humour, which were visible in personal relationships. Ted Graham recalled that girls came to the dances from surrounding areas and that the Scottish students introduced Scottish, Modern and Old Tyme dancing where, 'The presence of Colonial students heightens the hilarity, for they grimly try to grasp the intricacies of an Eightsom Reel, and many a cry of anguish has been taken for a Highland shriek!' (Fig. 5.13).¹²³ There were reports of a 'strange' tea party to celebrate India Day with tinned mango juice; or descriptions of 'typical students' in each faculty described those studying the colonial course as having 'a sunburned look and an affinity for those continental and sub-tropical drinks – coffee and cocoa...'¹²⁴ Students sometimes felt

the need to explain themselves or aspects of their culture and would be invited to talk at local societies.¹²⁵ They shared some perspectives in the *College Magazine*. Martin Adesanya from Nigeria, had an ambition ‘to work for the redemption of the Nigerian native, so that he, the native, may be lifted out of the trough of apathy’. Harold F. C. Simmons aimed ‘to work for the regeneration of the people of the West Indies, so that they may take their rightful place among the citizens of the world’.¹²⁶ Discourses of modernity could become intertwined with a desire for freedom and well-being.

Gendered relations were a further ubiquitous part of College life which reflected post-war developments with the urge to return to ‘normal’ domestic and private life. While women played a full part in College life, informal exchanges reveal many gendered assumptions. In the 1940s, the numbers of women had been a bit higher but there was a decline in the 1950s. In 1947, there were eight women and Marshall judged that ‘we should welcome an increase in that proportion’.¹²⁷ But it was not seen as



Fig. 5.13 Christmas dance 1956–57. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

a responsibility of the College itself and at another time Marshall would defend the College on the grounds that not many women applied for places, despite the criticisms that had been made of the lack of suitable courses and provision.

Arguments for equality frequently drew upon ideas of difference. In 1952, Daisy Graham was one of two female College students who longed for more female company. She found the movement to be encouraging of women even if the management and secretarial faculties were 'a man's province'. But she was hopeful that more women might be enticed to study social science at the College which could be 'a fine basis for work in the many spheres of voluntary and welfare work, even if you do not wish to follow a full-time profession'.¹²⁸ Women's choices were being channelled by social perceptions and opportunities. References to women in the *College Magazine* were saturated with gendered comments, advice and jovial banter which carried unambiguous messages. Before outlining Graham's co-operative experience, the 'our contributors' section described her as 'Aged 24. Wife of ex-student Ted Graham (1949–50). (It's amazing the ends to which some women will go to escape housewifely chores)'. Women in the magazine were named 'Miss' but men were simply given their initials. H. J. Twigg, noting that not all women could spell well, nevertheless advised 'male students to acquire a wife who can type' to save him the chore.¹²⁹ W. E. Gore, previously of Fircroft College, was more brusque in an article on 'Mother-in-laws' which included the advice in selecting a wife to 'choose a fat one' and that a good mother-in-law would train her daughter 'in the arts and crafts of housekeeping'.¹³⁰ Humour seemed to release free expression on the topic. A mock trial considered the 'charge "that woman has been the cause of the downfall and misery of man throughout the ages," and needless to say woman was found guilty'.¹³¹ In the 'about the authors' section of the *College Magazine* for 1948, Donald Webb's hobby was described as 'the study of form; he refuses to specify whether it is equine or feminine'.¹³²

Women could be simultaneously critical and complicit of these views. In 1953, Brenda Johnson, a nineteen-year-old on a scholarship from Barnsley British Co-operative Society, found herself the only woman management student who argued that 'that the time has arrived when the illusion that women are out of place in management should be finally shattered'.¹³³ She played on both equality and difference. There were advantages in employing women who, she believed, had more tact,

diplomacy and patience than many men and a ‘natural bent for fashion’.¹³⁴ However, she did not consider herself one of the “‘equality at all costs’ brigade’ and the following year her article ‘Men!’ imagined that if the eight ‘girl students’ expanded to an all-female College, they would all want the best rooms, mirrors, hairdryers, women’s magazines, form sewing and cookery clubs, play hockey and netball and she worried about ‘who would dance with us and who would take us to the pictures ... and buy us a hotdog ... and explain the methods of depreciation to us ... come shopping with us, and carry all the parcels? ... Do you think ... perhaps it’s all right the way it is’.¹³⁵ Thus, the assertion of potentially feminist ideas were frequently reined back upon as unimaginable. The note on ‘our contributors’ mentions Johnson’s ‘Future prospects? – ask George’.¹³⁶ Meanwhile George Grogan ‘discussed democratic meetings and that many frivolous things are brought to the meeting (not counting the female students of course)’.

The prospects and aspirations of these students were emboldened by the example of College alumni who were flourishing. For instance, Axel Gjörës, one of the very early students at the College, had become a member of the first cabinet of Sweden after the war and served the Social Democrats in the Riksdag from 1943 to 1950. He was Director General of the Swedish Board of Trade 1938–41, Minister of Public Administration 1941–47, Minister of Trade 1947–48 and Director General of the Swedish Board of Trade 1948–55.¹³⁷ Many examples of British and colonial co-operators offered hope for these students looking to the future. John Hammond, a student from 1954 to 1956, went on to work in consumer education for Nottingham City Council and in his spare time wrote literary criticism, an indication of the cultural interests of students. Derek W. Herrer was a student from 1955 to 1956 and a tutor from 1977 to 1978; he served as an advisor for the Overseas Development Administration, as the Assistant registrar in Botswana, and worked for the ILO in St Kitts & Nevis. These examples testified to the value of the College and the education and training it offered.

From the end of the war, the movement had re-established the College on a new basis, in impressive surroundings with a cohort of students from Britain and the world which had tripled in number. The new principal had taken to his role with alacrity. A complex and rich curriculum and pedagogy embraced areas of knowledge and learning that were kept separate in most educational settings—liberal, technical and education for social change—were all brought together. The College certainly found a

way to thrive within the difficult settings of the end of empire and onset of the Cold War but maintained a certain radical purpose in relation to co-operation. It was an auspicious time.

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Challenge, Engagement and Decline, 1958–1977

The 1950s and 1960s were good years for the College. Stanford Hall was full of learners and rich educational experiences (Fig. 6.1). Although it was a time when co-operatives were being outcompeted in the high street, the College proved to be flexible and generated many new ideas and schemes for renewal. Within an attenuating movement, unable and unwilling to defend a range of educational activity, the relative position of the College would grow in importance. The courses on overseas co-operation enjoyed a full cohort, a high reputation and government support. Harold Wilson and Anthony Crosland were not the only ones to recognise the significance of this work which was tied into the independence of former colonial countries, and later, international development. By the end of the period, the emphasis was tipping towards in-country training. Cold War anxieties continued to reverberate even if the paranoia of 1950s and early 1960s subsided somewhat, especially with the radicalisation of the 1968 generation of students keen to question authority at the College and elsewhere. The situation in the British movement was mixed. Alumni were occupying many executive leadership positions.¹ The College was proactive in buoying up sessional courses that were bolstered with shorter intensive management and training initiatives. In the long-term, College control over management training weakened as the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and regional societies began to take charge of their own training. Increasingly isolated, the College



Fig. 6.1 Stanford Hall from the front. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

sought national validation for its qualifications. It experimented with new ideas such as consumer education and research and training in democratic practice for members and elected officials. Although the ‘social’ course would receive fewer students by the 1970s, the ethos and underlying principles were retained.

No sooner had the College expanded than the co-operative movement found itself on the brow of a precipitous decline. The movement was ill-equipped to capitalise on its strengths during the post-war boom years that would last into the 1970s. With a narrative of progress inherited from their nineteenth-century forebears, co-operators published inflated figures for market share and membership, which approached 13 million, but an adequate response to the new times was almost impossible to co-ordinate in a voluntarist and democratic movement. The 1958 Independent Commission, chaired by Hugh Gaitskell, found the movement to

be out-dated, drab and unresponsive in comparison with other retailers, a perspective which appeared to undermine the unique strengths of the co-op.² Gaitskell saw no necessary conflict between democracy and efficiency. The Congress president for 1958, J. M. Peddie, remarked that it was ‘an inquiry and not an inquest’ although there was a fair amount of defensiveness in a movement which did not always take kindly to external criticism.³ Seven years after the Commission, the managing secretary of the Nottingham Society, writing in the College magazine, rued that the period had ‘probably been the most disastrous in the whole history of the British Co-operative Movement’.⁴ Nor did co-operative voluntarist democracy find a hearing in debates on public ownership.⁵ The Labour Party had given ‘scant consideration’ to co-operatives—remote bureaucratic agencies rather than popular control was at the heart of post-war socialist democracy.⁶ Such admonitions did not exhort members to put forward new co-operative alternatives. The feeling of rejection was compounded in 1966, when the Labour government introduced the Selective Employment Tax (SET) which levied a payroll tax on service industries to help subsidise manufacturing exports. It hit the movement and College especially hard.⁷ There were many reviews during this period which attempted to comprehend and respond to the changes engulfing the movement. The College was also taking stock and attempted to work within the five-year plans and priorities for education that were made by the movement in *A Plan and a Challenge*.⁸ 1977 marked the end of Robert Marshall’s tenure as Principal.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Residential courses for international students were in high demand. In 1957, the Co-operative Union pondered over a decade of co-operative growth in the colonies and Commonwealth since Lord Hall’s 1946 Circular which had outlined the role of co-operation: membership had increased fivefold; the value of produce marketed 30 times; and consumer sales 26 times. New colleges had been constructed at Kuala Lumpur and Western Nigeria. Indicative of its importance, in December 1957, a joint Working Party on Co-operation in the Colonies was chaired by Arthur Creech Jones.⁹ Fred Abbotts, chair of the Education Executive, reported proudly that in all the co-operative departments of the Commonwealth, a sixth of staff appointments had been filled by College students, totalling over 200. He found common wealth governments held

the College in higher regard than British co-operatives.¹⁰ Lord Oram, of the Co-operative Party National Executive, had visited many countries as Parliamentary Secretary for Overseas Development (1964–69) where he met numerous College alumni:

...for every one that has had the opportunity there are hundreds, if not thousands, who are eagerly seeking it. I have constantly been approached by young people in Co-operative service, asking if I could provide the means ... by some influence ... to enable them to get to Stanford Hall. Such is the magic of our Co-operative College throughout Africa, much of Asia and Latin America.¹¹

In 1964, Wilson, soon to be Prime Minister, echoed these sentiments when he wrote in the College magazine that co-operative enterprise made ‘the best use of their people’s talents ... without exploitation and ... teaches them the art of self-government in the most practical way’. He conjectured that, in time, Stanford Hall might co-ordinate a world-wide group of institutions.¹²

At the end of empire, the College had been sucked into the whirlpool of the Cold War in which political, business, educational and humanitarian motivations intermixed. From the late 1950s and early 1960s, more former colonial countries claimed independence. Mainly through the Commonwealth, Britain preserved an international influence at a time when new players were entering the field. For instance, funds for co-operatives were funnelled to India and Ceylon (later Sri Lanka), under the 1950 Colombo Plan which served as a bulwark against the spread of communism and helped ‘developing independent countries’.¹³ The College worked with the Great Britain-USSR Association which had been founded by the British government. In 1961, Robert Southern, general secretary of the Co-operative Union, reported that ICA policy remained unchanged:

...the Alliance will consist mainly of those free, genuine co-operative organisations which stand by the Rochdale pattern of Co-operation as we know it and practise it in this country and as it is known and practised in many other countries. We must, however, take account of developing forms of Co-operation, new enterprises and new associations which have come and are coming into being under the influence of benevolent and progressive Governments. We must regard them as our weaker brethren, growing up

towards maturity. When they attain maturity they will be well qualified for full membership of the Alliance.¹⁴

Southern's hardline Cold War politics necessitated accentuating the Third World as dependent and in need of assistance.

As Britain's control waned, averting communist influences was not assured—independence did not always correlate with 'correct' democratic choices in newly independent countries. Strongly anti-communist College alumni were appointed to work in the Commonwealth where they might enjoy the benefits of a privileged class aided by servants.¹⁵ In addition, there were complaints that the co-operative form was being contorted, for instance, South African co-operatives exploited black labour and even used prisoners.¹⁶ The Soviet Union partly funded educational initiatives in Tanzania. State socialists might even confuse co-operatives as a capitalist form. When Jack Bailey went to Ghana with the ICA he received short shrift as the Ghana Co-operative Alliance was being suppressed. Critics in the UK were casting doubt upon those who were very close to the new hegemonic Western power bloc. F. W. Leeman from the Midland Sectional Board suggested that

the British Movement has played ball so much with the Colonial Office that we cannot distinguish between colonial officials functioning on an imperialistic basis and those who function on a co-operative basis.¹⁷

Heated debates persisted in the ICA on which countries should be allowed entry and according to which principles. Leeman, who favoured the admission of co-operatives on the Soviet side of the Iron Curtain, was troubled by the selective invocation of certain principles.¹⁸ Bonner served on the ICA committee which updated the Rochdale principles and ultimately decided to relinquish cash trading and political neutrality but cling onto voluntarism which was used to exclude those in communist countries. Contradictions were rife. Not only was the voluntarism of a member organisation being scrutinised in the wake of the Independent Commission but Oram was aware that the state was now 'the most important factor in economic life, not just in Communist countries but in Conservative Britain and democratic America.'¹⁹ There was an urgent need to clarify the 'principle of the relationship between the Co-operative Movement and the State'. He thought this might be a way of expanding

the membership of the ICA so long as they were not going to use the platform for propaganda.

College students were active players in this debate and, in their working lives, would have to bridge state control and voluntary action contrary to the divisions found in international politics. From within the quiet precincts of Stanford Hall, they ascertained that while state action might be necessary, building a popular movement was a slow burner that would not be achieved by impatient expectations of immediate change (Fig. 6.2). Josiah E. Phiri, who had served as an Assistant Co-operative Officer in Northern Rhodesia, reflected that government aid 'is sometimes so great that even members of a Co-operative Society become doubtful whether the Society is really theirs or whether in actual fact it belongs to the Government'.²⁰ Shamsul Huq, Principal of East Pakistan Co-operative College, a deputy registrar and recipient of an International Labour Office (ILO) scholarship, also spotted the snags in introducing co-operation as a result of state policy rather than popular initiative and hoped that legislation would follow an educative process rather than precede it: 'True co-operation could be built up only by the slower process of education among the masses and not hustled into existence by over-anxiety to show results in a short time'.²¹ He wanted 'Stanford Halls' in all countries where meetings should become 'family festivals' with children, dancing and study groups.²² For A. M. Nalumano, the 'up and down economic structure' in the Barotseland Protectorate (Northern Rhodesia, later part of Zambia) hampered the capacity of self-help and education. Direct state participation in industry and commerce was justifiable as a temporary measure, 'provided that freedom of choice in all manner of life's activities is restored to the people after the country has been put on its economic feet'.²³ Co-operatives were conceptualised as part of a socialist project by U. E. Than, from Burma (later Myanmar) where, following independence in 1948, co-operation had become a 'half-way house to a socialistic economy'.²⁴ In his view, 'active state assistance' was essential to an 'under-developed country' and he invoked the ILO document *Co-operative Development in Asia*. He was fully aware that 'rapid growth and increasing complexity is inherent with pitfalls, setbacks, adversities and knotty problems' but hoped that official and unofficial action was capable of forging 'a truly people's movement'.²⁵

Marshall took sides in the Cold War, but he strategically filtered tectonic shifts into the daily life of co-operatives. 'Communism and Social Democracy' were 'two great systems of thought and organisation and

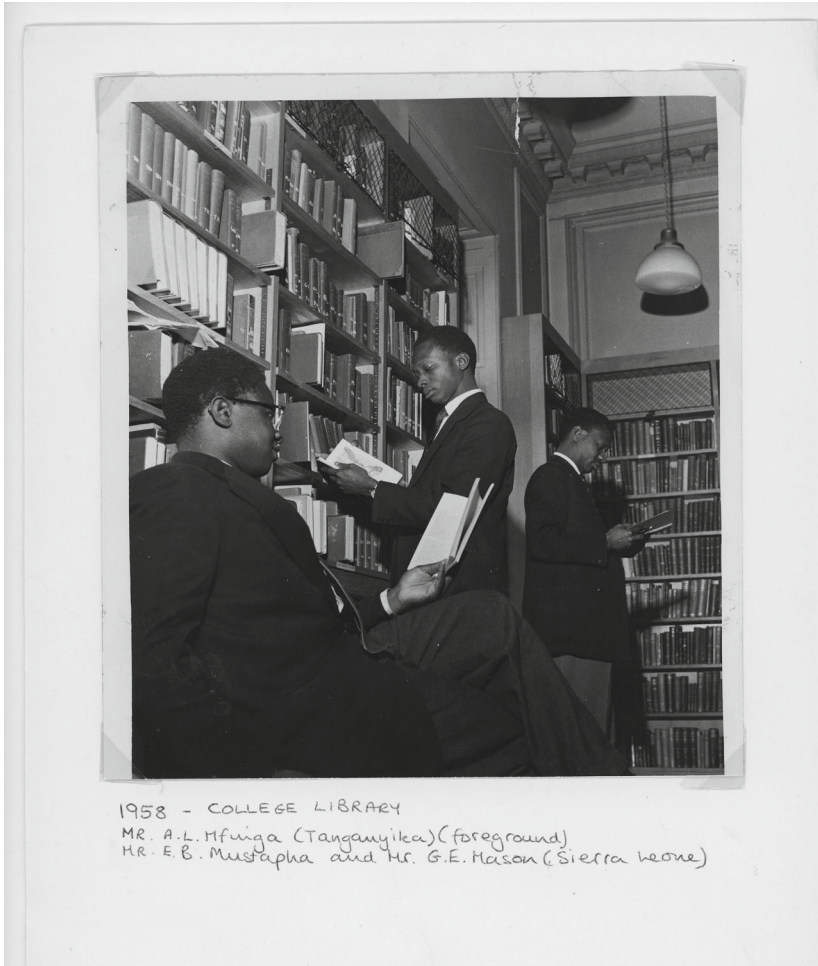


Fig. 6.2 A. L. Mfinga from Tanganyika and E. B. Mustapha and G. E. Mason, both from Sierra Leone, in the library, 1958. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

power' that confronted the movement.²⁶ Viewing these contradictions from the perspective of individual co-operators enabled him to position the College as a source of new ideas and peace in the international field:

the future issues of world peace that confront us may not be settled in Downing Street, may not be settled in the Quai D'Orsay, may not even be settled in the Kremlin or in the White House. The really substantial issues of war and peace may very probably be settled in the paddy fields and the rice fields of Asia, or in Africa, and Co-operation has a part to play in deciding that the issue shall be for peace. If our College can work towards that consummation of effort, our College has an honourable part to play.²⁷

With the independence of former colonies, the landscape of co-operative education morphed. Courses like Principles and Practice of Audit in 1956 and Co-operation in Other Lands in 1960 aimed to meet new needs.²⁸ The College was embedded in the process of independence. For example, Marshall was invited to Northern Nigeria to advise on setting up a co-operative college where he would liaise with staff at the Ahmadu Bello University. He attended the Tanganyika (later Tanzania) independence celebrations at the request of two former College students, George Kahama, Minister for Home Affairs, and Paul Bomani, Minister of Agriculture.²⁹ Having met many of the 56 College alumni serving in senior positions, Marshall was generally impressed by Kwame Nkrumah's leadership towards Africanisation and independence.³⁰ In 1967, Marshall was appointed to a Committee on Education for the National Commission for UNESCO.³¹ When the Botswana Co-operative Union needed a general manager, Marshall obliged with an ex-College student. Another swathe of co-operative colleges were opening with Marshall attending ceremonies in Switzerland and Tanzania. In 1963, he participated in the biennial conference of co-operative college principals in Helsinki which, in 1965, was held at Stanford Hall when eight principals attended 'accompanied by their wives'.³²

Much work was co-ordinated with international agencies. A stream of study tours, visits and publications were produced by the College and movement to address the needs of newly emerging countries.³³ In 1965–66, in response to the ICA, the College arranged a three-month course for seven UNESCO Fellows from India, Korea, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius and Nigeria, who studied adult education and member education.³⁴

A new correspondence course was formulated in association with the Colonial Office, the Agricultural Central Co-operative Association and the Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies. The Certificate and Diploma courses were revised to take account of the correspondence courses for co-operators offered by Plunkett and various co-op colleges and training centres around the world.³⁵ In 1971, the College hosted the Third International Conference on ‘Aid for Co-operatives in Developing Countries’ with Oram as chair and Margaret Digby, from Plunkett, as rapporteur.³⁶

In 1964, the Peddie Report, ‘Co-operatives Overseas’, reviewed the work of the College and highlighted that a ‘pattern has been created on British lines and out of British experience’.³⁷ It recommended a specialist full-time lecturer rather than relying on occasional and visiting staff and that a link with a university should be made.³⁸ From 1967–68, students were able to take a two-year course leading to the diploma in Political, Economic, and Social Studies awarded by the University of Nottingham.³⁹ In 1968, a one-year Diploma in Co-operative Development (Overseas) was introduced and awarded by the Loughborough University of Technology. The Report was produced by sympathisers of the College which reflected the intimate relationships with government and commonwealth nations. Key people were wined and dined each year to secure funding for the next cohort of students. Among College staff there was also a rapidly revolving door between the College and commonwealth countries. In 1961, D. W. Davies resigned to take up a post in Ghana and, in the same year, Fred Howarth, an ex-College student, was appointed to the secretarial department but, two years later, left to become Principal of the Moshi Co-operative College and served in Ghana as an ILO/UN adviser (Fig. 6.3).⁴⁰ In 1965, J. B. Dearman, tutor in the Social Department, moved to Fiji and, in 1966, A. J. Hammond left the College to work in Kenya. Two years later, C. Clarkson, tutor in co-operation overseas, resigned, when the replacements included D. Rushton, a College alumnus, and Peter Yeo.

Marshall sat on the government’s Advisory Committee on Co-operatives Overseas, part of the Department for Technical Co-operation, which was keen to see new innovations and chivvied him on to create an International Co-operative Training Centre (ICTC). It would help to build a distinct identity for the College’s overseas work; initiate short courses for British Co-operators willing to serve abroad; create closer links with Loughborough University; and pursue new lines of research. The



Agroupphoto of participants of Advanced Course for Managers of Cooperative Unions and Senior Government Inspectors run by the then Tanganyika Cooperative College in 1965. Seated were the team of instructors for the course. From left to right: Mr. Joachim Fedke, Mr. Salehe Makanyaga, Mr. Fred Howarth (Principal), Mr. Alphonce Kazwala, Mr. Francis Helm (with glasses) and Mr. Elikolosha Sabuni. Standing were the students for the course.

Fig. 6.3 Students and staff at the Tanganyika Co-operative College. Fred Howarth in the centre had been a student and staff member at Stanford Hall. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Centre was managed by a council including representatives from the Plunkett Foundation, agricultural co-operatives and universities. The salaries of four full-time staff and visiting lecturers were eventually agreed.⁴¹ These relatively minor concessions enabled the British government to parade its generosity at a low cost. An internal government memo confirmed that

we do relatively little for coop development; for various reasons we are unlikely to be able, nor is it likely that we need to expand our capital aid and that to coops overseas in the immediate future ... the proposals made

by the Parliamentary Secretary meet a growing need for which Britain is well equipped and they represent a comparatively modest advance on the lines of present activities.⁴²

In 1968, perhaps unfortunately for the College, the decision was taken to wind up the Advisory Committee and replace it with a consultative panel although this does not seem to have functioned much beyond its first meeting.

