ONWARDS, UPWARDS, TOWARD THE CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH!: LONDON CO-OPERATIVE CITIZENSHIP, 1918-1925

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MRes in Historical Research, Module 4 dissertation

29th September 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks are due to Dr Mark Merry and Olwen Myhill of the Institute of Historical Research, and to Dr Tom Hulme of Queens University, Belfast, for exceptional academic guidance, unstinting support, and for always going the extra mile.

I would also like to thank the Friends of the Institute of Historical Research for their generous grant of a Friends Bursary.

My love and thanks go to David, Huw and Sid Elliott for unfailing patience, encouragement, reassurance and love.

CONTENTS

Page 3 – INTRODUCTION

Page 20 - CHAPTER 1: “INTERCONNECTED IDEAS, SPACES AND STRUCTURES”: THE URBAN VARIABLE, PERIPHERAL LOCALITY AND LONDON CO-OPERATIVE CITIZENSHIP

Page 34 - CHAPTER 2: “COVERING THE METROPOLIS WITH A CLOUD OF CO-OPERATIVE WITNESS”: EXPANSION OF CO-OPERATION IN LONDON

Page 54 - CHAPTER 3: “A MIGHTY WEAPON FOR THE PERMANENT IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIETY”: THE CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH AND LONDON CO-OPERATIVE CITIZENSHIP

Page 67 - CHAPTER 4: “LOYALTY IS THE CHILD OF KNOWLEDGE”: EDUCATION AND THE LONDON CO-OPERATIVE CITIZEN

Page 82 – CONCLUSION

Page 89 - BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the ways in which London co-operation gave rise to a distinct form of citizenship, shaped by locality, co-operative ideas (such as the Co-operative Commonwealth) and the circumstances of the years immediately after the First World War. The co-operative movement had its roots in the ideas of Robert Owen, and the first attempts at co-operative living took the form of groups setting up home in the English countryside. Alternative forms of co-operation (for example, retail co-operation) took place in the 1820s and 1830s, including some in London, but the modern form of retail co-operation organised around local retail stores is generally agreed to have begun in Rochdale in 1844. The 'Rochdale Pioneers' are credited with the introduction of the dividend, paid to members from the trading surplus proportionate to their spending over the previous quarter- or half-year, and this financial benefit stimulated membership and contributed to the spread of the co-operative movement.[1] The modern co-operative movement, initially strongest in the North-West of England, expanded across Britain and Ireland during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly among skilled workers and their families. However, its spread was uneven, and some places proved particularly resistant to the establishment of co-operation. One of these places was London, although by the beginning of the First World War there were areas of co-operative success on the edges of the metropolis, particularly in West Ham, Woolwich, South-West London, and Edmonton. Co-operation and citizenship in East and North London in the period 1918 – 1925 had a particular quality, as a juxtaposition of national events and local co-operative developments and priorities at that time created an opportunity for the emergence of a potential model of co-operative citizenship, and also contributed to the contours of that citizenship. Post-war reconstruction debates and hopes opened up,

[1] G.J.Holyoake, *Self-Help by the People: The History of the Rochdale Pioneers* (1857)

albeit briefly, an imaginative space within which new social and economic relationships, and the imperatives and opportunities of citizenship, could be thought about and discussed.[2]

Against this backdrop, in 1920 the Co-operative Union Congress reaffirmed its commitment to the ideal of realising the Co-operative Commonwealth, a transformed society based on co-operative principles, which would replace capitalism through peaceful transition rather than revolutionary schism.[3] In London, the municipal elections of 1919, and the amalgamation of the Stratford and Edmonton Co-operative Societies to form the London Co-operative Society in 1920 provided the initial focus for a conscious concentration of effort to expand co-operation in the capital as part of an important contribution to the achievement of the Co-operative Commonwealth, through trade, and through elected representation. London presented particular opportunities and challenges in this regard. London local government provided many opportunities for the exercise of active citizenship by voting, and co-operative and allied candidates, through campaigning and if elected, could introduce co-operative ideas and priorities into the wider public sphere. But in terms of trade, London presented a particularly challenging environment, and the task of expanding from areas of strength on the periphery of London into the weaker central zone was difficult, especially during the post-war economic downturn. This study investigates the ways in which a set of interrelated factors – reconstruction, education, trade expansion, civic representation, locality, and the idea of the Co-operative Commonwealth – helped to structure a distinctive London co-operative citizenship in the years just after the First World War. It builds upon recent challenges to the idea that citizenship was "indivisible from national identity" by investigating the relationship