Over time, the colonial discourse would gradually mutate into ‘international development’ in which ‘donors’ supported discrete projects, not least in relation to co-operatives. The purview of the empire transmogrified into an itemised list of aid programmes. As the extreme Cold War tensions that permeated public life in the 1950s and 1960s receded somewhat, the associations that people made between co-operative actions and global political frameworks became more opaque. In 1976, Marshall’s valedictory presidential address to Congress was followed by ICA greetings delivered by a Russian co-operator from Centrosoyus. Fundraising initiatives became part of the co-operative ethos in Britain and abroad. Co-operative auxiliaries had made a significant contribution towards the £30,000 advanced by Oxfam to promote co-operatives in Botswana.⁴³ J. L. Rooke, former College student, became co-ordinator of aid projects and co-operative development in the new country of Bangladesh, in collaboration with ICA and Oxfam.⁴⁴ Marshall attended a conference in Denmark where the new zeitgeist was apparent in the purpose of the conference ‘to consider collaboration and co-ordination among the “donor” countries’. By 1966, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Oxfam was already assisting 40 co-operative projects in 20 countries.⁴⁵ College student, John Tomlinson, organised a fundraising appeal for famine relief in Congo.⁴⁶ Co-operators from many countries were now taking a lead and raising funds for education. The Swedish movement raised £75,000 in two years which went towards the construction of a co-operative college in India. By 1970, it was clear to the ICA that co-operative movements in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, France, USA and the UK were all supplying ‘technical assistance to developing countries’.⁴⁷

The UK co-operative movement did not always meet with the objectives of Marshall and his allies. It was an uphill task to raise funds from the movement for an Oxfam co-operative project in Bechuanaland (later Botswana) and the target was not reached. Indeed, the Advisory Committee had suggested that ‘the appeal would be successful if linked to

Oxfam than to co-operative movement'.⁴⁸ To remedy the shortfall, it was proposed that individual societies could allocate some of their dividend to Oxfam but this was rejected and the feasibility of the whole project was questioned on the grounds of trading difficulties.⁴⁹ Marshall also strongly favoured a 'voluntary service' programme for young people from the co-operative movement. Following discussions with the Ministry of Overseas Development and the Voluntary Societies' Committee on Service Overseas, there was an extensive campaign to publicise the scheme but only six applicants resulted including two College students who were accepted.⁵⁰ One of them was Bernard le Bargy who was studying accountancy and would be sent to Bechuanaland; a fellow volunteer travelled to Swaziland (later Eswatini). Bargy recalled that Marshall 'desperately wanted to support the overseas volunteers' initiative'.⁵¹ A request from Zambia was made for a CWS employee to work on a short assignment but the Society would not release staff. Short courses failed to generate interest.⁵²

A collective process of forgetting meant that this international work had to be continually explained to co-operators. In Britain, the historical ignorance about the colonies had fed a psychological marginalisation about the Third World as well as confusion over those who were migrating to Britain. Following a 1960 Congress resolution, a statement on understanding the problems of developing countries was distributed to societies of the National Co-operative Education Association (NCEA) and an article reviewing the 'integration' of immigrants was published in the Co-operative Bulletin for December 1960.⁵³ More explicit criticisms arose from students in the late 1960s. The co-operative movement was also directly criticised for not standing up to Apartheid by fully boycotting South African goods.⁵⁴ Connections were made between empire abroad and at home:

If we are to rid ourselves of the shame of the Hola Camps, Suez, and Central Africa, then we should try to begin at home. America has its Little Rock, we have Notting Hill. We have no cause to condemn Apartheid and anti-Semitism whilst we either support, or disregard, incidents at home. All of us have drunk from the cup proffered by the supporters of the Establishment, and it has filled us with prejudice.⁵⁵

In 1971, the ICA announced a Co-operative Development Decade in which there would be a concerted and intensive campaign for co-operatives as part of the UN Second Development Decade. A level

of nuance was added to the way that co-operative development was perceived, aligning with the views of many students at the College. Co-operative self-help could not be ‘decreed from above’, but it could be ‘nurtured and sustained ... through information, advice, co-ordination, education, training, research, financial help, and the provision of expert services’.⁵⁶ Moreover, in tune with the times, there was a concentration on specific and achievable projects. The British movement, led by the College, was asked to fundraise for co-operative projects in Tanzania.⁵⁷ The plan was to raise £10,000 during 1971–72 to promote co-operative education, purchase a mobile educational unit and a demonstration consumer store.⁵⁸ During the second phase, funds were raised for library books. The hope of modernising countries in a short space of time had clearly been unrealistic.

Aid was gradually reconceived as a dialogic process. When some speakers at Congress wanted assurance that donated money for Tanzania had made a difference, Marshall countered that

...we ought not to exercise ourselves in a kind of detached and insensitive patronage. We ought to consult the developing country about the form of assistance to which it attaches importance, and only when we know its views and its priorities should we then frame and contrive our responses ...⁵⁹

In 1974, a ‘Co-operators to the College’ project was started to raise funds for the salaries of non-government co-operative officers to attend the International Co-operative Training Centre.⁶⁰ By the end of 1975, £4,500 had been donated, topped up by the W. E. Lawn Memorial Appeal. In 1976, three students from Nigeria, Dominica and Colombia received assistance and three the following year from Mauritius, Kenya and Dominica.⁶¹ Both students and College were keen to stress that students intended to return to their countries for the benefit of co-operation: Aji Ali was quoted as saying, ‘I will use the knowledge ... to the best benefit of the Co-operative Consumers in the North Eastern State of Nigeria’.⁶²

By the mid-1970s, the College model of residential education in the UK was being re-assessed. It could never meet the high demand for education and training. Oram noted a new historical phase:

We have come to a point where it is not only necessary to bring students here to our Co-operative College, but increasingly in the future it will be necessary for our people to go out to the developing countries, very often only on short-term assignments, as consultants, as advisers, as trainers, to meet and to help to train those hundreds and thousands who will never be able to come to our College, or comparable colleges ...

...We have, within the Co-operative principles, within our Co-operative methods, one of the most powerful weapons against world poverty.⁶³

The full implications for the College and Stanford Hall were not drawn out. This approach represented the direction of travel but it was not entirely novel. At the time of the *Peddie Report*, the Plunkett Foundation was already providing on-site training with a two-month residential school in Africa, a correspondence course and a Commonwealth Conference on Agricultural Co-operation. Short intensive courses were a sign of things to come.⁶⁴

International work also extended beyond the former colonies, for instance, with partners in Europe and South America. In 1957–58, 15 co-operators visited Germany with a grant from UNESCO. An exchange between Britain and Norway was organised with the trade unions and labour colleges involving study tours and some stays at the College which was seen as a cultural resource of the labour movement.⁶⁵ In 1969, special seminars were organised for Czechoslovak co-operators following the Soviet invasion and, in 1972, a two-month course for Polish co-operators was divided between societies and the College.⁶⁶ Further afield, in the late 1960s, partnerships with Latin American countries led to an 11-week course and a seminar on Supermarket Management which was financed by the Ministry of Overseas Development and the Organisation of American States.⁶⁷ Within the British movement there was condemnation of the overthrow of Salvador Allende's government in Chile and the role of multi-nationals in Cyprus.⁶⁸

EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Domestically, the changing educational landscape posed new challenges for the College. Crosland reflected that 'The influence of the College has been less in the Movement than abroad and I believe that this is an area where investment should be dramatically increased'.⁶⁹ The same trends that impacted upon work with overseas co-operators were

felt earlier in Britain. The co-operative movement had been a historical source of opportunity, education and learning for working-class people, and it promoted the capabilities and possibilities of members. In the 1960s, the notion of human capital would confirm many co-operative ideas about this potential for knowledge and learning. Yet, the direction of state education policy was accruing difficulties for a movement which had actively campaigned for such change. Consistently, priority was accorded to compulsory schooling and higher education, marked by the raising of the school leaving age to 15 in 1947 and to 16 in 1972 and the Robbins Report of 1963. Initially grammar schools opened up opportunities for children of active co-operators who had traditionally valued education although academic selection would pose complications for co-operators in terms of recruitment. The planned county colleges were never implemented and the vocational learning, that many co-operatives favoured, was marginalised. Keeping abreast of changes in education, co-operation and technology could cause disorientation. In a way that prefigured Raymond Williams' *Keywords*, Abbotts was dumfounded by the vicissitudes of policy:

It is a strange topsy-turvy environment in which words today are completely reversed in their meaning ... over a comparatively short period ... the word 'vocational', ... originally implied an element of dedication to a cause. We now use the word as synonymous with 'occupational', and even refer to liberal studies as 'non-vocational'. In the best sense, all our co-operative educational provision is vocational; to be rigidly occupational in our provision would be failing in our social responsibility as employers and as a Movement.⁷⁰

Between 1962 and 1973, the purchasing power of total education grants in the movement halved; in the decade from 1962, member education officers were reduced from 57 to 34.⁷¹ By the 1970s, attendance at the Education Convention was noticeably scaled-down.⁷² The number and range of educational classes and activities all abated. Arthur Sugden's paper in 1974, 'The Co-operative Movement in a Changing Environment', was still mulling over efficiency and democratic accountability. But times had changed and the movement's leadership of education and training seemed to be a thing of the past.⁷³ The tangible presence of the College was reassuring in these times and its position in the movement grew in importance. It was not only the primary location for serious,

intensive co-operative education and research, but was also a symbolic representation. In 1970, the Congress president and College alumnus, Herbert Kemp, affirmed that the College was ‘the powerhouse for ideas and ideals’.⁷⁴

Preserving the British cohort was a big undertaking. Before the war, co-operatives had recruited some of the most capable working-class men (and women), who went on to leadership positions, but this cultural practice was becoming less tenable as quality applicants, who had been ‘creamed off’ by grammar schools, found important posts in the movement less enticing.⁷⁵ Dodds deplored that ‘we are in danger of becoming the victims of the revolution which we helped to prepare and of losing the quality that we need and once recruited’.⁷⁶ In 1957, D. W. Smith, from British Luma, a light-bulb factory owned by the English and Scottish wholesales and the Swedish co-operative union, wondered ‘how few’ children of co-operative leaders were progressing into the movement—having made sacrifices to send their own children to grammar schools and universities, it was not then possible for them to get jobs with co-operatives.⁷⁷ Indeed, Dodds regretted that the movement did not trust educated people: ‘I am told that existing staffs would not like to have people from the universities and grammar schools under a trainee management scheme being put in charge’.⁷⁸ According to the Independent Commission solely recruiting 15-year-old school-leavers was an ‘acute handicap’.⁷⁹

Debates over standards in schools and adult education, thus found expression in the co-operative movement. There was ‘no more basic problem for the Movement than that of attracting the right quantity and quality of labour’.⁸⁰ In 1958, reports circulated of societies that were ‘embarrassed’ about the dearth of suitable applicants and the low level of scholastic attainment of many recruits.⁸¹ For students of book-keeping it was proposed to lessen the weight of introductory courses on co-operation which were ‘beyond their competence’ and similar examples proliferated.⁸² The Executive professed that co-operative recruitment was akin to ‘making a silk purse from a sow’s ear’.⁸³ Moreover, issues of ability and staffing also reflected back onto the College. The Education Executive was apprehensive that, ‘if we are to train the type of regional managers of which we often speak in our Trade Association meetings, then there must be that quality of tuition at the College to ensure that kind of training’.⁸⁴

The College itself was undergoing a moment of transition as long-term staff were leaving but those replacing them did not all stay for a

long time and might be drawn to more prestigious and lucrative jobs higher up the pecking order. In the early 1970s, staff posts were being advertised at salaries of £2,000 at a time when Ruskin College was paying £3,000.⁸⁵ The College lost some long-term staff. In 1959–60, H. Davies died, who had been with the College since 1931, an expert in law and a strong Christian.⁸⁶ A few years later, Arnold Bonner passed away. In 1960–61, Walter Eason retired after 32 years, having been the first senior tutor appointed to the College and author of many textbooks. Aged 14, he had started with the Derby Co-operative Provident Society and eventually won a scholarship to the College in the mid-1920s before joining the tutorial staff in 1929.⁸⁷ Long-term staff were becoming scarcer with a trend towards a more rapid turnover at a time of full employment and a high demand for teachers. In 1958, following the resignations of S. C. Allonby and B. J. Youngjohns, G. Scott, from Ruskin, and G. W. Rhodes, from Huddersfield Technical College, replaced them.⁸⁸ But Rhodes left in 1960 along with T. W. Cox who were replaced by D. W. Davies and W. J. Chappenden, and the latter would soon join Nottingham University. In 1967, I. D. Cameron and J. B. Harrington, both ex-students, joined social studies and management. Cameron and J. Hayes both resigned the next year to take up post-graduate studies and it was not immediately possible to find successors. Full-time tutors were supplemented with part-time lecturers.⁸⁹ These examples were far from atypical and the expanding opportunities for teachers elsewhere meant that the College could not easily retain a stable staff body even if individuals remained loyal.

The discourse on recruitment and democracy was to alter. Many co-operators were mindful of the contradiction between ‘secondary education for all’ and the reality of a divided and segregated system of education which selected a few for a narrow educational ladder. The labour movement demanded opportunities for all who were able to take advantage of them but this could infer that pools of ability did in fact exist and it took time for comprehensive thinking to seep in. In 1960, D. Waddington, from Watford and Harrow, was ‘appalled’ that statements at Congress appeared to accept ‘the theory and practice of selection ... The assumption was that we did not want those of the 80% of the nation’s children who are failed at 11 years of age but who go on to achieve qualifications. Of course we need them’.⁹⁰ However, he was all too aware that their competitors wanted these people too—‘That is the basic problem facing our nation and the reservoir from which to draw is

not big enough'.⁹¹ Concerns about 'wastage' and ignoring talent would feed into the demand for comprehensive education. Marshall himself was not completely convinced by the comprehensive argument, being guarded about plans for the Open University; he questioned the view that 'everyone is capable to engaging with study of a University quality ... frankly I do not think that this is true. It is no discredit to anyone to say that he or she is not capable of study of that quality, but a simple acknowledgment of the human condition'.⁹²

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

As the College grappled with these wider tensions, there was a balance to be struck between proud independence and insularity. The insistence on the singularity of co-operative education mirrored the way that co-operatives aspired to be universal providers of goods and services. In 1956, the Education Executive reiterated that the movement's 'greatest need, both sides of the counter, is co-operators. Our courses ... must contain an element of Co-operative teaching ... if we fail in this respect, Co-operative business will become indistinguishable from that which is its purpose to challenge, and the Movement will die'.⁹³ Co-operators were sceptical about bolting co-operative content onto a generic course; rather they aimed to integrate the 'general and particular approaches' throughout their educational work.⁹⁴ At this stage, the Executive was confident enough to expect 'the continuance of loyalty on the part of societies' to this vision. Interestingly, the 1958 book, *Co-operative Education*, rehearsed the definition of co-operative education as nurturing 'co-operative character' as well as active citizenship and participating in social life. It was perhaps one of the final outings for this interpretation and the book marked an ending more than a beginning even though claims for the unique nature of co-operative education would persist.⁹⁵

However, it was becoming harder for co-operative education to go it alone. The Independent Commission had pronounced that co-operatives exaggerated their distinctiveness which, it argued, boiled down to its accounting methods and the relationship with an elected lay board. As a result, the movement was characterised by

... a certain isolation and consequent conservatism in the field of ideas, techniques and innovation. There is too little exchange of knowledge with the private sector, too little awareness of new developments at home and

abroad, too narrow an emphasis on specifically Co-operative practice and tradition. The result is a certain technical backwardness in Co-operative managerial practice.⁹⁶

No doubt, competitors were happy to see the co-op stew in what they saw as the movement's parochialism. A reluctant acceptance of this perspective inevitably clipped the wings of utopian co-operative aspirations. In 1959, commenting on the Crowther Report, *15 to 18*, Marshall had to carve co-operative education from new circumstances:

We are ... basically an educational Movement ... our justification and test is that we build up in our community the conditions that will cultivate co-operative qualities in men and women, cultivate charity, philosophy and co-operation instead of enmity, class war or the other disfigurements that we see around us.

In our beginnings we started with the conviction that that could be achieved entirely by our own efforts, and that we could bring people into Co-operative communities. Those days of heroic self-confidence are now well spent. We now have to rely not only on our own influence, but on other influences, including the State, to see that the establishment of conditions for the encouragement of co-operative qualities is completed....⁹⁷

As far as possible, this was to be achieved without adversely losing the coherence and independence of co-operative education.

National legislation made increased demands on the College. Following the 1964 Industrial Training Act, training boards in key industries were to levy employers for the cost of training that they could then claim back. It represented 'another pressure towards co-operative participation in common trade courses',⁹⁸ although co-operators were alienated by its technical nature and the neglect of 'the cultivation of human responsibility and the cherishing of the human spirit...'.⁹⁹ The movement was 'caught in the Act' and kept a close watch on the membership of training boards which might adversely affect it.¹⁰⁰ It took until 1968, when there was consultation over the Distributive Industry Training Board, on which the co-op was represented, and also a Food, Drink and Tobacco Industry Training Board, on which it was not represented, but co-operators did exert influence over the various constituent trade associations.¹⁰¹ The Boards served to encourage the creation of training development officers and group training schemes in the various sections

of the movement. In 1972, the Education Department recouped £27,377 from the DITB which was clearly a significant sum.¹⁰²

Co-operative qualifications gradually made way for national ones. In the late 1950s, the movement was reticent to dilute its own qualifications, for instance, declining to participate in a Certificate in Retail Management Principles which was backed by the Retail Trades Education Council, examined by City and Guilds and endorsed by the Ministry of Education for the whole field of retail.¹⁰³ College-leavers realised that validated qualifications might help them gain access to university.¹⁰⁴ The constant attempt to win recognition and funding for College work served as another stimulus. In 1960, the College was again approved by the British Institute of Management (BIM) and the Ministry of Education for teaching an Intermediate Certificate in Management.¹⁰⁵ From 1967, 'national' courses in secretaryship and retail management started to replace College awards.¹⁰⁶ The movement would also have to learn from competitors in the training and retraining of those at the top level of the movement.¹⁰⁷ In 1971, the Executive report by Lawn referred to the 'massive effort' in embracing the General Certificate in Distribution, the National Distribution Certificate and the Certificate in Distributive Management Principles. That year, 176 people enrolled for a Certificate in Distributive Management Studies that was launched jointly with the Grocers' Institute; an Advanced Distribution Certificate would follow. Participants attended the College as well as colleges in Watford, Birmingham and Sheffield.¹⁰⁸ In the same year, the seal of Accreditation by the Council for the Accreditation of Correspondence Colleges was awarded.¹⁰⁹ Characteristic of the times, in 1974, the Diploma in Co-operative Secretaryship was withdrawn and plans mooted for a new course although these were not realised.¹¹⁰

TRAINING INITIATIVES

Qualifications were often matched to new training schemes. Whatever the truth of James Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* which posited that management was replacing capitalism, the management focus struck a chord in co-operative circles.¹¹¹ The Sub-committee for Technical Education investigated recruitment from grammar schools and universities. The Independent Commission thought the movement had paid an 'exceptional degree of attention to training and education' and possessed the 'enviable asset' of the College but wanted to see more action. Courses at

the College should be integrated into 'an explicit system of training for management' rather than the then current 'haphazard affair'; personnel departments should be established rather than relying on education committees.¹¹² Functions of management should be more clearly distinguished from oversight and policy by the lay board, a distinction which the Independent Commission found was confused in many co-operatives. The College was encouraged to appoint more external tutors. Enhanced recruitment, personnel and training functions were also advocated by a College paper, *The Measure of Efficiency in Co-operative Retailing* (1958), carried out by Professor F. A. Wells working with former College students Dr M. Skillcorn and J. Straker, a research assistant.¹¹³

The response among societies was neither immediate nor electric. Staff training appeared less necessary amid rationalisations which made managers more plentiful in amalgamated societies. Rumours circulated of branch managers, keen to hold onto their jobs, being afraid to leave their shop because they would be held responsible for leakage¹¹⁴; managers and officials were 'starved' of educational resources and had to 'take their holidays in order to be present at educational courses and seminars'.¹¹⁵ Some societies had never taken education seriously and, in 1963, over 600 societies did not report any day release.¹¹⁶ Certain societies remained fickle in their appreciation of the College: in 1955, ten societies each advertising one scholarship, had no candidates; nine had only one candidate each; four had two candidates; three had three candidates; and just two societies had four candidates. By contrast, where the College was advertised, there was more competition and one society had 15 candidates for an award.

Surveys revealed that a significant number of societies did not support the College. In June 1960, *The Co-operative Gazette* reported that 296 co-operative societies had a policy on promotion; 222 agreed to pay rewards for those gaining certificates; 240 were employing more than half the movement's staff and assisted students through scholarships and short courses at Stanford Hall.¹¹⁷ The feeling in the Union and College was that 'education can be tolerated provided it does not cost too much' rather than it being 'very much concerned with trade'.¹¹⁸ While activists could be successful in getting societies to fund scholarships, in everyday business operations, job adverts rarely stated 'co-operative certificates an advantage' or integrated training into annual staff reviews.¹¹⁹ Experience was generally favoured over qualifications.¹²⁰ One commentator heard murmurs about 'ruddy college wallahs' parading their knowledge and

upsetting office routines in societies. By contrast, some College-leavers ruminated that they were becoming ‘angry young men’, a reference to John Osborne’s play, *Look Back in Anger*, given the time it took to find a position and, when they did, were treated as new recruits.¹²¹ The lacklustre enthusiasm of the movement for training was a constant theme that had exercised Marshall from the outset:

the Education Executive has done almost as much as it can do. We have made an analysis of the problem; we have led the way in preachments; and we have received a great response in the way of lamentations. Now is the time for action. We must at the local level tackle it with quite specific policies. The Education Executive proposes to bring together a number of societies and representatives of the trade unions to see whether we can devise positive, forthcoming policies of recruitment which will begin to tell in practical terms and which will bring us from the grammar schools and universities the quality which we need. Without that quality we shall not survive as the kind of Movement that we aspire to be.¹²²

The College made two concerted attempts to encourage the movement to recruit from higher up the educational hierarchy. In 1963, a Management Development Scheme created salaried positions comprising work-based training and College residence. Societies contributed funds with the agreement they would have first claim in employing the recruits. An appeal for funding was launched at the rate of £1 1s per £100,000 of trade with Congress concerned about ‘the dearth of reserve personnel capable of administering successfully the executive positions within the Movement...’.¹²³ Societies were expected to accommodate these students ‘on the basis of a positive and long term scheme of assessment and promotion’.¹²⁴ It would involve abandoning the traditional practices of promotion by age and seniority to which many societies were wedded.¹²⁵ In the mid-1960s, criticisms were levelled that centralised College training was ‘not practical’ for most officials who favoured regional training, a development which led to a shortening of the residential requirement.¹²⁶ From 1965–68, a Working Party on Staff Recruitment and Training saw limited scope for expansion. Gripes that the scheme was too small and was ‘crawling along’ appeared to be confirmed by a co-operative manager who explained with some urgency that, ‘A management revolution has been rampant in this country for many years’ with an estimated 800 centres devoted to it, yet the movement’s response was uninspiring.¹²⁷ By 1974–75, 52 young people had been recruited making ‘a useful, though still

modest, contribution'; 47 out of 64 recruits had remained in co-operative service.¹²⁸

A second scheme recruited school-leavers with at least two 'O' levels for branch management, this time involving a four-year training scheme which deployed day release, evening classes, seminars, correspondence courses as well as sessional College study and, in some cases, attendance at university extra-mural departments.¹²⁹ Just over 100 were recruited in the two years 1965 and 1966. However, by 1970, the Executive was 'extremely disappointed' with the 'total failure' to appeal to those with 'O' levels for junior management positions. In that year, only one society ordered the publicity. The scheme was discontinued, and, in its place, advice was to be given to societies 'on all aspects of trainee recruitment, including study and practical experience, together with information on short intensive courses at the Co-operative College...'.¹³⁰ It was 'disturbing' that there was a 'virtual absence' of recruitment of grammar school-leavers with two 'A' levels.¹³¹

Societies did not recognise education and training as a 'business necessity' or 'their obligation for proper training of staff for executive positions'.¹³² Accordingly, the College was to apply itself to short, flexible, intensive courses. By 1961, it had taken on Co-operative Union short-course provision and recruited a tutor to co-ordinate the offer.¹³³ This was not simply a reaction to the gradual waning of full-time residential students but an attempt to meet the rapidly changing needs of societies. There was experimentation with the length, content and scope of courses. In 1957, weekend schools were organised for the Co-operative Coal Managers' Association and the Co-operative Dairy Managers' Association.¹³⁴ Sandwich courses led to a Certificate in Branch Management. Students spent eight weeks at the College, followed by five weeks at work with related exercises to complete, finally returning to the College for four weeks, spread across January-March.¹³⁵ This would prove onerous for some and, in 1961, it was reported that even three weeks in residence was too long a period.¹³⁶ Refresher 'executive development' courses for department managers reviewed the principles of management, worked up case studies from their experience and reported on issues facing their departments followed by a final week at the College.¹³⁷

Curricular innovations reflected changing times: Office Management and Supervision; Management of Wine and Spirits; Work Study Appreciation; Stores Supervisors and Shops Inspectors; Supervision and Management in various departments. Additional courses were added in Dry

Cleaning, Store Detectives, Credit Control, Communication Skills, and Computer Control in alliance with the CWS Computer Bureau.¹³⁸ A mock shop was equipped to facilitate courses on Self-Service Management and Managing a Supermarket—‘in effect, working for two weeks as managers of a supermarket’ (Fig. 6.4).¹³⁹ Courses and conferences were organised for the 50–70 correspondence tutors who were on the College books. In 1973, the consultants Urwick, Orr and Partners presented on Management by Objectives to the chief officials’ conference, a sign of things to come.¹⁴⁰ There were antecedents for this practice—a course on Work Study had been organised by specialists from the British Productivity Council. In 1971, 812 instructors were trained in decimalisation, many of them at Stanford Hall although metrication would take a little longer;¹⁴¹ a 1972 seminar explored the proposed imposition of Value Added Tax (VAT), which replaced the SET, from which the College was exempt;¹⁴² and seminars on Industrial Relations followed the 1971 Industrial Relations Act.



Fig. 6.4 Supermarket training, Stanford Hall. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

The success of short training courses oscillated. In 1964, a reduction of 2,500 staff taking part in training was reported but there were also moments of renewal that appeared to buck the trend.¹⁴³ In 1969-70, 1,832 officials and managers from 140 societies were trained which represented an increase of almost 1,000 over the previous year.¹⁴⁴ In 1974-75, there were 2,379 enrolments in staff education.¹⁴⁵ The press frequently misrepresented and ignored this activity. In 1960, the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) had noted that 3,179 students had sat for exams of the Institute of Grocers which has 'more or less unchallenged writ in the private trade', ignoring the fact that there were 2,735 co-operative students in grocery subjects.¹⁴⁶

As part of a proliferation of training opportunities, co-operative societies would start to organise their own affairs which would eventually topple the College from its dominant position and, later, isolate it from training top executives in the movement. From the late 1960s, the CWS started to give greater priority to its training needs as did societies eligible for the Industrial Training Board levy which had the effect of eroding the College monopoly even if, overall, training expanded.¹⁴⁷ CWS Counter-craft Centres in Manchester, Newcastle and London were set up to train employees through a one-day course in the sale of CWS goods which was presented, somewhat defensively, as 'purely concentrated on the sales of CWS productions ... it leaves to our College friends the greater task of sales promotion'.¹⁴⁸ After 1970, the trade advisory departments of the Union would be transferred to the CWS which also established technical panels dealing with meat, pharmacy, bakery, transport, laundry and dairy for which the College provided bespoke training. This responsive mode would become more common in coming decades.¹⁴⁹ In 1972, the CWS assumed responsibility for the training of instructors.¹⁵⁰ More fundamentally, in the mid-1970s, a Training Executive took over responsibility for training from the Education Executive which was now 'limited to the inclusion within programmes of staff training of appropriate reference to Co-operative principle and practice'.¹⁵¹ Accompanying this incursion were the usual assurances that 'the commitment of the Union to Stanford Hall as the Co-operative College should be maintained and ... further developed to meet the needs and expectations of the Movement'.¹⁵² The new Training Executive was to be directly responsible to the Central Executive and was in fact chaired by Marshall in the first instance.¹⁵³ However, the ambit of the College was being whittled away and it

was now accountable to two separate bodies which introduced added complexity.

These changes had the effect of fracturing the holistic vision of co-operative education and forced a wedge between the general and specific approaches to co-operative training that the College had originally attempted to keep together. There were recommendations that a 'co-operative element' be incorporated into inductions; co-operative subjects should be included in management training; and that senior management seminars should encompass co-operative ideals and principles.¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, a College special course on Co-operative Organisation was designed for potential managers and officials who were professionally qualified but 'without either the appreciation of the organisation and history of the Co-operative Movement, or awareness of its basic principles'.¹⁵⁵ Two 'instructional blocks' on the movement were issued that, it was hoped, could be incorporated into existing courses on things like inflation, retailing and superstore practice.¹⁵⁶ The Central Executive became fearful about the fragmentation of training and loss of control; its calls for greater co-ordination were not to be met.¹⁵⁷ Co-operative education was becoming more frangible so that, in future years, even the distinctive co-operative add-ons could be dropped.

An unforeseen consequence of training managers was that the quality of the accommodation was judged to fall far short of expectations. Although earlier generations who had fought in the war found the rooms 'sumptuous', younger groups of CWS senior and middle management expected 'something better'.¹⁵⁸ In the mid-1970s, there were still two, three and four beds in a room and just 38 single rooms (Fig. 6.5).¹⁵⁹ Renovation of rooms was continuing with the help of the William Temple Turnbull Memorial Fund and, in 1967, a new dining room was built.¹⁶⁰ In 1975, an agreement was made for substantial adaptation and extension of the working and living space at Stanford Hall, supported by CWS Architects.¹⁶¹ The conversion to single rooms and a new wing was expected to cost £450,000; half was to be funded by the CWS and the remainder from the Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS), from increased Congress subscriptions and fundraising.¹⁶² In 1974, a regional management centre approached the College about available space which stimulated thinking about using the land and facilities more creatively.¹⁶³ There had been proposals for constructing a community on the grounds but they were prevented by planning restrictions.¹⁶⁴



Fig. 6.5 A study bedroom revealing a lot about the living and study conditions, the cross symbolically in the centre of the picture. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

SOCIAL STUDIES

Throughout 1950s and 1960s, while upholding the social courses, the College strove to build an inclusive common curriculum traversing the widening divisions in its provision. Social studies attracted a regular cohort but was also taught to all students. In 1959, in place of single core courses, students could choose from the Sociology of Co-operation, Art, Music and Literature, involving some elements of practice and ‘appreciation’.¹⁶⁵ The sociology option examined Henrik Infield’s *Utopia and Experiment: The Sociology of Co-operation* which made the case for co-operatives in challenging ‘backwardness’ and fostering improvement.¹⁶⁶ An Education course was compulsory for second-year students and 19 enrolled on a class in the Art of Teaching.¹⁶⁷ Social students were exposed to a series of special lectures on How to Read a Balance Sheet.¹⁶⁸ Key

staff included Bonner, the Tolstoyan and pacifist, Harold Bing, and, in the 1970s, Malcolm Hornsby.

Funding via partnerships and government was a priority in organising social studies. In 1957, six students attended a module on Display: Principles and Practice, held at Loughborough College of Art.¹⁶⁹ The College lobbied government and, in the late 1960s, was approved by the University of Nottingham for teaching the Diploma in Political, Economic and Social Studies with recognition from the Department of Education and Science.¹⁷⁰ In 1966–67, nine Stanford Hall students attended the Loughborough Technical College for a City and Guilds Technical Teachers' Certificate.¹⁷¹ The Union and College were also represented on the National Institute of Adult Education (NIAE); the rejuvenated Council for Educational Advance; the British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education; WEA; and the Long-term Adult Education Residential Colleges. In 1963, Stanford Hall hosted a conference on Residential Adult Education sponsored by the European Bureau of Adult Education and the NIAE.¹⁷²

More joint schemes with universities were organised, especially with the extra-mural departments that were keen to work with the co-op, sometimes through day release classes. In 1957–58, 15 university day release courses were organised for 208 students. Sheffield, Durham, Leeds, University College Wales, Monmouthshire and Birmingham universities laid on classes on co-operation and economics in conjunction with the movement.¹⁷³ More ambitiously, the Midlands and North-West Sections, the University of Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy and the North Staffordshire WEA, collaborated on six residential weekends covering social and economic history, co-operative history, the economics of retail distribution and public expression. Similarly, the North-East Section, in association with the Extra-Mural Department in Sheffield, delivered six lectures on Tasks of Modern Management targeted at boards and management committees. The Leeds Extra-Mural Department experimented with a full-time tutor in co-operative studies, funded by co-operative societies for the first seven years.¹⁷⁴ The success of these schemes fluctuated and, in 1959, it was reported that only three university day-release courses had run in comparison with eight the previous year.¹⁷⁵ Throughout the period, working-class students gained important opportunities. For instance, the Labour MP Dennis Skinner recalled recommending the Co-op College to the political activist Graham

Parkin who had been a builder and was a voracious reader. After successfully completing his studies at the College he went on to take a degree in Economics at Hull University.¹⁷⁶ Skinner clearly perceived the College as part of the labour movement.

MEMBERS AND CONSUMERS

Working-class members were not always so well nurtured within the UK movement which was becoming burdened with a prolonged downturn in fortunes. The education of members and directors had traditionally been an informal matter but, in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a propensity to jettison membership and democracy and focus more exclusively upon the business operations. The ageing democratic machinery appeared to be dead wood that needed clearing. The unique aspects of co-operation were downplayed, for instance, in 1971, by congress president, Gwilym Williams, who imparted a ‘lack of emotional appeal: this is the business session of our Movement ... profit for the member ... the viability of this great Movement’.¹⁷⁷ On a daily basis in many societies, this business approach kept members at a distance, yet it did not stem the contraction of the co-operative movement.

The movement accepted rationalisations and mergers of societies although, as a rule, these took place reluctantly, forced by market competition. In 1961, the National Amalgamation Survey reported that, since the war, the number of societies had reduced from 875 to 307.¹⁷⁸ In 1968, a Regional Plan was agreed in which fewer, more economical, regional societies was identified as an ideal. Inevitably, there was a concurrent reduction in elected posts and individual members did not automatically transfer their loyalties to a new more distant society. As whole areas of voluntary co-operative activity disappeared overnight, one apprehensive commentator warned his fellow co-operators that ‘we are in danger of losing our soul in our efforts to gain material benefits’.¹⁷⁹ ‘Morbid introspection’ set in.¹⁸⁰ Abbotts cautioned that democratic structures were dated and ‘ceased to be democratic in any real sense ... we shall limp along with a hansom-cab democracy unless we can increase the number of activists and increase their interest in our societies’.¹⁸¹ Research by G. N. Ostergaard and A. H. Halsey also identified the lack of participation in co-operatives.¹⁸² Apathy was a much discussed notion at the time. Yet, it was ironic that groups like the Woodcraft Folk were drawing in members and that youth was a rising force across the West.¹⁸³

In 1960, the Albermarle Report was quoted in the Co-op Congress to the effect that youth should not be blamed for delinquency and apathy, forces that seemed to interconnect with a concern for efficiency and technical advance. A struggle for 'moral and spiritual' life had been replaced with

a passive mutual commitment to things as they are. One cannot in fact indict the young for the growth of delinquency without also indicting the older generations for apathy and indifference to the deeper things of the heart.¹⁸⁴

Member education had a role to play in mitigating fears and investing business with a more profound purpose but it was engulfed in turmoil. In 1961, 'disturbing' reductions in adult education groups were reported and, in 1967, a 35% fall in student enrolments over 2 years was reported.¹⁸⁵ In 1966 alone, 14 education committees were disbanded.¹⁸⁶ The NCEA guideline of an education officer for societies with more than 20,000 members was not met by 86 societies representing 23% of the membership while 28% of members were in smaller societies without an officer.¹⁸⁷ Brian Groombridge's College paper on the future of the auxiliaries warned about the long-term ebbing of the Women's Guild in particular. A conference on the Future of the Auxiliaries and new training were not enough to hold back the decline.¹⁸⁸

The simultaneous loss and problematising of members and directors led to a new interest in member and director education (Fig. 6.6). The College could draw upon historical resources.¹⁸⁹ The 1958 Commission had agreed on the need for member education and training within a co-operative democracy.¹⁹⁰ In 1969, Southern, as Congress president, spoke in favour of member education, spurred on by the 1966 ICA Vienna congress which endorsed member activism and education. The problem was

not a question of member apathy, but a question of society indifference towards the basic duty of educating the members, who, in the main, are regarded as customers and not as participants in a Movement which has social as well as economic significance. This problem has largely fallen into the lap of our educationists and their most managements (sic) have let it lie.¹⁹¹



Fig. 6.6 A Stanford Hall member education summer school pondering *The Consumer and the Law*. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Southern reinforced the need for ‘effective democratic checks’ on the encroachments of ‘technocracy’ and senior officials

the managerial revolution should not be allowed to get out of hand ... major decisions of finance, personnel and policy being reserved to, and made by, elected Boards of Directors. This involves the obligation on Board members of better equipping themselves to judge performance and submissions made to them.¹⁹²

An experienced co-operator, ‘Figaro’, wrote in the *College* magazine about managers and committees ‘passing the buck’ to one another whereas he pressed for ‘a willingness to delegate authority’ coupled with ‘a higher degree of accountability from those in whom authority is vested’.¹⁹³ Officials had to learn to explain not just ‘how’ but also

‘why’ to a lay committee’.¹⁹⁴ The co-operator, Charles C. Job, wanted to ‘combine the advantages of modern streamlined management with full democratic accountability and wide participation by members in co-operative activities’. Presciently, he referred boards of directors to the Regional Plan which gave them responsibility for the education of members, their ‘most prized and precious asset’:

the support for Co-operation among our people, their loyalty and devotion, is the envy of our competitors, who spend millions of pounds in advertising and public relations in an effort to gain support which is already ours and is there ready for the taking.¹⁹⁵

From the late 1950s, the College attempted to deliver ‘a substantial service to Co-operative democracy’ although, in 1967, it remained an area of ‘comparative failure’.¹⁹⁶ Weekend schools for the Midland Section of the Women’s Co-operative Guild were arranged.¹⁹⁷ In 1960, summer courses recruited over 70 students from Education Committee members and Society Directors but two social studies courses had to be cancelled.¹⁹⁸ In 1964, recruits could not be found for a course to train local instructors despite the need for them and even after reducing courses from six to three weeks.¹⁹⁹ The College student, Jeff Gardner, desired ‘a new grass-roots level of participation in the democratic system of Co-operative Social Ownership’ to help arrest the isomorphic tendency of co-operatives to mimic mainstream business which in turn reflected a lack of faith in the ability of democracy to meet contemporary problems.²⁰⁰ The 1969 Congress resolved that each section was to develop member education, to inform members as co-operators and consumers and to invest in nurturing future leaders.²⁰¹ Paid professional staff were favoured over part-time volunteers, a practice which Abbots found ‘fantastic’—he wanted both efficiency and democracy.²⁰² There was a focus on ‘Directors dealing with their specific responsibilities for a Society’s performance’²⁰³ and a five-week training course in member service at Stanford Hall.²⁰⁴ In 1971, following the Working Party on Democracy in Regional Societies, there was experimentation with training and research for management education to present ‘complex issues and proposals to an elected committee in terms which simplify without distortion’.²⁰⁵ Summer courses for lay directors in member service were organised for directors, education committees and guild officers. In 1970, Len Burch and W. Pickard were employed as Member Education Development Officers

who aimed to apply adult education techniques to member education.²⁰⁶ The following year, 20 two-day primary and three five-day secondary courses were organised.²⁰⁷ A member education manual replaced *Co-operative Education*. Collaboration with the WEA led to courses on co-operative principles. The 1975 report on Lay Leadership and Membership estimated that there may have been 1,100 lay leadership positions so there was still hope for revival.²⁰⁸ Marshall was involved in the report but attested to a mounting weight on his shoulders when he urged the movement to take responsibility for bringing about some of these changes to member education, not just ‘that traditional and powerful pack horse – the Education Department and Stanford Hall’.²⁰⁹

The attempt to convince co-operative societies to embrace membership was, at best, partially successful in the short run even if it was the beginning of a more explicit educational approach to democratic governance. But the converse attention to customers also missed a trick in embracing a critical approach to ‘consumerism’ which was rapidly becoming a major force in post-war Western nations driven in part by the growth of service industries, disposable income and privatisation. G. D. H. Cole had identified a potential consumer education and protection role for the co-op in the 1940s. The Independent Commission wanted a co-operative democracy in which co-operative consumers would be equipped with ‘their own standards of discrimination and judgment’.²¹⁰ It was an agenda championed by Michael Young and the formation of the Consumers’ Association, a ‘new style consumers’ co-operative’ and *Which?*²¹¹ Writing in the *College* magazine, Young highlighted the potential for collaboration and compared the Consumers’ Association to the Rochdale pioneers.²¹² By 1966, Marshall again found himself locking horns with a stubborn movement that, in the common joke, did not co-operate and did not move: ‘For 15 years, the Education Department has been pleading the cause of consumer education for this Movement, and doing so in early days when it was much less the fashionable cause than it is now, and from the Education Department have gone out services of all kinds; advocacies, publications, visual aids, materials of all kinds, and the material...’²¹³ In 1968, the CWS declined to make appointments in consumer education while the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (SCWS) did not see the need for a committee on the topic.²¹⁴

This is not to say there was no activity, much of which overlapped with the *College*. In 1955, the Co-operative Union collaborated with the Council of Industrial Design to produce ‘Colour and Pattern in

Your Home' with ideas for do-it-yourself and 100,000 copies were printed.²¹⁵ Similar publications followed—Textiles and the Consumer, Food and the Consumer as well as More Fun with Your Food.²¹⁶ In 1958, co-operators met with universities to discuss household management.²¹⁷ E. B. Loveridge and then David Lazell became tutor organisers in consumer education.²¹⁸ Conferences and summer schools on consumer education and protection were held at Stanford Hall.²¹⁹ The 1973 Working Party on Consumer Education and Protection was tardy in responding to the 'accelerating growth in what we may dignify with the term "consumerism"' which had hitherto only 'marginally concerned' the movement.²²⁰ In 1973, a National Consumer Conference was organised following a Congress resolution on consumer education. A network of 90 discussion groups came together for a conference in London which served as 'a reinforcement of the Movement's status in consumer affairs'.²²¹ In 1974, Shirley Williams, Secretary of State for Prices and Consumer Protection, addressed 1,000 participants and Young spoke at a later conference. Member relations officers encouraged societies to include consumer information services within co-operative stores.²²² There was a call for the movement to 'manifest a real educative concern for consumers' and not leave it to the National Consumers' Council, which was to be established by the government in 1975.²²³ Dodds reflected that, out of 70 of the largest societies, only one employed a consumer advisory officer, four had consumer advice days and four operated consumer advice bureaux.²²⁴

RESEARCH

The changing nature of membership and consumerism were both areas where independent researchers were providing new insights. There remained some wariness about independent research which harked back to historical reservations about theoretical knowledge within the movement. In 1959, the opportunity to work with universities at Sheffield, Nottingham and Leeds opened up although 'cautionary considerations' were raised that there should be no conflict with co-operative research agencies. But the Executive favoured an 'experiment' in jointly sponsored research.²²⁵

Sporadic initiatives were nevertheless significant. Research scholarships for independent study were awarded.²²⁶ Bing gained a Jubilee Research Scholarship to compile entries on co-operators for the Dictionary of

Labour Biography working with the historian John Saville.²²⁷ A research project was funded by the NCEA on experiments in local democratic organisation in relation to co-operative education as well as the preparation of a manual of management for chief officials and department managers.²²⁸ A Jubilee Research Fellowship was awarded to a special unit at Keele University on co-operative democracy.²²⁹ In 1966, there was a grant of £1,000 to the college from Oxfam to pay for a visiting fellowship covering both teaching and research—Dr G. S. Kamat was selected from the National Co-operative College, Poona (later Pune).²³⁰ A Manual of Transport Management in the Co-operative Movement was published in 1967, followed by a Manual for Dry Goods Managers. In 1969, R. Wilson from the College carried out a survey of the training needs of the Birmingham Society.²³¹

From 1967, the Society for Co-operative Studies aimed to forge a ‘systematic link’ between the movement and the universities.²³² The following year its membership comprised 79 individuals, 50 from co-operatives and 52 organisations, 41 of them co-operative.²³³ In 1969, the College issued a *Golden Jubilee History Booklet, A Commemoration 1919–1969* along with an appeal to subscribe to a commemorative research fund.²³⁴ By 1971, £3,704 had been gifted plus covenants for seven years yielding £4,336 annually. Grants were made to R. D. Lock of Loughborough University of Technology to investigate member participation as well as T. E. Stephenson from the University of Leeds to examine management structure in a north eastern society.²³⁵ A senior fellowship at Loughborough investigated financing of co-operative societies in times of inflation although the researcher later resigned.²³⁶ Another researcher from Manchester University studied the Birkenhead, Lancastria and Norwest Societies.²³⁷ But the College Papers series ceased due to the cost.²³⁸

COHORT

The changes in each area of the College’s work affected the cohort. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, snapshots of the student body paint a picture of stability, alluded to in publicity photographs (Fig. 6.7). In 1956–57, there were 96 male students and eight female students, more than usual. The average age was 29 and 62 were married. Out of 72 British students, 62 were employed in the movement. Of the overseas students, 25 out of 32 were civil servants and seven in co-operative

service.²³⁹ The cohort was nourished by scholarships from societies, governments and related agencies. Co-operative organisations, including the CWS, SCWS, Co-operative Retail Services (CRS) and various sections, offered 36 scholarships; 17 came from local societies; and an assortment from the British Council, various governments including those in Ceylon, Malaya, New Zealand, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, Burma, Sudan and Iraq. Funding came from relevant agencies and co-operative networks such as the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Association, the Colombo Plan, ILO and the odd private student.²⁴⁰ In other years, the Sino-British Fellowship Trust, Cento, the Food and Agricultural Organisation, the Bukoba Native Co-operative Union and the Bugufi Coffee Co-operative Union in Tanganyika, as well as the Federation of Iceland Co-operative Societies, would sponsor students. Increasingly, the College benefitted from local education authorities, for instance, in 1960, Chester, Durham County, Huddersfield, North Riding and West Riding as well as Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, Fife, Glasgow and Lanarkshire all gave support.²⁴¹ The 1975 Education Act helped to secure government grants for long-term social students at the College on diploma courses.²⁴² However, the ebbing of the movement eventually constricted the number of sessional students which, by 1971–72, had dropped to 73 although this did not apply to international students: 38 were from Britain, 27 from the Commonwealth and eight from Iceland, Hungary, Iran, Ethiopia, Philippines, Brazil and Iraq.²⁴³

The absence of women at the College reflected the movement as a whole which, despite the significant work of the Women's Guild, had not sufficiently attended to this equality issue. In 1969, Marshall highlighted that the number of women in attendance was the same as in the first year of the College half a century earlier—just one. Complacency had been pervasive. In the early 1960s, reporting on the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), Robert Southern casually assumed that, in contrast to communist countries, co-operative women stood on a position of equality with men:

Our womenfolk are entirely free; they can have their own organisations, they can become members of societies and participate in the affairs of societies by election to boards of management, and generally they stand equally with men in co-operative esteem and action.²⁴⁴



Fig. 6.7 College students posing in their uniform with blazer, tie and crest. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Some eyebrows were raised at this claim when it was noted how few women shop managers there were in the co-op.²⁴⁵

By the 1970s, as second-wave women's liberation movements were sprouting, the ICA General Secretary was less confident; Britain had 'not yet found the answer ... we must ... find ways and means whereby there can be increasing female influence integrated into the affairs of the British Movement'.²⁴⁶ In 1975, the International Women's Year, when sex discrimination legislation was going through Parliament, the movement appointed Eva Dodds as its second woman president in 106 years. Congress debated the need to pay attention to 'equal opportunities for women in training for skilled work'.²⁴⁷ Congress passed resolutions on the position of women in senior positions, although changes on the ground would be scarce.²⁴⁸ In the same year, the Education Executive chairman announced condescendingly to Congress that he welcomed more women 'because they make a very pleasant change to

the scenery'.²⁴⁹ From a different angle, Mrs L. Williams from Oldham women's guild complained of Marshall's patronising tone when he had spoken to them 'as if they were back in the infants' school'.²⁵⁰ In 1970, the *Co-operative News* carried an article on the need for women to ensure a secure home environment for their husbands.²⁵¹ At the College, Marshall's wife, Beryl Marshall rarely appears in the historical records but was a constant presence and actively supported her husband's work. On the eve of Marshall's retirement, in moving an appreciation of his service, Mrs F. E. L. Collins felt impelled to refer to Beryl's 'important but unobtrusive help, especially with the drama and theatre group interest, and with assisting students to adjust to college life'.²⁵²

PEDAGOGY AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Beyond the formal curriculum, students were exposed to a variety of influences, not least through having time to read widely (Fig. 6.8). Lectures included John Daniels from the Co-operative Party on Marxism; the anti-mafia community organiser, Danilo Dolci; Mrs J. Scott on the Leicestershire Experiment in secondary education; Bing on Esperanto; Martin Lloyd, head of Uppingham school; the historian Asa Briggs; J. G. Mallett, the senior assistant registrar of co-operative societies for Southern Cameroons;²⁵³ Southern from the Co-operative Union; W. P. Watkins, director of the ICA; speakers from the Nottingham Afro-West Indian Association, Nottingham Forest Football Club, the Labour Party, the government Chief Whip and the High Commissioner to Ghana. The Greening Lecture was revived and delivered by Dr Jacob Bronowski, a mathematician and humanist, at the time working for the National Coal Board.²⁵⁴ The veteran Labour politician, Herbert Morrison, presented certificates in 1957. A co-operative 'any questions' was organised and students presented papers for feedback and publication at a College Co-operative Forum.²⁵⁵ The completion of the Abbotts' wing in 1956 was a welcome residential addition to the site and students started to enjoy a 'new look', borrowing a term from Christian Dior's fashion innovation.²⁵⁶ More flippantly, the passing of a resolution to purchase a seal for the seal pit was not followed through—on the outbreak of war, the seals and penguins had been put down due to the cost of feeding them.²⁵⁷ There were also attempts to embrace technologies and a filmstrip on Co-operative Provisions for Technical Education was produced.²⁵⁸ Audio-visual aids utilised wall charts, film strips, tape recordings and exhibitions.

Use was made of Radio and TV programmes and the development of local radio in the 1960s was a further opportunity.²⁵⁹

Contrasting clubs and societies catered for diverse interests not least through Christian and Humanist societies. A new chapel was built, adorned with carvings of Stanford elm by the sculptor, A. E. Birch, where the College prayer was recited: ‘Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deserves, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to work and not to seek for rest, to labour and ask for no reward save that of knowing that we do Thy will’.²⁶⁰ Anglican, Free Church and Catholic services were held.²⁶¹ A Nuclear Disarmament Club, which had 20 members in 1960–61, was represented on Aldermaston and Wethersfield Marches (Fig. 6.9).²⁶² Mai Alman, an 18-year-old library assistant, was arrested at a demonstration of the Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War.²⁶³ In addition, a skiffle



Fig. 6.8 Two students. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

band, Folk Singing Society and Hiking Club, had been formed, and later basketball, volleyball and dominoes would feature. In 1960–61, Michael Anawomah from Ghana, a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the Movement for Colonial Freedom, joined with Augustus Thole, A. M. Nalumango and Dave Trevorrow to take part in the international folk song festival in Nottingham.²⁶⁴ In 1964–65, the College ‘Hit Parade’ celebrated both old and new: *In an English Country Garden, Thank Heaven for Little Girls, The Young Ones, The Ballad of Bethnal Green, Scotland the Brave and Land of Hope and Glory* were all listed.²⁶⁵

As a consequence of easier travel, the social committee found it harder to organise events. In 1968, with new language seeping into use, the ‘discotheque’ held in the College was less successful than that at the Three



Fig. 6.9 College students on a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) march. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Crowns in Wymeswold which went ‘like a bomb’.²⁶⁶ Students went to see Peter Barnes’ play, *The Ruling Class*, at the Nottingham Playhouse where it premiered in 1968.²⁶⁷ More adventurously, students organised travel to the Arctic Circle and Moscow visiting various co-operative colleges, shops and factories en route.²⁶⁸ By the end of the decade, there are reports of visits to the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries organised through co-operative societies.²⁶⁹

In the 1960s, alterations in student life become noticeable. The head porter, Jack Dring, witnessed ‘quite a difference’ in the students by the early 1960s:

The earlier students were if anything more nervous ... more eager to conform. They were keen on their P’s and Q’s ... many of them had been used to a long period of service life which had taught them to conform quickly and without fuss. Then they were of an earlier generation when upbringing ideas were different to those of today.²⁷⁰

By contrast, Bob Mason, another porter who had worked for the previous owner, Sir Julien Cahn, did not feel that the students had changed much and were generally ‘a lot of good blokes to get on with’.²⁷¹ The 1967 issue of *Spectrum* contained a picture of three naked men strategically covered by ties and books. The 1968 cover featured a stereotyped multi-armed Vietcong soldier among a sea of heads, flags, weapons and body parts (Fig. 6.10). The editorial attempted to connect Britain, the Vietnam War and the College in calling for a ‘spectrum of feeling, of consciousness, to respond to the vibrations of being’. It problematised co-operative principles which had been pursued by diverse figures:

Jesus Christ, Sitting Bull, Karl Marx, Robert Owen, Tolstoy, Richard Neville, Ho Chi Minh, Adolf Hitler ... there are many kinds of co-operation. Most of the contributors to this magazine, however, are not revolutionaries, not anarchists, not fascists, not hippies, not provos. They are normal. They have never taken hash or LSD; they marry their lovers, and in general represent those individuals who, from a distance, seem like an amorphous, grey and ‘conned’ mass of ... people...²⁷²

Students started to question ‘complacency ... petty regulations ... the upholding of tradition merely for its own sake’ and kicked against some of the institutional restrictions.²⁷³ Peter Davis, the NUS secretary, called



Fig. 6.10 Cover of *Spectrum* reflecting the preoccupations of the '1968 generation'. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

for direct representation of students on the College and Education Executive 'machine', now deploying the term pejoratively, although he and Marshall eventually agreed to a system of 'joint consultation'.²⁷⁴ Elsewhere Davis railed against the professionalisation and bureaucracy being carried out by 'a gang of Philistines ... entertaining fantasies of managerial omnipotence'.²⁷⁵ New ideas of voluntary organisation contrasted with older working-class associations. A Social Service Group was filling gaps

in the welfare state by doing voluntary work in an ‘Unmarried Mothers Home’ and a children’s home.²⁷⁶ The 1968 students also became interested in older generations, interviewing Bing in the College magazine, who outlined his ‘Victorian’ influences as well as experiences and beliefs on pacifism, Tolstoy, adult education, the breakdown of family discipline, youth movements, vegetarianism, imprisonment, rejection of drugs and alcohol and the need to build co-operation as an alternative system to capitalism. Bing did not think he had met any hippies but figured that they were revolting against the ‘mechanisation and militarisation of life’.²⁷⁷

In the late 1960s, life at the College would be represented as a rejection of the racist arguments of Enoch Powell, invoking friendships, tolerance and fair play that still characterised Britain.²⁷⁸ By contrast, Ingle Blackett’s poem ‘To the Caribbean’ reversed this assumption so that ‘nations emergent’ were now the cradle of liberty:

Now are thy peoples so conscious of purpose
That, working together in glad harmony,
They show to the world an example of tolerance,
Mutual help, industry and Liberty.²⁷⁹

Overseas students were not overly-timid in criticising the weather, food and ‘tight-lipped reserve of the British people’.²⁸⁰ S. Mahindapala gave a sobering assessment of the British movement:

A financially sound organisation built up over a century has become a dividend-conscious concern masquerading by the name of co-operative ... While visiting some of the largest societies in the country, one could not help feeling oneself at the death-bed of a near and dear relative, unable to do anything to help.²⁸¹

More positively, he recommended that British co-operatives should expand into new and more varied areas of activity—holidays, sanatoria and community living for instance.

Despite the critical force which was building among the 1968 generation, its long-term impact upon co-operative management and leadership of the consumer movement was to be minimal. The changes of the 1960s also filtered through to the College in contradictory ways and could be hard to grasp. While attitudes to sex and race were clearly in a state of flux, there were recurring problems and continuities. The 1969 edition of

Spectrum printed a picture of students moving ‘George’ the statue around the grounds, dressing it in underwear, with two of the students having blacked their faces.²⁸² A picture of a woman in a short dress was matched with the caption ‘editor’s inspiration!’ In 1968, three women students echoed the late 1950s. Instead of ‘handsome young men ... begging for dates’ knocking at their doors, they found ‘a pasty-faced student in need of aspirins and sympathy’, a button sewn on or coffee and blankets after a night out. They offered ‘gentlemen’s hair-dressing ... a general advisory service...’. Their regrets, however, were assuaged by that fact that:

they’re not a bad bunch, and when we consider how dull life would be if this were a ladies’ seminary ... We like our lads, God bless ‘em. In fact we can’t even say they don’t appreciate us, at least one student must have realised the advantage of having a woman around the place, as he recently became engaged to one of our number. Poor girl, now she will have to nurse him for the rest of his life. However, there are still two of us who remain unclaimed. ANY OFFERS?’²⁸³

By the time of publication, another offer had indeed arrived. It contrasted somewhat with the socialist demands of S. Wilson reprinted from a 1938 edition of the *Stokehole*.²⁸⁴

Furthermore, the 1960s may have exacerbated differences at the College where diverse groups of students came into close proximity. In 1966, Marshall found it ‘regrettable’ that overseas students shared no courses with the UK students but were primarily preoccupied with agricultural co-operatives.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, the British Institute of Management students were described as ‘a group apart’.²⁸⁶ From 1964–65, sessional students felt that management training and sandwich courses were driving a wedge into the collective ethos of College life:

Stanford Hall is becoming less of a residential education centre and more of a training ground for future management and its inmates now think of themselves not so much as students as Co-operative employees training to receive qualifications for their own betterment and that of the societies they represent.²⁸⁷

The comprehensive aspirations of the movement and College were being whittled down—‘The variety of courses at present is stretching its resources to the uttermost ... it can no longer attempt to be all things to all men’.²⁸⁸ Rationalisation, rising standards and a focus on

management appeared to loosen the connections with the values and ethics of the movement and to be spiralling out of control—‘super managers’ and management development schemes implied the ‘subordination of the Social Gospel of Co-operation’.²⁸⁹ However, students testified that informal communication among those from different backgrounds and courses had created a common sense of purpose.²⁹⁰ The Christmas concert helped in ‘welding individuals into a highly co-operative team and in knitting the community life of the College more closely together’. Marshall held firm on mutual connection and solidarity in his understanding of co-operative education:

unity in scope – we have to serve member education and Co-operative democracy even if staff education and training remains our predominant commitment; the unity of British Co-operation - the College should continue to serve the whole of the United Kingdom; and the unity of international competition—we should still take satisfaction in maintaining at the British Co-operative College a service to the whole of the international movement.

END OF AN ERA?

The retirement of Marshall in 1977 represented a key moment in the history of the College. Thereafter, he was able to spend time on the Mergers and Monopolies Commission, the Advisory Council of the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the Society for Co-operative Studies. More than anyone else, Marshall had shaped co-operative education at Stanford Hall. The College had been established on a stable footing and enjoyed a great demand from the newly independent nations and this area of work flourished and had a widespread impact. But the College was predicated upon the existence of a powerful British movement able to support and utilise its services. From the 1960s, as these went into abeyance, an ever-greater exertion was required for the College to thrive. The ‘social’ courses had started off well but there was certainly a drop in enrolments by the end of the period. In training, there was a decline in secretaryship as well as diversification of management education with an emphasis upon experimental, flexible short-term, intensive and sandwich courses to address new needs. Amalgamated societies started to organise their own training, encouraged by government policy. Larger societies also problematised the relations between managers, directors and

members which aroused the interests of educators. Out of instability a coherent practice of co-operative education had been constructed and Marshall adumbrated an upbeat assessment of the movement's contribution to education, democracy and consumerism in *The Times*.²⁹¹ This work was to be taken forward by younger generations.

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Decline, Crisis and Renewal, 1977–1999

The new Principal, Robert Houlton and his successor, Robert Wildgust, inherited problems that had been smouldering for years and erupted during the 1990s. At a time when the ‘business’ side of the movement predominated, which viewed co-operative education as an optional cost, alternatives were quietly gestating. After 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the rise of globalisation paradoxically went hand in hand with a greater emphasis upon democracy now that anti-communism was off the agenda. As global inequalities were exacerbated, the shortcomings of the shareholder model of enterprise and its harmful social and environmental impacts became more conspicuous. Notions of the learning organisation, lifelong learning and global civil society were all in circulation. The College, as part of a global movement, elucidated a democratic co-operative alternative. From the late 1970s, it defended the traditional areas of management, social studies and overseas courses. But the virtual collapse of all three areas in the 1990s provoked an existential crisis for the College which sparked heated debates. In such unpropitious circumstances, the College was figuring out a new practice and vision of co-operative education based upon values and principles and an understanding of the unique nature of co-operatives.

ROBERT HOULTON AND CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Houlton was seen as a radical appointment. He was a relatively young academic working at the University of Liverpool as a lecturer in economics and industrial studies. He came from a working-class background and had experience of working with the labour movement as well as higher education and training. As an external examiner for Nottingham University, Houlton had some familiarity with the College. He had been a news and current affairs producer for the BBC and a writer and presenter of adult education TV programmes.¹ From the outset, Houlton grappled with structural and financial issues and the challenge of survival in a declining movement with falling rolls and rising costs. Retaining and maintaining Stanford Hall became a major preoccupation. The model of student living since 1946 was becoming less tenable and potential users were demanding higher standards for training and accommodation. The costs of renovation were seen as an 'extravagant expense' although the College had little choice in the matter.²

In paying tribute to the previous regime, Houlton's intuition was that Marshall had shouldered 'excessive tasks', with 'all lines of responsibility' leading to the Principal. Staffing changes followed. In the early 1980s, he was joined by Wildgust as Senior Administrative Officer and, from 1982, Assistant Chief Education Officer. In 1978, on the retirement of the senior tutor, W. Shearer, Oswald O'Brien from the University of Durham took up post as Vice Principal and Director of Studies until 1983 when he was elected MP for 11 weeks and a day.³ L. C. Fox, the Senior Training Development Officer, was appointed to Assistant Chief Education Officer and a librarian post was created which helped to embed the College in a world network of co-operative libraries.⁴ Houlton thought about re-organisation in relation to key areas: policy should be 'set by the Education Executive and confirmed by the Co-operative Union'; teaching responsibilities were to be carried out by relevant staff; financial accountability for all areas of activity was necessary; and 'a management capability was essential' for consultancy and research with societies.⁵ He wanted tutors to 'go into societies' rather than remain at Stanford Hall.⁶

Houlton came into post at a time of rapid change. Between the quadrupling of oil prices in 1973 and the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, it is commonly believed that the post-war model of political consensus and economic stability came to an end. The political

and economic transformations of the 1980s—Thatcherism—created an inhospitable climate for the College. Co-operatives in Britain and abroad struggled with the dominant model of economic liberalisation and fierce competition. A co-operative movement on the wane was not on the radar of the Conservative governments but the removal of the Retail Price Maintenance hit co-operatives hard. Previously they had enjoyed an advantage as the dividend meant that selling goods for the same price as other retailers gave the consumer an additional motive to shop at co-operatives, but no longer. In any case, the dividend was being phased out gradually and replaced by stamps.

Despite the ominous outlook, the co-operative movement still stimulated a blend of hope and realism among activists. In 1980, a review of membership could claim that ‘Our movement (200 independent societies with a total membership of 10 million) represents the largest single voluntary force for common ownership and collective control and responsibility in Britain’.⁷ In the early 1980s, there were 225 retail societies with over 10,500 retail outlets, 100 dairies and ‘many thousands of acres of farmland’. The turnover of retail societies amounted to £3,100 million, ‘ensuring that the “Co-op” is the *largest* retail organisation in Great Britain’.⁸ However, as management students were expected to appreciate, the movement was comprised of a myriad of smaller businesses, centres and units: ‘the graduate should understand that each society is an autonomous unit, individually organised and controlled by its own board of directors, all of whom are nominated and elected by the local membership’.⁹ Houlton soon appraised himself of the movement and College which had to blend theory, training, education and practice, a ‘turbulence’ he found to be reflected in programmes and staff:

Wherever you turn in the Co-operative College the dualism of roles is present. Administrators are philosophers, or sociologists, or amateur theatre directors. Academics are councillors, prospective Members of Parliament or tavern licences.¹⁰

However, the culture of the co-op, which was turning away from an effective member democracy, could not easily adjust to change. The co-operative aspiration to be a general provider of goods and services was continually whittled down as it came to depend on loyal customers, those who could not travel and the convenience shopper who did not want to. In the 1990s, the movement’s factories would be sold off as uneconomic.

There would be a drastic reduction in the number of societies which fitted with a policy of regionalisation but often reflected the economic failings of societies. In a declining inward-looking movement, there were many dangers to navigate: those who tenaciously held on to their positions, sometimes embedding failure at the expense of the welfare of the movement as a whole; those who extracted personal gains; and carpetbaggers aiming to exploit a weakening movement and make private gain out of common resources.¹¹ It was a ‘dysfunctional federation’ in which there were many ‘fiefdoms dominated by a small clique’, undermining both ‘the democratic principle and any efforts to integrate the movement’.¹²

Internal cracks were also appearing in co-operative structures. In the 1990s, scandals broke out across the business world. The case for improved governance was made by the 1992 Cadbury Report on corporate governance as well as the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life, which put forward seven principles—selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. The co-op was not immune to the breakdown of the old ‘gentlemanly code’.¹³ Ostensibly democratic business forms carried no guarantee of being well-managed and directed. Members had been taken aback at a *Manchester Evening News* headline, ‘Sex Scandal Rocks Co-op’. As College finances were being cut, it was revealed that United Co-operatives had paid over £5 million to fund the pensions of two chief executives. These businesses had elected boards of directors, made up of members, unlike boards in firms which included those with hands-on experience and expertise. Election to a co-operative board gave a democratic legitimacy but did not guarantee competence. In some cases, it hardly gave legitimacy as few members voted and some had even been discouraged from doing so.¹⁴

In terms of government education policy, the movement was stuck in a responsive mode. Prime Minister James Callaghan’s Ruskin College speech of 1976 is frequently considered a turning point in education policy which steered away from child-centredness towards the political control of education and vocationalism. The Education Executive, despite primarily working in adult education and having minimal connections with schools, was supportive of a resolution on ‘Standards of Education in Schools’ to the Education Convention and called for ‘the need to equip children with the knowledge, understanding and skills which will not only help them activate social judgment but will also provide a sound foundation for the economic development of the community’ as well as allow for the representation of parents and industry in education.¹⁵ The claim

about a fall in standards came in spite of the fact that, overall, examination passes were rising, as delegates were quick to remind members.¹⁶ Co-operative leaders courted the Prime Minister in agreeing that something was ‘wrong’ with education as a whole. What is notable is the absence of an analysis of co-operative education as a basis for these interventions or any connections to adult learning or the College.

Adapting to cultural change was troublesome. One review argued that, ‘All the action is with specialised and “issue” groups which are often simultaneously casual yet professional. Most Co-operative groups are, in contrast, formal and amateur’.¹⁷ The educational structures of the movement resulted from complex historical battles, partial compromises and divided responsibilities. For instance, the College was now doubly accountable to the Training Executive and the Education Executive; it reported on parts of its work to both Congress and the Education Convention run by the National Co-operative Education Association (NCEA). The Co-operative Union served as the trustee of the College and this relationship would also come under pressure.

Other changes blended into the ethos of the College more easily. The interest in experiential pedagogies put the College in a strong position to build upon its historical strengths in valuing the lives of students.¹⁸ Academic qualifications were required for diploma courses but work experience was more important for the certificate courses. The same applied to international work, where both students and tutors brought a wealth of experience. The College was eager to underline that

continual use is made of participative learning methods, which promote active exchange of experience between course members. Much of the training material has been compiled from the Tutors’ own personal working experience in the developing countries ... the College has many close contacts with Co-operative Organisations throughout the developing world, ensuring that the content of courses and training materials are continuously being updated.¹⁹

The work of the International Co-operative Training Centre tailored the needs of co-operatives to their specific settings. Nimal Wijyaratna’s notion of management encompassed both productivity and socio-political change alongside collaborative and mutual conceptions of research that infused the work of the College. Peter Yeo explained the importance of participatory teaching for ‘sleepy outdoor members on a hot evening’,

after a day's work, who were not receptive to long lectures.²⁰ Houlton laid down his thoughts on the centrality of 'capability' for co-operative students, perhaps a forerunner of Amartya Sen's groundbreaking work in the area.²¹ These tendencies had to be weighed against the need for standardisation and quality. Preparedness of students was an issue and not all made it through to the highest qualifications. Exams were held after two months to decide who would go on to complete a Diploma Course or a Certificate Course.²² In addition, new technologies were utilised with TV and 'micro computers' alongside portfolio work, study groups and visits.²³ The rise of the Open University had made clear the multiple potential uses of TV.²⁴ In 1990, the College's computer facilities were upgraded with a four-year £20,000 covenant by the Co-operative Insurance Society.²⁵

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Stanford Hall still attracted a diverse cohort (Fig. 7.1). Gradually, international development work was transitioning from educating an elite in the UK to favouring in-country training, an approach which many at the College endorsed despite the financial imperative to fill bed spaces. In 1977, the international conference on Co-operation and the Poor, hosted by the College, helped to mark the change of direction while potentially raising the profile of co-operatives. Even moderate aims were not being met and a more coherent and holistic approach to co-operative development, in which education was essential, was called for in the Loughborough Statement.²⁶ By contrast, during the 1980s, the rise of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), re-configured development and, in response to the debt crisis, withdrew aid for co-operatives. SAPs led to privatisation, the reduction of the public sector in many countries and the removal of trade barriers. Co-operatives were ordinarily part of the public sector and were afflicted by budget cuts. The World Bank questioned the effectiveness of co-operatives and they fell from favour in development strategies and policies.²⁷

It took time for this to feed through to the College and a steady international stream of students made it to Stanford Hall. Under the auspices of the Co-operative Development Decade, funds were raised for co-operators from developing countries to attend the College. In 1978, plans were also made for societies to 'adopt' a student so that they might spend time with families in societies, especially during vacations which left bed



Fig. 7.1 Cohort 1979–80, Robert Houlton seated centre left. Staff waving from the window reveal changing attitudes. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

spaces to rent.²⁸ That year, the international provision included three-month specialist courses on Education and Training for Co-operatives; Consumer and Supply Co-operatives; a two-month Workshop for Policy Makers each with about 10 students. The nine-month Diploma in Co-operative Development and the Certificate in Co-operative Management and Development, awarded jointly with the Co-operative Union, attracted 15 students each.²⁹ In 1980, specialised diploma courses for co-operative development were made available. Houlton was involved in a new course on co-operative financial services for the International Co-operative Insurance Federation.³⁰ In 1990, there were 38 men and 11 women on long-term courses comprised of 19 from the UK and the remaining from Africa and Asia.³¹ Six followed a specialist three-month course in Savings and Credit through Rural Co-operatives. Thirty-five

students graduated, with the help of grants from the Overseas Development Administration (ODA), the European Commission as well as various co-operative and governmental organisations, although these sources were reducing.³²

The noticeable drop in funded places for international students came in 1994 with only 4 places filled even though there had been 72 applications awaiting a sponsor. The College regretted that this was ‘directly attributable to the government policy of cutting back on co-operative training’. Enervating co-operative networks undermined numbers and informal contacts could no longer be relied upon. In 1994, it was decided to cease some loss-making overseas courses.³³ A year later, the College was ‘confident that the decline has now been arrested...’ and was exploring the possibilities of distance learning.³⁴ Yet, recruiting students to spend time at the College had become more difficult and the competition for scholarship funding was extremely high. In 1996–97, the international programmes validated by Loughborough University were also suspended due to lack of participants.³⁵ With the ‘small number of students’ adversely affecting the ‘quality of the learning environment’, it was decided to discontinue sessional programmes altogether and Wijayaratra was made redundant. The lack of interest in a master’s in business administration (MBA), which had been accredited by Loughborough University in 1993, was indicative of falling rolls. Of six initial applicants only one was able to take up the offer, Dennis Maino from Cameroon. There were no students in 1994–95 and two completed in 1995–96. Again, the course leader had to be made redundant.

Despite the collapse in long-term residential courses, international work was to expand significantly via external opportunities. Consultancy and on-site management training, organisational development and human resources, both in the UK and abroad, became central aspects of the College’s portfolio. In 1978–79, the Co-operative Liaison Education and Research Unit (CLEAR) was established to carry out research and consultancy services partly funded by the Ministry of Overseas Development.³⁶ The Unit would also extend its reach to include UK management. From Houlton’s perspective, it enabled the College to stay afloat and ‘generated income which made the College financially viable in the 1980s’. Its success meant that over half of turnover related to activities which were not dependent upon Stanford Hall.³⁷ By 1992, there were 300 specialists on its books and the proportion of research and consultancy earnings was higher than at Oxford and Cambridge.³⁸ The fall of the Berlin Wall would

further impact upon international work. At a time when the College found it harder to access funding because of new demands coming from Eastern European countries, it benefitted from new consultancy opportunities in that part of the world where the College helped co-operators to 'adjust to the changing demands of the market economy and organisation'.³⁹ Projects included work with Centrosoyus in Moscow, the Moscow Co-operative Institute and Moscow University of Retailing and Distribution;⁴⁰ on governance with consumer co-operatives and credit unions in Russia; modernising management training programmes for co-operatives in Kazakhstan; as well as new exchanges with co-operators across Europe. CLEAR worked in Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, Russia and Yugoslavia. For the European Union (EU), it carried out a preliminary project on a Co-operative Management Centre for the Baltic States and produced a report on Co-operatives and Social Economy Organisations in Central and Eastern Europe.⁴¹ An EU 'Leonardo' funded programme examined vocational co-operative training in the UK, Greece and Italy.

To lever various funding streams and nurture appropriate partners, it was essential to cultivate key international bodies such as the EU, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and ILO. Working in partnership with international agencies became habitual. CLEAR Unit projects ran in conjunction with the Plunkett Foundation, for instance, on rural development in Bangladesh, a training programme for staff of the Bangladesh Rural Development Board as well as strengthening the accountancy systems of co-operatives. There was collaboration with the RVB College in the Netherlands, DANAGRO and the Aarhus Technical College in Denmark.⁴² In Botswana, the College joined with Plunkett and partners from Italy. The Unit also acted as the secretariat to the International Committee for Training and Education of Co-operatives (INCOTEC) of the ICA which was chaired by Houlton for a time. Training materials and radio programmes for rural co-operatives for the Central Co-operative Agency in Nigeria were produced. The College helped to standardise the training and qualifications of the State Co-operative Colleges throughout Nigeria. In 1991, Houlton visited Kobe in Japan for the opening of a new Co-operative College and staff visited Zimbabwe to advise on co-operative training courses at Harare Polytechnic. Research was carried out on co-operative training needs in Palestine⁴³ and a European dairy project in Egypt was evaluated. In 1999, Alan Wilkins worked on

school co-operatives and co-operative learning in Southern Africa and Namibia.⁴⁴

Additional short-term collaborations included, in 1991, a summer school for 20 co-operators from Sweden. Managers from Japan and the Philippines visited and study tours were organised for groups from Tuvalu and China, funded by the British Council and the ILO. Study visits were organised from Poland, Kenya, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Pakistan, Portugal, the Dominican Republic, Germany and Bangladesh. In 1994, the research fellow, W. Ibison, was funded by the EU to examine environmental quality, health and safety management systems.

Staff continued to arrive and depart. In 1982, Jim McCloskey, who was to become Executive Director, joined the Unit. Roy Kershaw, Joyce Fogg and Annette Thomas all joined. In the 1990s, David Rushton, Shirley Giggey and Godfrey Cromwell were key staff. In 1978, employees included K. Ellis, formerly a Management Services Adviser; D. W. Heffer, former secretary and accountant in the movement as well as Adviser on Co-operative Training (Accounts) in Botswana and St Kitts and Nevis; A. L. Mackintosh, who had had posts with the Ministry of Overseas Development, in Nigeria, Gambia, Swaziland and Jordan. In 1979–80, J. A. Launder arrived with experience as Assistant Registrar in Tonga. In the early 1980s, R. R. Yadav joined, who had been a reader in Management Accounting and Auditing at the V. M. National Institute of Co-operative Management in India; and the ex-student Trevor Bottomley.⁴⁵ C. A. Turner had also worked in the Gambia and Indonesia.⁴⁶

LEARNING AND TRAINING

In domestic courses, the length of study and pathways were diversifying to meet the changing needs of co-operators. Societies could be fickle in their support for training so the College had to repeatedly drum up demand. In the early 1980s, many co-operatives did not carve out a unique identity in a marketplace where they were being out-competed. The College was swept along with the business-focused current as it targeted co-operative managers many of whom now made light of co-operatives as a distinctive member organisation. For example, publicity for a four-week summer course at the College laid great emphasis on performing well in a competitive marketplace:

The management and leadership of the UK retail industry has been in the hands of naturally gifted entrepreneurs, rather than highly educated professionals. But sophisticated techniques and systems are increasingly deployed in marketing, information, financial and property management. These could transform retailing from its dependence on entrepreneurial flair to a greater reliance on the application of management science, design and technology. In future the difference between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in retailing will depend on the successful marriage of analytical methods with wise instinctive judgement.⁴⁷

This publicity perhaps complimented existing leaders but may have been misplaced in over-playing ‘management’ when ‘leadership’ was being extolled in both business and the public sector. A leaflet advertising the ‘Stanford Hall Management Centre’ also underplayed the unique identity of the College.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, in the late 1970s, the Graduate Management Training Scheme (MTS) appeared buoyant with 750 applications each year, of which half were interviewed, followed by a two-day selection session at the College and second interviews. The desired candidate qualities were less about a degree subject than commitment, generic skills and a ‘well-rounded personality’. Those appointed might shadow an existing manager. All the course fees, accommodation and travel were paid by the MTS fund in addition to a small training salary.⁴⁹

Partnerships with higher education and relevant agencies positioned the College within national training networks. In 1978, the College was re-accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Correspondence Colleges.⁵⁰ The following year, links were forged with the Co-operative Bank and a Bank Training Centre was established in the grounds of Stanford Hall.⁵¹ From 1986, the College managed the Consortium of Retail Teaching Companies (CORTCO). In 1991, it organised a Careers Convention at the then new Birmingham International Conference Centre, funded by the Distributive Industries Training Trust, on which Houlton had served as a trustee since its foundation.⁵² The College became an accredited centre for examinations leading to membership of the Chartered Institute of Marketing.⁵³ New courses, in association with Loughborough University, were the Diploma in Co-operative Education and Training and the Diploma in Co-operative Accountancy and Financial Management. The 1991 Annual Report heralded a new Diploma in Co-operative Financial Services. The following year saw the resuscitation of a Diploma in Management Studies (DMS), a previous non-starter due to a

lack of interest from societies. Twelve registered for the first year. Wijayaratra and Bob Quinney, who arrived with experience of management roles in the movement, created a distance-learning option. A Certificate in Management Studies, as a stepping-stone to the DMS, was formulated.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in funeral, dairy and retail had become part of the College's portfolio and it was sub-contracted to organise NVQs for the funeral sector. In 1998, Chris Cooper arrived from the Oxford, Swindon and Gloucester society to co-ordinate competence-based management, staff development programmes, and to introduce new NVQs, for instance in management, supervision and administration. In extending its reach, the College became a recognised Accredited Centre by the Institute of Management, the National Examination Board for Supervision and Management, and the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR). It was also validated for Modern Apprenticeships through an agreement with the National Training Partnership. The Retail Industry Capability Certificate (RICC) was re-designed to complement a new NVQ.⁵⁴ In 1991–92, 98 trainees participated and 68 in the following year. In 1992, more advanced materials were produced at NVQ levels 3 and 4.

Short-term programmes converged on hot topics from the management of liberalisation to young people, membership, ethics and governance. By 1990, the Management Training brochure included courses on Management Development; Motor Trades; Women into Management; Achieving Results through People; and courses relating to finance, dairy, supermarkets and the law.⁵⁵ In 1992, an Economics of Co-operation Fellowship Seminar featured speakers John Butler from the Union; Stuart Eliot, a lecturer at UMIST in Manchester; Peter Davis returning from Leicester University; Harry Moore, the CEO of Co-operative Retail Services (CRS); and Malcolm Hornsby.⁵⁶

The business-minded interests of the movement had to be balanced with nurturing member and director education as essential to co-operative democracy. In the past, it was assumed that directors would learn on the job, through graduated levels of experience in the movement but this practice was harder to justify with rapid amalgamations and increasing complexity of director roles.⁵⁷ In 1987, director courses included Manpower Planning; Coping with Stress; Exploring New Co-operative Trading Initiatives; Ideals, Principles and Structure of the Co-operative Movement; and Democratic Organisations in Co-operative Societies. In the same year, the Institute of Co-operative Directors (ICD) was created

to improve director training. In theory, it was a growing market even though, by 1994, 50% of directors had received no training.⁵⁸ As mergers removed elected posts, some ‘member-based regional councils’ were introduced to stimulate member interest. There was a debate whether they were eligible for ICD training courses such as Making an Effective Presentation, the Application of New Technology to Business Needs and If and When to Transfer Engagements to another Co-operative Society. The 1993 course for directors on Transfer of Engagements assessed co-operative values to ask whether ‘larger changes of structure’ took account of member participation.⁵⁹ Appealing to co-operative societies could be an uphill task. In 1986, with the help of an outside consultant, courses for directors were re-organised and new sessional tutors hired so that there was less direct reliance on familiar College staff—making visible changes helped to indicate that courses had been refreshed.⁶⁰ By 1998, it had become more common to deliver ‘in-house’ programmes of training and development for boards of directors which necessitated closely mapping the micro-politics of individual societies.

Similarly, in member education, flexibility and dialogue were seen as essential elements in a co-operative pedagogy (Fig. 7.2). In 1978, there were attempts to build up member education and learning through a ‘co-operatives in the community’ scheme.⁶¹ New courses for guild members were organised. In 1986, Len Burch stressed that teaching directors’ courses would not enforce ‘a rigid adherence to a pre-set agenda and participants will be free, within the general framework of the subject matter to raise areas of personal interest or difficulty’. A Capability Certificate in Co-operative Studies was introduced for members who wished to become more involved in societies and had to complete at least six courses over three years.⁶² Provision was made for wives and childcare organised.⁶³ Notwithstanding these advances, member education was not always a priority and, in the late 1980s, the Union even threatened to withdraw its support for member education.

Financial pressures helped to stimulate the search for work with co-operative and mutual organisations beyond the consumer movement. In the early 1980s, Management of Agricultural Co-operatives was offered, and courses would emerge on worker and housing co-operatives. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, three-month courses included Education and Training for Co-operatives and Community Based Institutions; Management of Worker Co-operatives in Industry and Agriculture; and Project



Fig. 7.2 Parachute game, with a mix of participants blending the formal and informal. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

Appraisal for Co-operative Enterprises.⁶⁴ Training and guidance materials for small shopkeepers were produced with a grant from the Rural Development Commission. In 1995, the College introduced the University College Cork Diploma in Credit Union Studies programme.⁶⁵ The College would attempt to build on these initiatives.

More controversially, another solution to the lack of demand for Stanford Hall was to work with non-co-operative audiences to generate income. Inevitably, critics of this strategy worried that it drew the College away from its core purpose. Additional activities in the early 1980s included leisure courses: painting; ‘art appreciation’; photography; music; antiques—collecting for pleasure; country house history; progressive flower arranging; family activity weeks; and football coaching courses. In 1990, the Bereavement Trust held a national conference at Stanford Hall.⁶⁶ Weekend conferences on heritage and country house management, exhibitions and the use of the College theatre as a cinema for

screening classic films all added to the mix.⁶⁷ This range of activity was advertised alongside member education and directors' courses that included informal learning groups relating to co-operative and adult education; an in-service teachers course; a youth organisers conference; how to organise a pageant; courses for directors and presidents; financial control and statistics.⁶⁸ Moreover, consumer education retained a presence albeit not as a major area of work or source of income for the College. Research was done on the scale of consumer activities in retail societies, for instance, consumer advice, testing products, information, complaints, consumer education and the National Consumer Conference.⁶⁹

In addition, moves were made to engage with mainstream schooling where the marginalisation of the co-op and labour movement troubled many co-operative educationists.⁷⁰ But the College seemed to be at a standing start. The Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations had been set up in 1964 and involved teacher-led curriculum projects although co-operators were not involved in these processes. In 1978, the request from Education Convention that appropriate co-operative materials be produced for use in schools had met with a somewhat defensive and dumfounded response from Houlton—the movement had no experience of this work, nor the professional expertise and 'necessary contacts and associations'.⁷¹ In 1980, legislation on school co-operatives was discussed as well as a proposal to include co-operatives in teacher training.⁷² To mark the 1985 UN International Youth Year, the College hosted an International Co-operative Youth College summer school on the theme of 'towards an understanding of world development'.⁷³ In the late 1990s, the College started to gain experience of working with schools and young people, through the Schools Curriculum Industry Partnership (SCIP) and an international project working with partners from KOOP in Sweden, Portugal and Spain.⁷⁴

ACCESS COURSES

In its third main area work, the College initially bucked the trend of declining residential courses. The social department of the post-war years, which specialised on the history, theory and economics of co-operation, no longer brought in residential students. However, the College piloted access courses which directly targeted working-class mature students and would be led by Hornsby. Speaking in 1978, Houlton reflected that

the promise of the Robbins Report had not come to fruition and the expectation that it would 'provide opportunity for higher education for working-class children' had not been taken up.⁷⁵

In 1982, in acting upon this impulse, a new Diploma in Policy Studies (DPS) was to examine central and local government, voluntary bodies, trade unions, industry, nationalised industries, the social services, co-operative societies and the mass media. It was necessarily interdisciplinary embracing economics, sociology, political theory, social psychology and historical perspectives. Participants were mature students, usually aged between 23 and 62 with either 'a proven track record of voluntary service in community, trade union, political or charitable organisations' or had 'the motivation and energy to serve the community in the future'.⁷⁶ Students might be of 'average ability' but should show 'capacity' and must also be 'prepared to work hard throughout the course. After all it is not only for their own benefit, but also for the communities to which they will return'.⁷⁷ Participants included 'tilers, secretaries, lorry drivers, youth workers, nurses, boat builders, textile workers, steel workers, coppersmiths, managers, gardeners, brewers, the self-employed and the unemployed'.⁷⁸ The concept of ability was unpacked as it was found that people

discovered talents that they never knew they had. Some people develop the confidence to speak in public. Others find that the old blockages with mathematics from their schooldays could quickly be removed. Most people finish the course more confident, more skilful, and more perceptive.

Following four intensive 8-week terms, a four-week term, and some weekends, students worked on projects in their communities for nine weeks—topics included the newspaper coverage of the Scarman Report; schooling and Afro-Caribbean children; drug abuse; Muslim self-help; village colleges; trade unions; and the applied arts. The course was funded through the Department of Education and Science (DES) with tiered grants so that a man over 29 with a wife and two children would receive a state grant of £3,786 whereas a woman over 29 with a working husband would receive £1,990.⁷⁹ In 1990, when 21 students passed through the College, it was reported that just seven colleges ran 'second chance' courses for mature students on a residential basis.⁸⁰

The Policy Studies diploma flourished for several years with some students transferring directly onto higher education and many finding

places at universities. However, following the 1992 Further Education Act, access courses would be embedded in further education and widening participation in higher education was becoming a political priority. In addition, it was found that not everyone relished the prospect of residential time away from home and the DPS would be reduced in length to 23 weeks with the project to be completed in participants' own time. Courses were reconfigured on key themes of the environment and British heritage; subsequently, Europe 2000 and co-operative studies were added.⁸¹

CRISIS

By the early 1990s, it was clear that, despite a name change to the International Co-operative College, all areas of provision were under threat. The College had been built up around a unique blend of social, management and overseas co-operation and, while the CLEAR Unit brought in substantial income, co-operative education was grinding to a halt. The lack of attention that societies had devoted to membership, governance and democracy was reflected in their under-investment in training and nurturing of members and directors, a situation that had festered for many years. Compounding this neglect, training for junior and middle management was being squeezed. Societies' training budgets were cut back in times of recession when the newly merged societies might lose their organisational memory of the College or prefer in-house schemes—CRS reported that 'it is not considered necessary for a society the size of CRS to have its staff trained by a third party'. Movement-wide initiatives in management recruitment and training had been wound up. In 1991 alone, staff training services had declined by 35% and just ten societies accounted for 75% of the patronage of College courses. On the whole, residential international courses were becoming less popular, as governments and agencies were unwilling to fund them.⁸² The *Times Educational Supplement* explained that the College had been concentrating upon 'short bursts of work-based training' which was 'the name of today's training game'.⁸³ On top of this, DES funding of Diploma courses effectively ceased with the 1992 Further Education Act. These trends would be aggravated by the need to relate to the local requirements of the newly formed Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) to access funding.⁸⁴

Moreover, falling rolls and inflation would deepen College deficits and agitate tensions with its trustee, the Co-operative Union. The ensuing conflagration shone a light on the ambiguous lines of accountability between the two bodies. In the early 1950s, once the centenary income for the College had been spent on purchasing and converting Stanford Hall, joint Union and College accounts helped to shelter the College and facilitate covenanted support, and the Union paid a rental charge to the College. By the mid-1980s, these arrangements had been phased out and, at one point, money actually flowed in the opposite direction as the trustee absorbed surpluses from the charitable work of the College. Much to Houlton's chagrin, joint accounts 'had begun with the Co-operative Union's subscriptions underwriting the costs of the College and ended with the College offsetting the costs of the Co-operative Union'.⁸⁵ Relations blew hot and cold and, in 1989, the Central Executive was persuaded to donate £25,000 annually to the capital fund of the College.⁸⁶ It did not plug the gap and Houlton was keen to disabuse members of the assumption that the College received large grants from the movement rather than income for service provision.⁸⁷ Moving from Stanford Hall was not the favoured option and would only take place through 'reluctant necessity rather than choice'.⁸⁸ Symptomatic of the growing rift, separate accounts were arranged and a new annual report produced which officially reported on the 'charitable' work of the College as opposed to staff training, member education and democratic representation carried out for co-operative societies and covered in discrete reports to Congress. The 1990 Annual Report referred to 'differences of opinion over "governance"' which camouflaged resentments and disagreements. Progress was made towards a new College Trust Board which was to take over responsibility for the College's financial affairs but, by 1992, this had stalled which caused 'serious concern' as it would undermine the capacity of the College to build a viable future. Richard Kimberley, chair of the Education Executive, reminded societies that 'the College is a charity. It is *their* charity set up to be a living memorial to the memory of the Rochdale Pioneers'.⁸⁹

In a recession-hit movement, many business leaders thought that co-operative education had outlived its use, that Stanford Hall was no longer viable and a proposal to sell it was made public.⁹⁰ In 1992, the College was showing a deficit of £286,000 with income from the CLEAR Unit down from £717,000 to £471,000.⁹¹ Restructuring led to a reduction of 20% of permanent staff and savings of almost £250,000. In spite of this,

in December 1993, without warning, the Central Executive proposed a fresh cut of £85,000.⁹² This sparked anger across the movement and a swathe of resolutions would be submitted to the Education Convention and Congress pronouncing that the College was part of what made co-operatives different, it was the ‘crown jewels’ of the movement. Some even alluded to earlier Tory government spending reductions.⁹³

Acrimony broke out into the open. Tightening the screw, the Union stated that it would no longer underwrite staff training courses for co-operative societies, which was met with ‘understandable dismay’ as the College, ‘struggling to survive, could ill-afford to lose the vital cashflow from this service’.⁹⁴ Kimberley was scathing of the Central Executive and spoke of those within the movement

who are without principles and without scruples and who want to remove every vestige of accountability down to the ordinary activists. And these people know that one obstacle in their path is the Holy Trinity of the education executive, the National Co-operative Education Association and the college.⁹⁵

In reflecting on previous deals with the Union, an exasperated Houlton poured petrol on the flames by castigating the then current business leaders of the co-op who paled in comparison with those of the past; the movement was ‘a shadow of what it was in the 1950s’ when ‘the Co-op was arguably the most dynamic, innovative, profitable and successful organisation in the world’ and when it had found a solution to funding the College.⁹⁶ By contrast, Hughie Todner, chair of the Central Executive, speaking at the 1993 Congress, encouraged delegates to distinguish ‘the work of the College Trust, the education department and the buildings that are Stanford Hall’; education was needed but it had to be ‘affordable and realistic’. Todner alleged that the governors of the College were not fully accountable, and he wanted stronger marketing and business representation to complement the educationists. He was disturbed by the Principal who had sent out a letter requesting donations. An independent commission on the College was proposed.⁹⁷ Many educationists were unconvinced and detected an underhand attempt to kill off co-operative education. Critics accused the Union of confusing its roles as a trade association and College trustee.

The episode would lead to greater independence of the College from the Union. The Union supported this but kept pre-empting the situation

in undermining the College. Following ‘stormy debates’, the Independent Review Commission, set up by Congress in 1993, reported back in 1994 to clarify the relationship between the Union and the College.⁹⁸ It was chaired by Lord Graham along with Ian Snaith, a senior lecturer in law at Leicester University; Lord Carter, a politician and chair of the UK Co-operative Council; and Keith Brading, a former Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, who were charged with developing a framework for the College which would deliver appropriate governance; securing a viable method of funding; and preserving accountability to the movement. In reporting to Congress, Graham acknowledged both past compromises and fiery disagreements:

...no one is satisfied with the existing position ... everyone was upset at the mess we have created...
 ...disenchantment if not downright hostility had grown between the Central Executive and the Education Executive.

He affirmed that the College should become more independent of the Union without relinquishing lines of accountability and service:

Both the College Principal and the Education Executive urged us to devise a scheme which separated to the maximum the relationship between the Central Executive and the Education Executive. “Floating off the college to a separate and independent life” – with or without financial strings – summed up these aspirations. We accepted the thrust of this argument and have given to the newly proposed College Board of Management all powers, save imposing a limit on asset disposals ... we also recommend that, more formally, the college be the provider of services requested by the Co-operative Union, particularly in staff and member education.⁹⁹

Houlton, supported by the Union, had also been making plans including a ‘life-saving’ scheme for the construction of new buildings, teaching facilities and a model village with 200 cottages on the estate, that was expected to produce an endowment of at least £3 million. When it was turned down by Rushcliffe Borough Council, Houlton frantically conjured further proposals for an international business school, a bereavement trust and proposed that 2% of all property sales in the movement might be put into a College endowment.¹⁰⁰

In 1994, a deficit of £50,000 was reported with the recent loss of a £300,000 contract. The Central Executive, renegeing on its earlier

commitment, announced that it could no longer underwrite the College and that Stanford Hall was now on the market. Events moved rapidly. Loughborough University had indicated an interest in a partnership arrangement.¹⁰¹ At this point, a different set of simmering disagreements within the College exploded into public as staff protested they had been ‘betrayed’ by Houlton, excluded from consultations and had lost confidence in his leadership. They also expressed outrage at not having been consulted by the Central Executive.¹⁰² They asked whether Houlton’s new proposals for leaseback or sale had ‘any support from anyone other than himself’. Even Robert Marshall re-entered backstage to suggest that there might be possibilities for retaining the College at Stanford Hall.¹⁰³

Arthur Thompson, chair of the Education Executive, and Snaith, expressed their anger over the handling of the matter with the new Board not having met even though its membership had been agreed.¹⁰⁴ The outcry was significant enough for the Executive to pause its plans, partly assuaged by new information including £250,000 of aid from CWS which agreed to purchase paintings and make a donation. The sale of Arthur Spooner’s Nottingham Goose Fair to pay for repairs had been announced in the *Times*.¹⁰⁵ The CRS board had also agreed a £1 million interest free loan to enable the College to put into practice some of the proposals.¹⁰⁶ At the end of 1994, Houlton would resign having lost the sympathy of his staff who feared either a sale or merger deal with Loughborough University. Wildgust took over as chief executive who had had a background in local authority administration. The College had narrowly pulled through the crisis but was hardly unscathed.

A FRESH START?

Just when the College was looking at its potential eclipse, contrary forward-looking options were afoot. The fall of the Berlin Wall unleashed democratic ideas. Implicit and explicit critiques of capitalism highlighted the social and environmental impacts of a shareholder business model. There were different ways of doing business—downplaying the democratic nature of co-operatives had not served the movement well. In the wake of what came to be called the neoliberal hegemony of the 1980s, there was a converse interest in values-based businesses which presented a good opportunity for co-operatives to re-group. The driving force also came from the business end of the movement, most notably Graham

Melmoth at the CWS who championed fair and ethical trade in a co-operative ‘family’ of businesses.¹⁰⁷ Central to the renewed values and principles, was the role of membership in a co-operative business.

Refocusing co-operative education on the values and identity of the movement gained momentum from international developments. In 1992, the Swedish co-operator, Sven Åke Böök, had presented his 250 page report, *Co-operative Values in a Changing World*, to the Tokyo ICA Congress.¹⁰⁸ This struck a chord with many British co-operators. The College, eager to prioritise values, ran a series of workshops in thinking about how co-operatives might respond to the predations of global capitalism.¹⁰⁹ In particular, it revisited the basic purposes of co-operatives and began to think in terms of programmes on co-operative values and identity. Over time, the holistic approach to co-operative education had been reduced to specific inputs and modules on co-operation that might be added onto programmes, but, ultimately, many of these had also been dropped as the College had lost influence. The re-ignition of interest in learning programmes permeated by values and principles, represented a renewed moment of confidence, the thin end of a big wedge. New courses emerged with titles like Co-operative Principles and their Relevance Today and Co-operative Enterprise through Co-operative Ethics—Values in Business Past, Present and Future.¹¹⁰ The 1995 ICA Congress agreed a new Statement on Co-operative Identity, which incorporated the values and principles, under the guidance of Professor Ian MacPherson.¹¹¹ At the time, Melmoth chaired the ICA; in 1997, as CEO of the CWS, he asked the College to develop a learning programme on co-operative identity and values. Initially this was a two-day event for 428 senior managers and was subsequently adapted as day programmes for the next 1,400 managers in 100 sessions and then rolled out further. Education was recognised as a central aspect of business innovation. Over the next decade, co-operative identity programmes would become a pivotal aspect of the College offer. A video and workbook aimed to reach all 35,000 members and staff. The training helped societies to come to terms with their own historic neglect of values and membership that was central to the repositioning of co-operatives. As a College employee, Mervyn Wilson, noted, ‘they were some of the most important programmes the College had ever developed ... you forgot the extent to which absolute basics had been ignored by co-operatives in their sheer battle for economic survival’.¹¹² The Adapt project worked with the CWS and the International Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) to explore the

ways that co-operative values could help to build business success, which involved collaboration with worker co-operatives including Wave Design, Poptel Internet Services, Daily Bread Co-operative, and the Centre for Alternative Technology.¹¹³ It coincided with a ‘new mutualism’ movement, championed by the Co-operative Party, that experimented with co-operative models for both public and private enterprises.¹¹⁴

In 1994, the same year that conflicts were coming to a head, the 150th anniversary of the Rochdale Pioneers was celebrated which would prove significant for the College. While a mammoth omelette was cooked on the streets of Rochdale, innovative educational programmes were facilitated via Stanford Hall. These included a co-operative banner project and publication¹¹⁵; a creative writing project and book with the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP) which ran its annual festival at the College in the mid-1990s;¹¹⁶ and a touring film project organised by Alan Burton, based upon the historic films of the movement.¹¹⁷ At Stanford Hall, Opera North, working with 300 performers staged a production of *All Together Now*. Finally, a successful History Workshop, ‘Towards the Co-operative Commonwealth: The First 150 Years’, also took place at Stanford Hall.¹¹⁸ These events helped to galvanise enthusiasm around co-operative values and identity and bolstered confidence to pursue work on membership and co-operative values (Fig. 7.3).¹¹⁹

In the wake of the Independent Report, there was an immediate reaction among co-operators who realised that, if they did not back Stanford Hall, they might lose it. A ‘significant increase’ in demand for member and director courses resulted, some of them tailored to particular societies such as United Norwest.¹²⁰ As societies implemented the recommendations of the Co-operative Union’s Corporate Governance Code of Best Practice, the College expanded its training for member education.¹²¹ In 1997, 350 participants attended 37 courses run locally for societies including United Norwest, Coventry and East Mercia, and West Midlands. New courses were validated by the Institute of Co-operative Directors. Even though there were fewer boards of directors in existence, demand for training was on the up.

Finally, a new board of management was appointed with Dr John Beishon as chair, an academic who had helped to set up the Open University Co-operative Research Unit and had a reputation as a trouble-shooter with what the *Daily Mail* termed an ‘SAS’ management style.¹²² Following resignation due to external commitments, he was replaced in

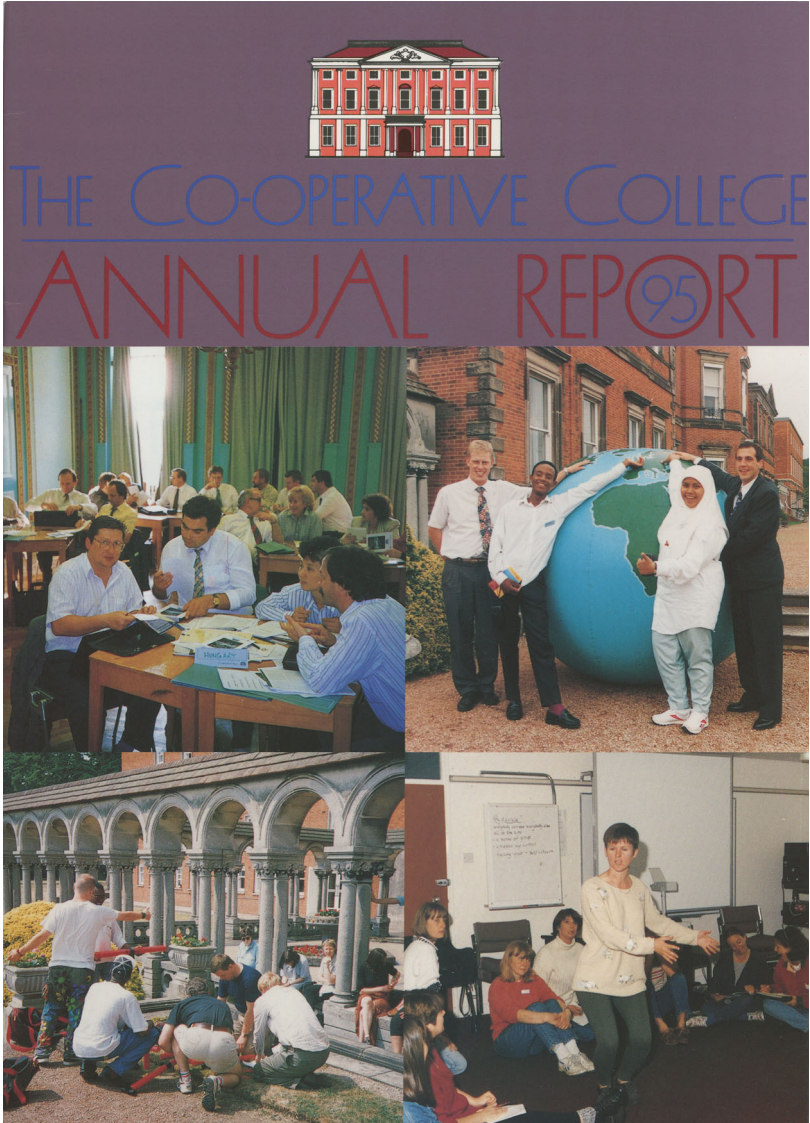


Fig. 7.3 The 1995 College *Annual Report* promoting training and co-operative activity. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

1997 by James Wood a College alumnus from 1955 who now headed the Atlantic and Pacific Tea Corporation in the USA. Members included Lord Carter; Garfield Davies from the TUC and Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW); Professor Stuart Kirk, pro-vice chancellor of Loughborough University; Bob Quinney, from the College; Lloyd Wilkinson from the Co-operative Union; Ruth Gee from The Association for Colleges; and Trevor Briggs from the NCEA.¹²³ In 1996, the co-operators, Pat Wheatley and Gillian Bober, came onto the board while Professor John Feather from Loughborough replaced Kirk. In 1998, both Professor Stephen Yeo, historian and former Principal of Ruskin College, and Ben Reid, chief executive of the West Midlands Society, followed on. Emblematic of its growing independence, the College registered with the Charity Commission which confirmed its acceptance of the Board as assuming responsibility for ‘the effective and efficient use of resources, the solvency of the College and the safeguard of its assets’.¹²⁴

The updated mission statement and business plan positioned the College as ‘a centre of excellence for education, training and consultancy dedicated to the promotion of co-operative values, ideals, principles and practice’. The staff were committed to this statement and ‘the projection of Stanford Hall as the home of co-operative education’. The board had been concerned that ‘problems had accrued in the past through attempts to embrace wider markets already covered by other providers’. It believed that the estate could be better managed.¹²⁵ The new structure freed education from support services, led by Wilson and David Rushton respectively. Certain posts were made redundant and the catering, bar and reception services were outsourced to allow greater focus on the core purpose. A new trading company, Stanford Hall Enterprises Ltd., reduced the tax burden of non-charitable services. An annual subscription from the Union for running the services of the department was negotiated as a service contract. The Hughie Todner Appeal Fund was devoted to creating an additional 15 en-suite bedrooms.

The 1995 Co-operative College Business Plan had aimed to meet the ‘dual objectives of the expansion of co-operative education and the retention of Stanford Hall’. This was to be achieved by ‘site overheads being substantially met by a high level of co-operative and other clients using Stanford Hall as an education and conference centre...’¹²⁶ Partnerships were part of the business mix needed to keep Stanford Hall in the black. Work with co-operative groups was welcomed, for instance with

the Woodcraft Folk, ICA, Co-operative Women's Guild, National Co-operative Auxiliaries Council, and Member and Staff Sections from CWS and CRS.¹²⁷ Related organisations included the YMCA, Trade Union Education Council, FWWCP, National Association of Working Men's Clubs and Leicestershire Education Department. But cognate relationships were limited and a major Home Office contract was secured, for police training courses run by the National Police Training Directorate. Stanford Hall was becoming an attractive venue available for conferences and exhibitions—users included not only the Co-operative Bank but also Allied Carpets, Rolls Royce, Business in the Community, National Lottery Charities Board, Samaritans, YMCA, MENCAP and the Leicester Primary Heads Association, all of which, at one point, helped to raise bed occupancy levels to 70–85%.¹²⁸ Residential students were again encouraged to find accommodation away from the College at Christmas and Easter.¹²⁹

Surveys of the Estate were commissioned and in March 1995, Stanford Hills Farm and outbuildings were sold enabling a small residential development. While the Board rejected any sale of assets to cover deficits, it was willing to explore whether disposing of 'non-essential assets' could be used to renew the core business and 'secure markets in the longer term' although these markets were not specified. Teaching rooms were refurbished and the Turnbull Room renovated from a Badminton Court which was to be used for conferences, education and private hire (Fig. 7.4).¹³⁰ There was a successful National Heritage Lottery bid of £69,000 to restore the theatre organ; annually the theatre was hosting nearly 40 productions as well as regularly screening classic films; in the late 1990s, up to 3,000 day and season tickets were sold each year.¹³¹

In 1996, a small operating surplus was reported and, two years later, a three-year report to Congress received a sympathetic response with reserves rising from £8,000 to £150,000. Conference lettings in 1998 amounted to £1.3 million. The Union withdrew its claim that the College should be sold. The CRS, CWS and other societies made increasing use of College facilities. Member education was growing and, in 1995, 245 places were taken up on 24 Director courses at Stanford Hall with four courses running elsewhere; in 1999, the numbers had risen to 458 participants on 41 courses.¹³² The College thought the CMS and DMS were being 'over assessed' by the Open University and so started a new partnership with Henley Distance Learning, incorporating also a Certificate in Supervisory Management.¹³³ From 1996, the Board of Learning, Course Committees and Examination Committees carried out external



Fig. 7.4 The Badminton Room before its transformation into the Turnbull Room. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

scrutiny of the quality and effectiveness of learning. Two inspections by the Loughborough University Quinquennial Review of its validated programmes as well as one by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) were supportive. The FEFC recognised the College as a distinct national provider of learning programmes to the Co-operative movement in which the ‘strategic use of residence’ and the possibilities for intensive study featured.¹³⁴ Six per cent of College income flowed from the FEFC-funded DPS in addition to £100,000 for minor capital works. Perhaps contrasting with the past, its reports critiqued the lack of an equal opportunities policy and limited learning styles although it was mindful of the close student-staff relations.¹³⁵

The College had travelled a considerable distance since the late 1970s. It had worked consistently to build a vision of co-operative education

in key areas of activity. Overseas co-operation had been very successful; management courses diversified into a plethora of training options; social education transformed to residential access courses with some success. In addition, the CLEAR unit specialised in consultancy, training and research services to the movement globally. However, each of these initiatives faced serious obstacles resulting from social and economic change, institutional and policy shifts, and changing demands for education and learning in a much-reduced movement which had turned away from co-operative values. Amid funding cuts and pervasive assumptions about the need to focus exclusively upon business operations, an earlier comprehensive vision of co-operative education fragmented somewhat. With a dramatic reduction of students, the future of the College looked extremely insecure and vexed relationships broke out into open hostility. Nevertheless, a new vision of co-operative education emerged, emphasising values and principles and a mix of education and business enterprise that put the College back on track. Wildgust was keen to alert potential users of the College that, ‘We now have a rigorous system for maintaining our course provision which matches any College in the country’.¹³⁶ The updated course booklet stretched to over 44 pages and included a range of offerings, many of them in member education. A new direction had been set although further transformations were on the horizon.

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Searching for a New Identity, 2000–2019

From the 1990s, co-operatives gained greater recognition and this was to continue through the period of intensified globalisation. The undermining of Keynesian economics and state monopoly of welfare services was to have unintended consequences, one of which was to make space for co-operatives. The Blair and Brown governments had some sympathy with co-operatives. New Labour were wary about the traditional labour movement and desired to experiment with new forms but the co-op represented ‘old old’ labour although it started to receive more positive press coverage.¹ In 2001, a Co-operative Commission was appointed. Globally, a growing interest in co-operation was stimulated further by the 2007–08 financial crisis and ensuing period of austerity. The UN designated 2012 the International Year of Co-operatives when the General Secretary, Kofi Annan, stated that co-operatives were a major force in creating ‘more than 100 million jobs and affecting half the world’s people through ethical and socially inclusive enterprises’.² There were various attempts to harness co-operative values to existing services and businesses. The definition of a co-operative as a mutually owned and controlled enterprise could be interpreted in different ways so that co-operators could play deftly upon the ambiguity and inadequacy of dominant distinctions between public and private which, in reality, were each contested clusters of activity. From 2010, the new Coalition government ostensibly

backed co-operatives but constricted the context in which the College was operating by enforcing stringent cuts in funding.

During this time, the co-operative movement underwent a period of both renewal and crisis. Graham Melmoth, who led the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) from 1997 to 2002, made a case for the unique nature of co-operatives, connecting business and values. He had seen off Andrew Regan's predatory attempt to de-mutualise the Society. In 2000, the CWS merged with the Co-operative Retail Services (CRS) to form the Co-operative Group. It now concentrated upon smaller convenience and 'market town' stores. There were signs of new growth and, as co-operators grew in confidence, Somerfield Stores were acquired and later Britannia Building Society as part of a 'vibrant co-operative sector'.³ Subsequently, significant mistakes and business losses would reveal the ongoing structural weakness of the business operations in comparison with their competitors. Due diligence on Britannia had not been carried out effectively and substantial losses would ensue. In 2013, amid fresh governance scandals, the movement haemorrhaged billions of pounds which led to the selling of farms and businesses as well as its new office premises in Manchester which had to be rented back from the new owner. Highly critical reports followed.

The period since 2000, witnessed changes of leadership at the Co-operative College—Mervyn Wilson, Simon Parkinson, Cilla Ross, Neil Calvert and from June 2024, Ali Longden and Jacqui Thomasen, although the latter four are somewhat beyond the scope of this account. An enhanced focus on values and principles, moving the College to Manchester, responding to changes in management and an alertness to the whole co-operative and mutual sector, were all notable developments. An enhanced interest in both the future and the past characterised the College (Fig. 8.1). Globally, there was interest in the College which positioned international development as a core activity. The Rochdale Pioneers Museum and National Co-operative Archive were re-organised during these years. Work with schools and young people expanded with the co-operative schools movement as well as an attempt to create a co-operative university. However, ambitions had to be reined in after the governance and business crisis of 2013, the Brexit vote of 2016 and the COVID-19 crisis from 2020, which all constrained the scope of the College. It was a period of searching for both financial viability and educational innovation to renew the purpose and meaning of co-operative education in circumstances very different to those of a century earlier.

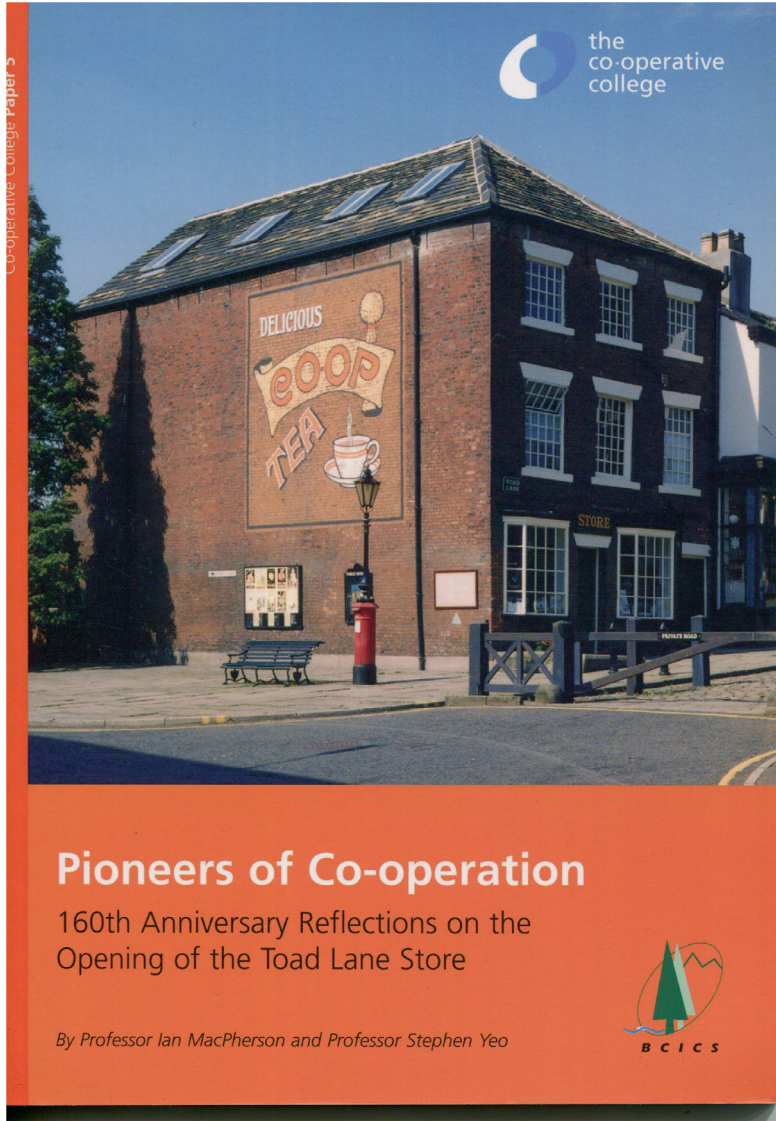


Fig. 8.1 Celebrating old and new at the 160th anniversary of the movement. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

A NEW PRINCIPAL AND A NEW HOME

At the turn of the Millennium, Wilson took up post as Chief Executive and Principal. He had worked in the movement for virtually all his career and was saturated in its ethos and historical intricacies. Serving as education secretary for London Co-operative Society from 1973–81, he had been responsible for various educational activities in the then largest co-operative retail society in the country. From 1981 to 1992, Wilson was the member relations officer for CRS in the South East region. Following this he joined the College as Officer for Member Education where he was responsible for director and member training, as well as working with schools and young people. He had a degree in Economics from Kingston Polytechnic and would later complete a Diploma in Management Studies. Previously he had been a member of the Communist Party (CP) as part of the tail end of the radical 1968 generation. Clearly the Cold War sensitivities had blown over by then since it was not an issue that came up at his appointment to any of these posts. Wilson was partnered with a new chair of the board, Stephen Yeo, the ex-principal of Ruskin College and historian.

Structural issues that afflicted the College looked likely to intensify. It was not clear whether supplementary business activities were adequate for the long-term financial well-being of the College. One way to fill bed spaces was through a sizeable contract with the Home Office to train the various crime squads that occupied up to three quarters of the residential rooms. When the contract came up for renewal, it was clear from the draft tender specification, which had been written with Stanford Hall in mind, that the College would gain the contract if they could meet the various requirements that were being made. However, this would have involved moving the College out of the main building into the Co-operative Bank Training Centre. This was hardly ideal as the College would have been squeezed in terms of space, still without the guarantee that it would be able to secure an income adequate to meet the building maintenance and repairs. For instance, unforeseen problems with the guttering on a grade II listed building meant that over £20,000 had to be found at short notice. The grade II nursery and walled garden areas had fallen into disrepair.⁴ In the 1950s, annual repairs and maintenance had amounted to approximately £5,000, a figure which had steadily climbed until it exceeded £100,000 in the mid-1990s which was by then considered unaffordable. The capacity of the College was being sapped by the building

which detracted from investment in education and training—72% of staff had service roles while just 18% were directly involved in the delivery and servicing of education. There were additional pressures from the Co-operative Union which had been through a significant restructure and a reduction by a third of its subscriptions. Union funding for the College was preserved with the admonition that, in future, the College should negotiate a better deal with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).⁵

At a weekend senior leadership meeting, the possibilities were mulled over. Ultimately, the meeting decided it should sell the College and construct a new building on the site of the nursery and walled garden which might also be able to house a co-operative archive collection. This option would bring about an endowment ‘to protect the College against the pressures that have dogged it for so long’.⁶ For Wilson, ‘it was one of those lightbulb moments when you are being driven by where you are rather than what you were there to do’; it seemed as though ‘the tail was wagging the dog’.⁷ Staff asked themselves, ‘if the only way to keep Stanford Hall was to give up control, why are we doing it?’⁸ Advice from the Charity Commission concurred that the core purpose of the College was as an educational charity rather than a historic buildings charity. The point would be put more baldly by defenders of the sale—‘are we a college or a hotel?’⁹ Pauline Green, the Co-operative Union’s chief executive approved of the plan as did Bob Burlton, chair of the Central Executive.

Exit plans were formulated. It was going to be a decision that would arouse discontent among ex-students, staff and supporters, many of whom cherished the symbolic role of Stanford Hall. In the autumn of 2000, the sale was formally announced in the *Co-operative News*.¹⁰ Tangled negotiations with Rushcliffe Borough Council were involved in disposing of a stately home. Plans were presented to sectional conferences and four special meetings were organised in London, Manchester, New Lanark and Loughborough. Yeo called on co-operators to seize the modern moment:

The labour movement once saw stately homes and dreaming spires and long periods of ‘residence’ for learning as what we wanted. Apeing aristocratic, old England. We have got beyond that. What we now want for our movements and our selves, is leading edge, technically superb, well supported, professional learning experiences leading to appropriate qualification. We want our Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises, including our

own College, to be ahead of the times, rather than for ever catching up. Now's our chance.¹¹

Wilson blended the historical with the modern by invoking the spirit of 1945 when the College aimed to procure 'the best possible facilities to support the education and training of co-operators. The only difference being that in a very different world the facilities we need are different...'.¹²

There were various criticisms and drawbacks. Financial arguments were beside the point for those who were undergoing emotional turmoil at the prospect of detachment from a building close to their hearts. For some, the loss was akin to a bereavement and led to accusations that the sale was a betrayal of the movement, misgivings that would rumble on in future years. In addition, once the College had been sold, doubts would be raised about the 'Stanford Hall money' which some members saw as being kept in trust for the movement and so they wondered how this was going to be spent. Of course, the College had no intention of sharing this money, especially given its recent incorporation as an independent charity. Outsiders did not understand that, without a continuous stream of grants, the College was losing money on an annual basis and would, after 2015, occasionally dip into this endowment.

Feedback in the press was either constructive or questioned the location of Stanford Hall which was 'inaccessible' and 'in the middle of nowhere'.¹³ Charlie Baker, of the Confederation of Co-operative Housing likened the plans to 'selling off the family home to build a bungalow at the bottom of the garden'.¹⁴ Co-operators spied an opportunity to relocate the College to a centre of co-operative activity. Jim Craigen wrote to the *Co-operative News* to say he would prefer a move to Manchester, an argument endorsed by John Jacques and many others.¹⁵ In fact, private dialogues led to a plan being presented to the Co-operative Union executive that would lead to the sale of Stanford Hall and the re-location of the College to Holyoake House in Manchester from where it had moved in 1946. On balance, this pleased more people in the movement—being close to the Union and CWS and the traditional co-operative stronghold of the North-West brought many advantages.

STAFFING AND GOVERNANCE

The move was an onerous process that involved the redundancy of loyal people who did not want to move north.¹⁶ Immediately, the staffing team was transformed into a smaller core group and a greater spread of associates of whom there might be up to 50 on the books at any one time. In the coming years, as the College searched for an appropriate mix of staff to meet its needs, redundancies would impact staff morale. Associates ran training, consultancy and research and were co-ordinated by the central staff. This model allowed for the College to react flexibly to the changing needs of its national and international work. In some respects, it repeated the previous model of having correspondence tutors, of whom there had been about 70 in the post-war years. The loyalty of associates was encouraged through being engaged by the College for 20–50 or more days in a year. The drawback of this model was that staffing could be so flexible that discontinuities and losses in experience could occur in a short space of time. Expertise could be built up but it was done so at a greater distance from the College itself. It might be difficult to coach and supervise associates to adhere to the purpose of a developmental project. In 2003, there were 16 full-time staff and 30 associates; the College trained 1,500 people and had a turnover of £1.5 million. Only 7% of its work was funded by the Learning and Skills Council which was indicative of the fact that the College still did not fit easily into mainstream structures.¹⁷ Some of the key staff during this period were Chris Cooper, who looked after training programmes; Linda Shaw, and later Sarah Alldred, responsible for international work and research; and Emma Wilder, responsible for finance.

The College also aimed to update its governance structures in the light of the 1994 Independent Review Commission Report. There was an attempt to clarify the relationship and responsibilities of the trustee (Co-operative Union/Co-operatives UK) and the College. A search committee helped to identify gaps on the board and a transparent process for appointing new members was agreed. Wilson was at pains to re-affirm the connections with the Union in a democratic movement—‘this in no way breaks the relationship with the Trustee—the objective has been simultaneously to get clarity of responsibilities, and a closer working relationship between us’.¹⁸ But inevitably, as time passed and the College reported to its own Board, the relationship with the trustee became more tenuous. New legal structures gave the College some flexibility and,

in 2014, it was able to become a member-based charitable community interest company (CIC). The College registered as a charity in Scotland. These represented further steps towards a more independent existence.

RENEWAL?

The sale of Stanford Hall and restructure of the College was driven by a vision of being ‘a centre of excellence in training and learning consultancy and research for the co-operative and mutual enterprise sector (CME)’ while the mission statement referred to ‘excelling in the provision of Adult and Lifelong Learning programmes that emphasise Co-operative Values and Principles’.¹⁹ This was a conscious attempt to link the College ‘brand’ with education and training and to divorce it from a set of bricks and mortar. It reflected a growing confidence in the idea of co-operative and mutual enterprises as an alternative, and sometimes a challenge to, the dominant investor-owned model.²⁰ The College aimed to ‘help CMEs understand the distinct values upon which they are based’, and so involved encouraging organisations to value their own distinctiveness from which they might have drifted or not been fully aware.

There was a fresh openness to co-operation in policy circles. Blair’s original vision for the co-op was to run it as a capitalist business and to hive off a charitable arm to distribute grants.²¹ However, he was talked around to a more sympathetic position and 2001 saw the launch of the Co-operative Commission which asserted the potential for ‘successful co-operative businesses’ with an equal emphasis on all three words. Values and membership were permeating beyond the usual circles, as central to the movement, and there was an interest in exploring how services might be reworked along these lines. In doing so, activists built upon the re-formulated Statement on Co-operative Identity as well as the ‘new mutualism’ experiments of the 1990s which made a case for the applicability of co-operative values and principles.²² In 2001, the co-operative principle of ‘co-operation among co-operatives’ appeared to be put into practice with the merger of the Co-operative Union and the International Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) to form Co-operatives UK, a coming together of the consumer and worker wings of the movement that had effectively been divided since the nineteenth century.

In addition, social enterprise models were receiving attention in policy circles. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) report, *Social Enterprise: A Strategy for Success*, helped to launch the Social Enterprise

Unit which gave a formal stamp of approval to experiments with alternative models of business and welfare.²³ Debates took place on whether social enterprise was a top-down imposition. Yeo was sceptical about social enterprise as a dilution of CMEs while others argued that certain models of social enterprise had also emanated from within the worker co-operative movement.²⁴ The concept would become even more slippery as successive policymakers attempted to impose their favoured image upon diverse practices conceptualised variously as the third sector, civil society and big society.²⁵ Complex discussions over the nature of co-operation and co-operatives could bewilder civil servants who had been socialised on a neoliberal diet—co-operators might strategically present themselves as fitting into both the public and the private sectors, or, equally, the distinction could leave co-operatives in the shadow. Internationally ongoing experimentation with multiple forms of organising, for instance, recognising the role of trade unions, proved fruitful (Fig. 8.2).

There was a new openness to research, partly to explore the changing context. Wilson had been impressed with the College Papers from the 1950s and 1960s and aimed to embed research projects into its work. New publications helped to take forward College work on international development, social enterprise, schools and learning. The College worked with universities and other agencies to build ‘intellectual capacity’, inform the College curriculum, produce an evidence base for co-operation, bring in expertise and ideas as well as widen the horizons of partners. Academics were becoming more interested in the theory and diverse application of co-operation, and came from business, education, history and the humanities and social sciences.

Research partnerships prospered. The College would run action research projects on membership, funded by the West Midlands Social Enterprise Partnership (WMSEP), with Johnston Birchall and Richard Simmons from Stirling University, who constructed new frameworks to understand member-based organisations.²⁶ A second WMSEP project examined social enterprise in the school curriculum which drew in partners including the Marches Consortium, Wolverhampton City Council and the co-operative training organisation, Dynamix. Work with John Wilson and Anthony Webster led to new publications including a history of the Co-operative Group.²⁷ Jonathan Michie, then at Birkbeck College, headed a project on football supporters’ trusts to which the College contributed. There were related partnerships with Social Enterprise East Midlands (EQUAL), National Social Enterprise Development and with

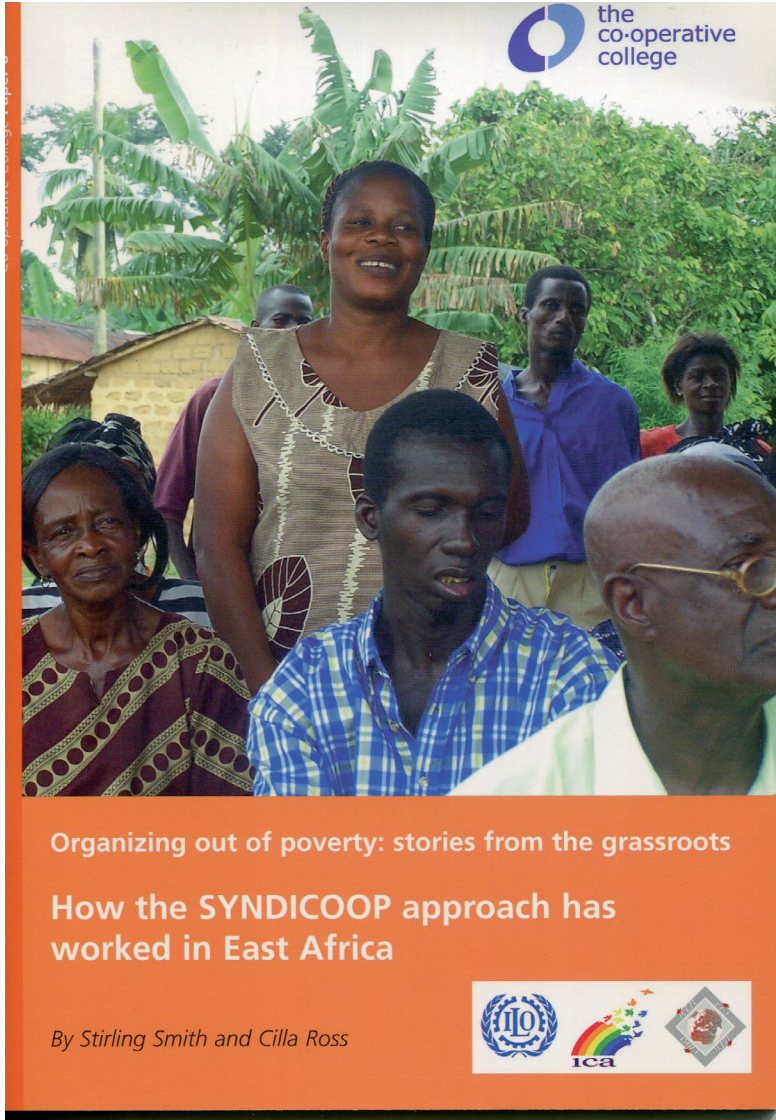


Fig. 8.2 Co-operative and trade union organising complementing one another. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

CfBT (Centre for British Teachers) on mutual models in education. The College actively participated in projects on credit unions and care co-operatives. However, the enthusiasm for mutual models could be stretched at times. Some believed foundation hospitals to be based upon a co-operative model. This was not entirely convincing as the governance structure was isolated from a member/patient representative body that the new foundations were obliged to set up, and in practice represented an impoverished form of consultation. Another area focused on co-operative schools where scholars problematised co-operation and drew out new possibilities—John Shostak and Keri Facer, then both at Manchester Metropolitan University became involved. A joint seminar series on co-operation and education was held at the Institute of Education in London, which merged with UCL in 2014.²⁸ Furthermore, many new research students came to the College via alliances and joint supervision with universities, including Sally Hartley with the Open University looking at youth and co-operatives in Africa; Rowshan Hannan from the University of Leeds examining dairy co-operatives in Kenya; Angela Whitecross, University of Central Lancashire, who researched the history of the Co-operative Party; Constance Cheron at the University of Wageningen on food co-operatives in the USA; Deborah Ralls from Manchester University and Gail Davidge and Joanne Dennis from Manchester Metropolitan University, all produced theses on co-operative schools. Each of these collaborations brought knowledge and capacity to the College.

HERITAGE, MUSEUM AND ARCHIVE

At the Millennium, co-operative renewal was anchored to the history and heritage of the movement which represented an important resource in engaging with audiences of co-operators, academics and educationists as well as the general public. The 2000s saw the formal (re)establishment of the Rochdale Pioneers Museum and National Co-operative Archive within an independent body, the Co-operative Heritage Trust (Fig. 8.3). This represented a major achievement. Three key figures worked on this project. Wilson was acutely aware of the historical relevance of the movement, not least in terms of the College curriculum and the capacity to generate enthusiasm; Yeo was a historian who had a lifelong interest in the co-op; and Gillian Lonergan was a long-serving archivist for the movement who would be appointed to lead the heritage work. Together they

divined a coherent vision of co-operative history and heritage and successfully brought it to fruition. For Wilson, it was imperative for the historical records and material presence of the movement to be protected:

... one of the most important pillars for the long-term future of the institution ... the institutional memory, it's the success stories, it's about how people had a vision of a better society and transformed it into reality. And it's why making those unique records available to future generations, I've always passionately believed, is one of the unique offers that the institution could make. But unless you safeguard stuff in the first place, unless you stop it going into skips, you can't make it available in the future.²⁹

As part of the re-organisation of the Union, it evaluated the use of its archive leading to fears that it might be disposed of. Records included George Jacob Holyoake's collection that encompassed much of Robert Owen's material, with personally marked up drafts, which would have commanded a good price at a university in the USA, although many co-operative leaders were blissfully unaware of this, one of whom referred to them as 'dusty old books' without value. The College already had its own archive and collection of books. It added those of the Midlands Co-operative Society, other co-operatives and local archives. Within a relatively short space of time, the College had recruited archivists to catalogue the material. In 1926, the movement had acquired the Toad Lane site, where the Rochdale Pioneers had first set up shop in 1844, that was now falling into disrepair. In the 1970s, renovations had introduced concrete ceilings and alterations not in keeping with the site. In 1999, as part of a Union review, it was agreed to transfer the Union archives and part of the CWS archives to the College which also took on responsibility for Toad Lane.³⁰

An independent Co-operative Heritage Trust was to house the museum and archive. It was registered in 2007 and incorporated the Rochdale Pioneers Museum and the National Co-operative Archive. For Wilson, this had the advantage of helping to ensure its long-term survival and independence. Although it was nested within the College, a future leader would not be able to dismantle, sell or syphon off its resources. Moreover, the Union might have been chary about simply handing its archives over to the College. In addition, the Co-operative Heritage Trust helped to facilitate good relationships with the Co-operative Group that



Fig. 8.3 The Rochdale Pioneers Museum Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

was merging with United Co-operatives in the North-West where Toad Lane was located; significant funding emerged from this source as well.

The College applied successfully for registered museum status and designated status for the entire archive collections which were confirmed to be of national and international significance. A Heritage Lottery grant of over £1 million was obtained as part of a £2.1 million project to catalogue the archive and refurbish and transform the museum into a

modern visitor attraction. A previous grant from the 1990s, to restore the Wurlitzer at Stanford Hall, had to be repaid before the College could be eligible for funding. Upon the retirement of Gillian Lonergan, Liz McIver took over. Archivists have included Sophie McCulloch and Jane Donaldson. In 2020, it moved out from under the College wing but retained close working relationships and its presence in Holyoake House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The College strengthened its position to support business models globally. It would update its mission statement aiming to become a ‘world leader’ in education and training for the co-operative and mutual sector. International development was receiving greater public visibility. The Education for All movement had been gathering momentum following the successful World Conference at Jomtien in 1990 and the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) a decade later which would be updated in 2015 with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, the United Nations incorporated the new Statement on Co-operative Identity into its pronouncements upon co-operatives. In 2012, during the International Year of Co-operatives, the College would organise a major conference which led to two publications.³¹ The International Labour Office (ILO) and International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) produced ILO Recommendation 193 which became an important mechanism through which various countries re-examined their legislation on co-operation and for which the College wrote a guidance note for co-operatives. Wilson became a member of the ICA Advisory Group on Co-operative Principles resulting in a further guidance note on Principle 5:

5. Education, Training, and Information

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

The College was represented on the Co-operative Institute for Peace and Social Inclusion.³² Symptomatic of changing times, even the World Bank commissioned a College project on governance which resulted in a publication.

Under the 1997 Blair government, the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) was upgraded to the Department for International Development (DfID). DfID was keen to work with grassroots organisations and social movements and became receptive to the College. It led to a growing awareness in the co-operative movement about how co-operatives related to the development agenda. In 2005, a special issue of *Developments* magazine was produced for this purpose, including a headline suggested by DfID, ‘Can co-ops save the world’, and 500,000 copies were printed for distribution through co-operative societies. Overall, it led to varied research projects, partnerships with universities, PhD studentships and new relations with researchers working on poverty reduction. Once again, each project helped to enrich the capacity, contacts and awareness of the College. Shaw and the associate, Stirling Smith, played crucial roles in taking this work forward.

By the early 2000s international work at the college had dwindled to occasional visits from groups of overseas co-operators to the UK movement which were arranged by Jenny de Villiers. The College’s international and research work was rebuilt through a series of successful project bids and partnerships. In 2003, the European Union (EU) funded, ‘Co-operation, Social Responsibility, and Fairtrade’, on Fairtrade and co-operatives in Europe which produced case studies from the UK, Belgium, Italy and Sweden. The College would also carry out some work on the Ethical Trading Initiative for a time.

Later in 2003, the College led a consortium of UK co-operative organisations to negotiate a Strategic Grant Agreement (SGA) with DfID. The fact that the SGA programme was designed to build the capability for international development activities within organisations for which this work was new, indicated how far this area of work had slipped off the agenda of the College, although the co-operative movement on the whole had had limited engagement. The press release for the project identified the priority of tackling world poverty as a ‘job for the co-op’:

2.4 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. 1.3 billion live on less than \$1 a day. All the world’s aid budgets can only make a dent in those statistics. Co-operatives in the UK are doing their bit - as the largest retailers of fair

trade products we are helping poor farmers by buying cocoa, wine, bananas etc. But what about the farmers and producers who do not grow products that can be sold internationally? What about consumers who want a good deal, or access to affordable health services? Or cheaper housing? Co-operatives are an important part of the answer - and the UK co-operative movement is going to help those millions of poor people to help themselves - by setting up co-operatives.³³

The consortium was eager to impress the point that ‘DfID accepts that co-operatives, as democratic organisations, can play a role in achieving the MDGs’. In some ways it was a preliminary project to build dialogue within and between movements—‘why co-operatives are important for poor people in the global “South”—Africa, Latin America and Asia—and working out ways in which the UK movement can help’. Wilson averred that co-ops were ‘a natural way of organisation for poor people’. The partners included the Co-operative Group and retail co-operatives, housing and worker co-operatives as well as Co-operatives UK and the Woodcraft Folk.

The three-year funding for the SGA was to be devoted to education, information for members and customers; networking with organisations like the TUC and NGOs; joint work with the ILO and ICA, which joined the steering group; and building the capacity of the movement to undertake practical projects with co-ops in developing countries. More co-operators from the South were to be brought to the UK for short study visits. The SGA was launched in the UK and Africa during the events to coincide with the Annual General Meeting of Kuapa Kokoo, a farmers’ co-operative supplying the Co-operative brand Fairtrade chocolate. This grant was followed by a Partnership Programme Arrangement (PPA) agreement with DfID which funded research and policy development on co-operatives for three more years from 2008 (Fig. 8.4).

The College kept close to the Co-operative Group which had led the way in terms of Fairtrade. Martin Beaumont, who took over from Melmoth as CEO of the Group, a member of the consortium, was supportive

When we took the momentous decision to switch all Co-op block chocolate to Fair Trade it meant 164,000 children could go to primary schools and new wells could be built to supply water to 25 entire villages ... we hope more and more people will choose to do what they can, even if that’s



Fig. 8.4 An event on co-operation and poverty at the House of Commons: Gareth Thomas, M.P. and Minister for International Development, speaking. From left Stirling Smith, Stephen Yeo, Jürgen Schwetmann (ILO), Dame Pauline Green and Iain MacDonald (ICA). Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

simply buying a different type of chocolate or choosing Fair Trade fruit, to help others less fortunate than themselves.

Fairtrade was based upon solidarity between developing countries and British consumers. The Co-op Group, from a business angle, was a leader in introducing Fairtrade products, such as bananas and chocolate, to the high street. This was a breath of fresh air to the College which reciprocated with projects and publications, new curriculum resources and partnerships.³⁴

With the help of the Co-operative M.P. and Minister for International Development, Gareth Thomas (Fig. 8.4), the College was able to work out a deal with DfID to earmark part of its regular framework funding to the ILO for co-operative development which was the origin of a CoopAfrica Programme which ran from 2008 to 2011 (Fig. 8.5).³⁵ The College led research into co-operative colleges in Africa with whom

connections had been rekindled under the SGA. It represented one of the long-term tangible benefits from the CoopAfrica Programme. Some Colleges had matured into fully fledged universities, such as the Co-operative University of Kenya and Moshi Co-operative University which had commenced as a co-operative college in 1963 and a university college in 2004. Stanford Hall alumni were connected to these colleges and were more than happy to lend a hand to new projects. Wilson and Shaw, on a visit to Botswana, stumbled across 12 former students all working in various government ministries, which illustrated palpably the way that the College had functioned in educating an elite cadre.

Moreover, increased capacity enabled the College to collaborate on policy work with European co-operatives and ICA Europe to encourage the European Commission to include co-operatives in their international development policies and plans, which had a degree of success.³⁶ A history of Euro Coop, an organisation which attempted to construct European co-operation between co-operatives, was also produced. EU funding streams, known as Socrates and Leonardo, would facilitate meetings and opportunities for staff. Visits to the USA enabled College leaders to network with co-operative development agencies internationally, particularly the Swedish, Norwegian, USA and Canadian institutions. After the 2007–08 financial crisis, there was a renewed influx of interest in co-operatives given the visible failings of the capitalist banks and financial institutions. Work with Ian MacPherson enabled Co-operative Youth Forums to foster a new stratum of leaders, connecting the University of Victoria in Canada and the College. Ultimately the young people themselves challenged the environmental sense in flying them over the Atlantic and the scheme would be discontinued.³⁷

International projects included fundraising and working with victims of the 2004 Tsunami in Sri Lanka. The British Council and DfID supported co-operative educational work in Ethiopia in which the College partnered with the University of Reading and Fair and Square, a UK development education project focusing on ethical shopping. A six-year project in Malawi was grant-aided by the Scottish government; the Leverhulme Trust financed co-operative research in Malawi with Hazel Johnson from the Open University who also sat on the College Board for a time. 'FRICH' was a DfID-funded project involving the Co-op Group and Finlays to set up tea smallholder co-ops in Kenya, in which the College worked closely with colleagues from the Co-op College in Kenya on training programmes. Publications emerged from these projects including

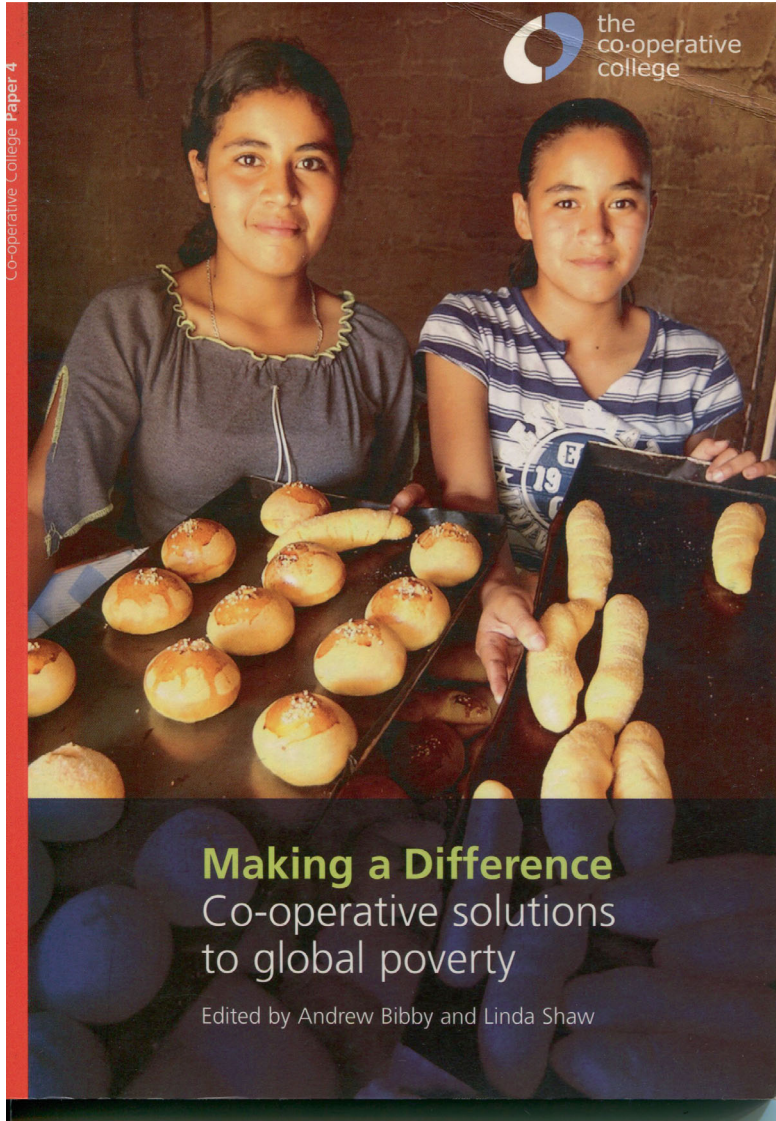


Fig. 8.5 Exploring co-operative solutions to poverty. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

a special issue of the *Journal for International Development*, edited by Johnson and Shaw and which featured articles by their PhD students.³⁸

CURRICULUM AND TRAINING

The lifelong learning agenda was also becoming more prolific under the Labour governments and had been highlighted on an international level by Jacques Delors' UN report, *Learning: The Treasure Within*.³⁹ The British government's *Learning Age* promised an inclusive definition of lifelong learning even though specific policy interventions neither matched the intentions nor directly benefitted the College. Access and second chance to learn courses had historically enabled activists in social movements to enter the educational arena. This became more problematic when access courses multiplied in further education colleges through the 1980s and 1990s and then, widening participation proliferated with the Blair government target of 50% of young people gaining experience of higher education. It undercut and removed the obvious need for College access programmes. Although aspects of co-operative, social and economic history would be incorporated into research and training, the detailed study of these areas as stand-alone subjects had come to an end.

Management education at the College, in part led by associate Bob Quinney, moved closer to work-based learning involving a range of pedagogies, including training, coaching, work-based assessments and tailored programmes. New NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) management programmes were developed while Outlook 2001 supported women into senior management positions. College programmes did respond flexibly to specific needs within the consumer movement, for instance, for funeral, travel, retail, human resources, insurance and customer service.⁴⁰ The nature and infrastructure of these operations was transforming. By the year 2000, the College was running up to 70% of its learning programmes off-site as well as via distance learning, aided by new technologies. Online programmes in Values and Principles were crafted. A new website was now an essential element of any organisation and this was launched at the Congress in May 2003. The College represented itself as a 'learning organisation', in order to help achieve the international system of management quality, ISO 9000 (International Organization for Standardization).⁴¹ A staff development programme for associate staff was started.

Governance was a further crucial area of training.⁴² Member education needed to be grappled with if co-operatives were to live up to their name. The College ran various member projects, involving training, research projects and toolkits. Peter Couchman at Oxford, Swindon and Gloucester Co-operative in the 1990s had also done innovative work in thinking about member needs, the diverse ways in which they participated in their co-operative as well as how frontline shop staff might proactively promote co-operative messages. Many conservative elements in the movement were reticent. For instance, a College action research project on membership worked with one co-operative society that did not want to actually recruit any members—quite a confusing situation. It may have reflected a certain distance between the College and regional societies.

The coming together of CRS and CWS into the Co-operative Group created a need for director and member development, especially for elected office holders in area and regional committees. A priority was to build an accredited training programme for co-operative members that could be delivered locally. Courses were re-written and an associate team formed so that it could be rolled out nationally. In her short time at the College, Ros Pilkington was active in achieving accreditation from a variety of bodies including EdExel and the Open College Network. Moreover, a Skills Audit programme for boards of directors, made use of ‘balanced scorecards’. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for directors of co-operatives examined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) including environmental and social factors. Co-operative ideals were aligning with common assumptions as business was being held to account for its wider social and environmental impact. The 2001 Commission drew attention to this area of work and the College reacted accordingly.

Despite the apparent co-operative re-awakening, the opportunities for education and training within the traditional consumer movement gradually diminished which had a serious impact upon the College’s traditional curriculum and cohort. In 2000, the reducing number of independent consumer societies stood at just 43. A major shock came in 2013, just as the Co-operative Group was marking the 150th anniversary of the CWS, with the announcement of serious operational, financial and governance issues which led to the loss of literally billions of pounds. The Group was restructured, even more elected posts excised and the space for member participation constricted with a members’ council replacing area and regional committees. Consequently, College training courses for

these committees evaporated overnight. Even experienced co-operators might now be precluded from playing a role in Group governance—Graham Melmoth, after retiring as CEO of the Group, would chide his old employer when co-operative stalwarts like Dame Pauline Green were rejected due to a supposed lack of expertise. The Myners Report looked into the governance of the Group and was dismissive about the preparation, experience and capacity of committee members. It found risible the claim that inexperienced lay members could be enabled through a few training courses to effectively hold executives to account. Even though Myners privileged mainstream business models, there was some truth in his claims which helped to illuminate the historical chasm that had opened up between members and executives. Managers had often been content to ignore the membership that was increasingly ill-equipped to comprehend the complexities and machinations of modern business. Many members were not interested or able to intervene in the strategic decisions that were being made in their name. This mutual stand-off was an indictment of the sclerotic inward-looking nature of the movement. The College argued for education and training but had been marginalised from the higher levels of management. Its training programme was the best that could be achieved in the circumstances and it became easy for Myners to indirectly tarnish the College with his broad brushstrokes.⁴³

Nevertheless, in line with its updated vision, the College was courting the Co-operative and Mutual Sector. Fairtrade and ethical trade were targeted for a time. Director training for agricultural co-operatives was organised in collaboration with the Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies, as well as director training programmes for housing co-operatives. Credit union training was facilitated, partly by a partnership with the East Midlands Credit Union Development and Support Agency. An Adapt project, funded by the European Social Fund, modified work done with the CWS on co-operative values and principles to the needs of more than 20 small and medium-sized co-operatives including consumer societies at Radstock, Penrith, Brixham, Musselburgh and Fisherrow. However, while there was a great need for training in smaller co-operative and mutual enterprises, paying for it was not straightforward, a dilemma for the whole co-operative movement.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND CO-OPERATIVE SCHOOLS

Co-operative education now involved increasing numbers of young people.⁴⁴ In fact, co-operative learning in mainstream education had become a minor theme of the College's work and would be re-affirmed by the Strategic Plan of 2001–03 when it was envisaged that partnerships with teachers and educators would be pursued. This strand of work had come a long way since Robert Houlton admitting that the College had limited expertise. The accretion of specific projects and partnerships with schools had built awareness and know-how at the College which enabled it to take advantage of opportunities as they arose. Working on projects with schools helped Wilson to formulate a vision of a network of co-operative schools. Clearly, the new mutualism agenda and the Co-operative Commission also made co-operators alert to the possibility of harnessing co-operative values to institutions and legislative opportunities. The introduction of the Specialist Schools programme by the John Major government, then re-launched by the Labour government after 1997, released significant funding for schools to build a curricular specialism with the aid of a private sponsor. The College had good relations with the Co-operative Group and its values and principles committee which agreed to sponsor, at £50,000 each, a network of what became ten specialist business and enterprise colleges in every English region.⁴⁵ The resulting network proved to be a success and many teachers formed subject groups which was given another boost when the Group agreed to fund a £300,000 curriculum project that enabled teachers to create resources inspired by the global co-operative movement. School leaders, who had many responsibilities and vulnerabilities to manage with limited resources, appreciated the additional support as well as the chance to network with sympathetic others.

A significant shift came with the 2006 Education and Inspections Act which enabled a group of schools to involve external organisations by forming trust structures. This was an attempt by the Blair government to nurture new partnership working rather than simply full-blown privatisation. The College was well-placed to exploit this opportunity. Cliff Mills from Cobbetts solicitors, and Peter Hunt at Mutuo, helped to fathom a legal model and conjure some political sympathy for a co-operative schools trust (Fig. 8.6). The model centred upon a commitment to co-operative values and principles as well as a multi-stakeholder forum where the views of staff, pupils, parents, community and alumni might be aired

and feed into governance. The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and Labour/Co-operative MP, Ed Balls, made available small grants for training schools in co-operative values and principles. Wilson co-authored a pamphlet which made the case for co-operative school structures that might ‘lock in’ the values.⁴⁶

Many headteachers immediately saw the attraction of these schools as a modern adaptation of key educational values, a means of safeguarding and defending the education they had worked for all their lives.⁴⁷ They feared creeping privatisation and unaccountability in many policy models emerging from government circles. Sean Rogers, who was working in government services in Blackburn and would subsequently head up the College’s work with schools, responded with alacrity; Wilson recalled him saying, ‘you have no idea how big this will be’.⁴⁸ It took some time for schools to realise that co-operative frameworks could be adapted to the specific needs of their own schools rather than representing the imposition



Fig. 8.6 Mervyn Wilson (centre) speaking with David Blunkett (right), who held a number of senior ministerial posts in the New Labour governments, House of Commons event. Co-operative College Collection, with permission Co-operative Heritage Trust CIO and Co-operative College

of a new form of sponsorship and control. Indeed, by 2016, there were approximately 850 mainstream state schools that could be categorised as co-operative. In time, other legal models, including a co-operative academy, were adapted by schools. In the early years of the Millennium, the academies programme had been launched for schools in deprived areas that would benefit from sponsorship and independence. The Co-operative Group was to take up the possibility of directly sponsoring a network of academy schools. Visits to Spain, Italy and strongholds of co-operation also inspired teachers. The co-operative model attracted some political support from many Labour politicians but also across the political spectrum, evident from the House of Commons Education Committee inquiry into Schools Partnerships and Co-operation.⁴⁹ Wilson was in regular contact with government ministers for a time and was a member of the NUT/Compass Inquiry on Education in the twenty first Century.

The election of the Coalition Government in 2010 presented new problems for co-operative schools. The academies programme was now to be applied to all schools, especially successful ones. By contrast, the trust model was ‘left to the market’ where it would wither somewhat. Co-operative academy models, including converter academies, had some take-up but on a lesser scale. All ‘coasting’ schools were now to be forced into what were seen as hostile and ‘predatory’ academy chains, which meant that a number of co-operative schools were gradually picked off by ‘successful’ schools with contrasting values, something that would not have been allowed in the case of Catholic or Church of England schools.⁵⁰ There were also weaknesses from the co-operative side. A mutual self-help model offered only limited additional resources for schools on a co-operative journey and many schools did not actively implement the model. The rapid growth of co-operative schools set in train a momentum that required time and resources. However, in the frosty atmosphere post-2010, this became less possible. The Group became disillusioned with many trust schools which it viewed as co-operative in name only and subsequently concentrated its efforts on sponsoring co-operative academies. It remains to be seen whether this programme is a sleeping giant that might yet be renewed.

CHANGES TO THE CENTENARY

In 2015, Wilson retired and Simon Parkinson was appointed principal. His previous experience had been with the charitable and voluntary sector, working for MENCAP, a learning disability charity dating back to 1946. On leaving school in Salford, Parkinson had worked for the local council which funded his first degree to become a building surveyor. From there, he worked with MENCAP, supporting the independent living of disabled people. Once again, his employer funded a master's in public administration at Warwick University.⁵¹ The experience of the voluntary sector was to influence the way he viewed the College. Coming from the outside, inevitably his image of a unified movement was to diversify and fragment as he met with co-operators around the country.

Upon arrival, Parkinson identified the schools project and international development as two primary areas of work that were siloed and did not merge into a coherent vision with a 'joined-up approach'. The perennial issue of the College's relationship to the British consumer movement troubled Parkinson with his voluntary sector background. The trading relationships had dried up so there was minimal training taking place. Societies were organising their own training schemes and had partnerships with local universities. As a result, the sense of the College as part of a movement was somewhat vague. The College was partly reliant on what Parkinson described as 'core funding' from the Group and Education Development Fund which was seen as a 'subscription' in which there was a 'moral duty' to fund the College with no necessary accountability about how that money was to be spent. This 'unrestricted funding' was drying up 'because I think we did a good job of taking the money and a poorer job of telling people what we were doing with the money'. Parkinson wanted to change the 'mindset of the College' with 'charitable language' invoking the importance of 'impact', 'how we are spending money ... and the difference it is making'.⁵² The Co-operative Group was also looking to reduce its commitments to 'core infrastructure organisations' of the movement.⁵³

The new mission statement decoupled the College from the movement somewhat—'a member led educational charity that uses co-operative values and principles to try to build a fairer world'. Parkinson noted that it would be 'brilliant if the traditional movement wants to be part of that, otherwise we will find a way...' He thought it ironic that there was a more general yearning 'for a different way of doing things, about

work, platform coops, making a difference in ... communities' and hoped that would provide a way forward.⁵⁴ The College did build capacity for training among lower-level co-operative start-ups, community shops, platforms and community co-operatives but it was still not immediately apparent how this need might be financed in the long-run. Parkinson wanted to build a more cohesive staffing team by extending the leadership and forging a strategy that could be launched in 2019, the College's centenary year. He aimed to expand the fundraising capacity as well as marketing and communications. It was to be done 'project by project', to build knowledge, awareness and capacity—once again struggling to embed continuity of expertise and experience. The structural and financial situation facing the College meant that it continually had to re-create itself, building capacity around new projects which helped the College to break even with the help of returns on the investment of the Stanford Hall.

In addition, Parkinson could not see a way forward with the schools' work. He thought there had been a rapid growth of transitioning to new governance structures without adequate emphasis on embedding change and strengthening the network, on teaching, curriculum, infrastructure and standards. Officially, responsibility lay with the Schools' Co-operative Society, but the Group did not renew its initial backing for the SCS which created a vacuum. The Society had no powers to force schools to join co-operative networks or share services and, in the absence of immediate benefits, schools declined to renew their subscriptions. A reduction in new conversions, from which the College derived income, reduced significantly and staff were made redundant. A new partnership with Edison Learning on school improvement found few takers. Many co-operative schools thrived even if the energy from the College waned as it was unable to locate funding, resources or guidance.

Work continued on a number of fronts. The College had taken on youth enterprise work although this had been moved online as there was no obvious funding stream. In Rochdale, a project worked on loneliness. Related initiatives in Manchester, Glasgow and Cannock helped to introduce young people to co-operative values and enterprise. New online courses included *What is a Co-operative?* and *What are the Co-operative Values and Principles?* Successful projects took place in Malawi, with the Tear Fund and Christian Aid. Study visits, that had previously been hosted by the Union now moved to the College and these increased to about one a month, involving work in the library, trips to co-operatives, exercises and

case studies. A highpoint for the College was the Centenary Celebrations in 2019 with a main event held at Rochdale Town Hall which attracted visitors from around the world, from Africa and the ICA for example. An edited book was published to celebrate the College and critically reflect on co-operative education.⁵⁵ Work also started on a history of the College.

Upon the retirement of Shaw, Ross was appointed vice principal of the College at a similar time to Parkinson and brought experiences of higher education and the labour movement. She had worked in adult education and higher education, for instance at the Working Lives Institute at London Metropolitan University, where she focused on community organising, trade union studies and international development. When Parkinson left to head up the WEA, Ross became the principal and the first woman to lead the College. She wanted to map the College onto the contours of both community learning as well as those of higher education. Collaborative work with Co-operative Councils considered alternative local economic strategies. Ross became fascinated by the alluring vision of a co-operative university which had been circulating in the movement since its inception. A group of supporters gathered to plan a way forward and potential partners emerged. This was a time when many radical examples of higher education were in evidence including free universities and The Ragged University. Models of co-operative higher education were reviewed such as Mondragon University but that was closely linked with the Mondragon businesses whereas the College had something more broad-ranging in mind. The 2017 Higher Education Act enabled institutions and private bodies to establish universities and promised a way forward.

Ross felt the College could limp on or really have a go at bringing a university into being and she worked to build a head of steam. Co-operatives UK, the Co-operative Party, student co-operative organisations as well as a number of academics lent their weight to the proposals. A big potential stumbling block was whether the movement would put forward finance or students to attend—in 2018, Parkinson was far from confident about this. In theory the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) were agreeable but the application involved up-front costs of £500,000. The financial obstacle was partly dealt with via the endowment which had already been reduced in the previous few years. An application to the Office for Students attempted to register a federal model with partners including, among others, Vaughan

College which ran accredited courses and Red Co-op that was more interested in informal community learning.⁵⁶ Ultimately, the application was ruled out as there was no guarantee that teaching quality and qualifications could be assured in all parts of the proposed network. The proposal was put on ice.

In the spring of 2020, global shifts were to envelop the College and bring everything to an abrupt halt—the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which caused novel coronavirus disease, COVID-19. Although the sudden ending of provisions all contributed to the need for redundancies and restructuring, the College looked to the future. In 2020, new leadership took over the College with the resignation of Ross and the appointment of Neil Calvert as principal, working with Allred focusing on International Partnerships; Longden on Learning Programmes; Thomasen as Director of operations and Business Development and Amanda Benson as Curriculum Development Manager.⁵⁷ In 2024, when Calvert moved on, it was announced that Longden and Thomasen would divide the role of principal and chief executive. After over a century, the College was looking to a new future based upon educational innovation and financial sustainability.

Since the Millennium, the College had successfully sold Stanford Hall and moved back to Manchester, creating an endowment to underpin its educational purpose. New initiatives in training, research and consultancy all took place. Notable achievements were marked up in international development and in the creation of the museum and archive. The College also extended its remit to include co-operative and mutual enterprises outside of the consumer movement, the co-operative schools' network and an attempted co-operative university. Yet, the College was beset by the ongoing difficulties of the consumer movement to which its connections were becoming so tenuous that they were hardly recognisable to some. The COVID-19 crisis put a halt on activity and forced a re-thinking and new plans. But throughout these decades, it retained and nurtured co-operative visions of education and learning as central to the past, present and future of the co-operative movement.

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Conclusion

Over the past century, the Co-operative College has developed and defended a coherent vision and practice of co-operative education driven by values and principles that leavened co-operatives, co-operative movements and broader institutional developments. Its education, training and research have contributed to the creation and sustenance of co-operative and mutual enterprises. For a relatively small organisation it has punched well above its weight and had a significant impact in Britain and globally. Ex-students went on to roles in co-operatives, government, research, education and other areas.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the idea of a college for co-operators was widely discussed with many proposals, ideas and suggestions. These would gather force in the early twentieth century. A fully fledged College with a physical presence was beyond the dreams of many individual co-operators but people like Fred Hall seized the opportunity to construct a permanent institution. After intensive campaigning, a College of sorts came into being to meet the assorted needs of 'social' and management education in Britain and overseas. As with many co-operative experiments, it was commenced in a small way with the resources that could be garnered but these beginnings laid a foundation for a larger College. The actually existing College was in tension with what a future College might look like, where it would be located, what it would teach and research, and who it would benefit. The destruction of the Second

World War was hardly auspicious but keeping the College open helped to nurture ideas for building the peace. Possibilities arose as unspent educational budgets accumulated in a highly mobilised society with a surfeit of democratic consciousness, upon which co-operators were determined to construct a co-operative future. Stately homes were coming onto the market at low prices and the purchase of Stanford Hall gave material assurance that co-operators now had the real College they had longed for. A model of residential education became embedded and carried a promise of permanence. During the post-war period, the wide-ranging vision would be reined in. The idea of the co-operative commonwealth, which assumed that the co-operative model could be extended indefinitely to all areas of life, was inevitably constrained by nationalisation and an encroaching welfare state—the co-operative vision now had to be inserted into these developments. The whole movement was on a long-term downward trend which ultimately impacted upon the College. Once this was acknowledged, co-operators came to accept that, in the immediate future, they might become a necessary ‘sector’ of a modern mixed economy.

Nevertheless, many generations of co-operators benefitted from the unique curriculum and ethos of the College and would go on to enrich co-operative movements around the world. The residential model of intensive education centred upon management, secretarial and social students in addition to the popular post-war course on overseas co-operation. As the College embraced each of these areas and brought them into a fruitful dialogue, they would all transform. The distinctive teaching, learning and research pursued by the College gave it a particular purpose in comparison with colleges that were offering programmes of general education. Maintaining a co-operative vision necessitated handling a set of slippery dilemmas and tensions. Holding together technical, management, social and overseas education was no easy task. Generic common courses were established to bridge these curriculum areas and foster communication between various students. Social students learnt about co-operatives and accountancy and, conversely, those in management were exposed to sociology and the humanities. Overseas students were constantly interpreting and adapting ideas from and to their own countries—a process that spread to domestic students. Moreover, research made connections between areas of co-operative practice, through publications and partnerships, which have widened the influence of the College and enriched its programmes. In an adult education context, the College

represented an experimental form of ‘multi-lateral’ institution—a prototype concept of comprehensive education in which different forms of learning took place in the same place. While it was hard to establish points of confluence between the various streams of activity, students also learnt via informal contact, discussions, visits and debates that exposed them directly to the lives and ideas that they were exploring. The non-educational aspects of bringing disparate groups of students together was sometimes critiqued as a form of ‘social engineering’, but living and working in a College allowed for authentic relationships to emerge.

‘Social courses’, which stretched back to Owenite social science, were continually updated in relation to changing co-operative environments. By the 1970s and 1980s, as other educational opportunities came on stream, they were transforming into access courses as well as income-generating opportunities less related to co-operative education. In the years after the sale of Stanford Hall, the College sought to find a new balance in developing key strands of work with co-operative and mutual enterprises in Britain and the world in which historical and social aspects of co-operation have helped to re-imagine the future. So while social courses went into abeyance, educators have adapted them to programmes of teaching and research and they remain ideas which many scholars and activists still find captivating.

Management and secretaryship had always been a key area for co-operatives. The latter gradually blended into the management courses as there was decreasing demand from societies that were undergoing mergers. From the late 1960s, as residential long-term study became harder to justify, shorter sandwich courses and intensive training were trialled successfully. Societies also started to take training in-house which, in the long-term, made the College more distant from training the higher echelons of executives who, in turn, became more separated from the co-operative vision and even viewed education and training at the College as optional. For some years, a chief officials’ conference was held but this came to an end. The College could not easily keep up with the ‘managerial revolution’ and became marginalised from higher level management development even if it maintained working at lower levels. There is some potential to reclaim this space.

This division between managers and members pointed to a further dilemma. Members and directors had historically been taken for granted as part of co-operative life. It was not until the 1960s that co-operatives started to worry about ‘apathy’, declining membership as well as their

preparedness and ability to govern societies that were expanding rapidly as a result of mergers. Consistently, the College focused on management programmes informed by co-operative values. In 1995, the updated Statement on Co-operative Identity shifted the emphasis from the dividend as a trading relationship onto a generic sense of membership. One purpose of co-operative education was now to remind societies of their own identity and make them alert to its possibilities. Competitors' loyalty cards seemed to be just such an example of how co-operative clothes were being stolen in broad daylight. The unique aspects of co-operatives had been underplayed for decades. Given that societies were only partially receptive to the urgent need for training and building capacity, the College found itself in an impossible situation, arguing for a minimal level of training because that was the most that could be hoped for in the circumstances. Societies had focused on their economic survival and the College had to appeal to this mindset to keep afloat—it was a spiral pulling the movement away from its unique selling point. There were significant moments of renewal, as during the leadership of Graham Melmoth. But, in 2013, the Myners Report lambasted the lack of training and ability of many directors—an issue to which the movement as a whole had not found an adequate solution. The subsequent move away from member control is unlikely to produce a sustainable co-operative outcome.

International and overseas courses were perhaps the most prolific and influential aspect of College work. In truth, the College has consistently been international in scope, from its very first cohort and then during the Second World War when it attracted soldiers stationed in Britain. After the war, it boasted a high reputation in many countries, thriving long after other residential courses had dwindled. Co-operative programmes also proliferated in developing countries. Indeed, it is possible that the College had a greater and more direct impact upon co-operative movements internationally than in the UK. It is certainly ironic that state recognition for College domestic programmes was lacking at the precise time when they were feted by civil servants and ministers keen to boast about Britain's backing for co-operation in colonial and commonwealth countries. There was a greater willingness to experiment with co-operative ideas abroad than at home. The whole project of training elites to work overseas had paradoxically been based upon an appreciation of the informal educational role of the movement in the history of Britain, yet the implications of this were not fostered domestically where the movement was being perceptibly marginalised. It reflected the prevalent developmental thinking that

co-ops were more relevant to earlier stages of history, at the time being played out in developing countries, rather than the supposed modernity of post-war Britain.

There were certainly elements of this programme which fed into an analysis of social control favoured by some accounts of imperialism. The Cold War exerted limits and tensions in the ways that co-operation was understood and practised. This was debated in the movement where voices critical of empire were raised. The College leadership was allied with the Western perspective of the Co-operative Union, but it filtered ideas to enable students to grapple with grass-roots co-operatives. Co-operatives were also welcomed by newly emergent nations eager to work with the College. The creation of co-operative colleges in Europe, Africa, Asia and America emulated the British model. By the 1990s, in-country training and specific projects became more significant. Overall, co-operative education is still driven by the belief that co-operatives have the potential to represent common interests, produce wealth and divide it equitably among members.

The College faced possible extinction with the drying up of the residential model of education. At the height of this predicament, a solid body of committed co-operators supported the College, allowing it breathing space so that a new strategy could emerge. In part, the financial strengths of the movement, especially the larger societies, helped to buttress the College against the harsh winds that threatened to topple it. Internationally a new vision and purpose was emerging, on which the College capitalised. The sale of Stanford Hall and a move back to Manchester allowed it greater flexibility. But without a regular cohort of students, the College has had to search for innovative solutions in serving the co-operative and mutual sector while achieving financial stability. It is remarkable that the College did indeed survive and an indication of the importance of education and learning which so many in the movement valued. Creating an institution of learning turned out to be an enduring resource to which many have turned to for sustenance. The fact of continuity is not to be underestimated at a time when virtually all the long-term and short-term residential adult education colleges have either folded or been integrated into universities. The College has not only weathered but actively moulded historical and social change.

A DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION?

The College has assiduously sought to serve the educational needs of the movement and many of those who availed themselves of it had positive experiences. Whether the movement has fully appreciated the resource, remains a moot point. For many decades, the College had to work with a restricted practice of co-operative education because that was how it was understood by people paying for it. Even so, a greater holistic vision was not discarded so that, via particular projects, it could facilitate movement-wide strategic approaches, for instance, in director training or values and principles. Co-operators were never an entirely unified force with multiple societies, committees and activists, each with their own perspectives. Many of the most active co-operators tended to be promoters of co-operative education and the College. A sustained body of co-operative educators have strengthened the College's ability to divine its way through the difficult and protracted downward trajectory of British consumer co-operation. As a result, partial and lacklustre action rubbed up against the continually renewing enthusiasm of educators, a feature that has been ingrained within the movement.

The College helps us to understand the changing nature of the movement. When it was formed there were roughly 1,000 independent co-operative societies in existence in Britain, which now number a handful. Most of the remaining societies were large enough to create and manage their own training departments which reduced the need for College services. The residential long-term model of the College was time limited and onsite short programmes for smaller groups became popular. The turn to tailored training and consultancy made a lot of sense, even to those keen to retain Stanford Hall. Yet, the unwillingness of the movement and the government to fund long-term courses at a high level can be considered a lost opportunity in many respects. Dominant educational funding and organisational regimes have made it hard for the College to thrive.

For the past half century, principals of the College have shared a common dilemma, that the movement had created the College but appeared to be turning its back on it, unwilling to use it, and less willing to fund it though no one wanted to be seen as the one that pulled the rug from under it. The intertwined issues of governance and financial instability of the College left it vulnerable for significant periods of time. Only briefly did the College rest on a completely secure financial basis.

Even for the long periods when it was not in danger of closure, it had to spend a lot of time negotiating finance and fathoming new initiatives to appeal to the interests of the movement and those outside. As a small institution it has had high unit costs and has frequently lost expertise with the turnover of staff. Over time, the close relations with the Education Department of the Co-operative Union became more nebulous and the College asserted greater independence. Yet, the move towards being an autonomous organisation, based on fundraising and service delivery, left it exposed. The creation of an endowment for the College, funded by the sale of Stanford Hall, has cushioned the College although it continues to search for a viable financial existence.

A challenge for the College was to devise its way through the twists and turns of policy and the economic environment. The movement had long campaigned for educational provision but it might arrive in a form which reduced the space for manoeuvre. Secondary education and the raising of the school leaving age made recruitment harder as the children of committed co-operators were siphoned off to university. The College was prominent in recommending experiments in a variety of recruitment drives but these were only ever partially adopted. Similarly, the post-war years were problematic in the way that the movement did not pro-actively re-think the potential for new forms of co-operative ownership beyond encouraging more people to join the co-op. An alternative would have involved a major educational programme to help fathom novel models of social ownership. Consumerism was also becoming a feature of life in Western societies but too little too late took place despite the recommendations from the College and external commentators that this was an area which the movement had been well-placed to exploit given its relationship to members. The movement was aware of these issues, and sometimes passed resolutions on them, but societies could be recalcitrant with no desire to take on additional risk. Instead, membership was left to fester somewhat, increasingly separated from the core business. In a declining, inward-looking movement where many people became more concerned with the benefits they could extract, dynamism and the capacity for re-invention were much diminished. The College was significantly arguing for a more robust response but was dependent upon a movement that could be sluggish. There were of course times when the College was not able to fully live up to its vision of co-operative democracy. Despite eulogising equality and participatory democracy, gender differences were often reinforced and the movement struggled with contemporary ideas

about diversity. It welcomed overseas students but was less active in soliciting more diverse students from Britain, a fact which reflected the make-up of the British co-operative movement.

The College has had to hold together a distinctive notion of co-operative education while engaging with wider institutions. Over-playing the need to go it alone carried the danger of greater marginalisation, floating alone in a stagnant pond rather than being exposed to mainstream currents of thought and practice. But under-emphasising the distinctive vision would lead to a loss of purpose and the reason for existence. There has been no easy solution to this predicament. In the early twentieth century, there was a wariness about partnering with agencies which might dilute a rich educational practice. A confident movement felt able to remain aloof from universities even if the College did nurture relationships. But it was an approach that served to isolate the movement from standards, ideas and knowledge. After the Second World War, this became particularly acute with the rapid development of secondary and higher education. The College was out on a limb and could find itself excluded from networks and practices that might have aided it. A holistic view of co-operative education became less tenable as the movement contracted. Co-operative education was slowly fragmented into parts that could be inserted into other programmes and even quietly dropped. The growing 'business' agenda of the movement squeezed out these unique programmes without halting the downturn in the movement's fortunes. However, the renewal from the early 1990s, in part led by business leaders, re-inserted courses focused on values and principles. While these could be seen as only partially restoring the element of co-operativism to learning programmes, when allied to sympathetic executives and managers, they could help to infuse staff and members with a new purpose and potentially to drive business transformation.

The case for the College remains. Recent decades have witnessed the impairment of mass democratic governance in which citizens and members find it harder to play a greater role in the organisation of their lives. Instead, experts and managers and the highly educated have taken control of key bodies with a decreasing space for 'ordinary' voices. Civil society groups, without adequate resources, typically find it hard to respond to tenders, funding possibilities and service delivery projects in a short space of time. The strengths and traditions of the co-operative movement all supported the College to make significant interventions in many aspects of public life and to reconceptualise the nature of business.

Co-operative education has plenty to offer in reconfiguring a democratic deficit across the age range in linking adult education to the learning of young people for instance. There are many emergent movements which draw upon co-operatives, from those interested in the commons, new collective online platforms and co-operative proposals to address the needs of business and government. Established co-operatives have an interest in helping to energise these sectors. They will also be able to draw upon the significant renewal of co-operativism internationally that has taken place over recent decades—which remains an important aspect of the College’s work. Complex thinking and practice within and against these divisions could pay manifold dividends. Given environmental and social crises, alternative models of education and learning represented by the Co-operative College are still urgently needed, in Britain and globally.

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