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[2] See, for example, Julia Bush, *Behind the Lines: East London Labour 1914-1919* (London, 1984) pp94-98; Chris Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour: The Post-War Coalition 1918-1922*, (London, 1990); Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow, *Interwar Britain: A Social and* Economic *History* (London, 1976), pp119-121

[3] *The Fifty-Second Annual Co-operative Congress Report,* 1920.The Co-operative Congress was an annual event for representatives of those co-operative societies who were members of the Co-operative Union, to discuss and vote upon matters of concern to the co-operative movement. The Co-operative Union offered advice and support to societies, and was primarily concerned with education.

between co-operative locality and citizenship, and considers the co-operative community as an alternative locus of belonging, and it thus has implications for the broader domain of citizenship history.[4] Occupying a place at the intersection of co-operative history, urban history and citizenship history, it is a topic to which all these relevant literatures contribute. However, no substantial historical investigation of the character of London co-operative citizenship and its relationship to the factors which helped to shape it has hitherto been attempted. Bringing these established historiographies to bear upon London co-operative citizenship, as it emerges from co-operative society records and national and local publications, offers new perspectives on co-operative community and locality, on women as co-operative citizen-consumers, and on the role and nature of co-operative education. A recurring theme of this work is that while co-operators often appear to be following general societal trends – for example, in their preoccupation with the education of the citizen, or in their development of advertising and branding for their goods, or in their participation in associational culture - the idea of the Co-operative Commonwealth potentially provided a distinct structure and a rationale for their activities. Although the Co-operative Commonwealth was not embraced by every co-operative member (and there is strong evidence to suggest that it was not), yet it served as a moral resource or reference point for the movement, a "common inspirational vision."[5]

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[4] See, for example, Tom Hulme, 'Putting the City Back into Citizenship: Civics Education and Local Government in Britain, 1918-45', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol 26, No 1, 2015, pp26-51; Dion Georgiou, '"Only a local affair"?: Imagining and enacting locality through London's Boer War carnivals', *Urban History* https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926816000900

[5] Pushpa Khumbat, 'Learning Together? The Co-operative Union, the Workers' Educational Association and the National Council of Labour Colleges 1918-1939', *Journal of Co-operative Studies* Vol 49., No.2, Autumn 2016, p6

Historiographies

The urban variable

The urban variable, a concept which proposes that socioeceonomic, cultural and political change is "in part, constituted *through* urban places and urban experience" is a significant theme within urban history, and one which throws light upon the uneven spread of co-operation across London.[6] Urban historians have asked whether towns and cities may be understood as sites within which historical processes are enacted, or whether cities help actively to influence or shape them.[7] As Nicholas Kenny and Rebecca Madgin have argued, "the city is not a stage-set upon which events are acted out, but instead the urban variable actively shapes and conditions human behaviour."[8] The urban variable has been used as a historiographical lens through which to analyse the similarities and differences between urban and rural environments, between particular cities and towns, and to uncover the layers of difference existing within cities themselves, between neighbourhoods and localities, centre and periphery.[9] The urban variable as an analytical approach is fundamental to my entire study, in which it operates at several different levels. It is used to throw light upon the ways in which the specificities of London – both in the localities of co-operative strength and in the wider metropolis – contributed to the particular pattern of co-operative development within

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[6] Iain S.Black, 'Modernity and the Search for the Urban Variable', (Review Essay on Martin Daunton, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain:Volume III, 1840-1950,* Cambridge, 2000), *Journal of Urban History* Vol. 32, No. 3, March 2006, pp466-476

[7]See, for example, H.J. Dyos and D. Reeder, 'Slums and Suburbs' in Dyos, H.J. and Woolf, M., eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (London, 1973), Vol II, pp359-86; H.J.Dyos, 'Editorial', *The Urban History Yearbook*, 1975

[8] Nicholas Kenny and Rebecca Madgin, *Cities Without Borders: Comparative and Transnational Approaches to Urban History* (England and USA, 2015), p11

[9] On the specificities of particular cities and towns see, for example, Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, Popular culture and the City, 1870-1939* (Manchester, 2012); T.J. Hulme, 'Urban Governance and Civic Responsibility: Interwar Council Housing in Buxton', *Midland History*, Vol. 35, No. 2, Autumn 2010, pp237-55. On locality see, for example, H.J.Dyos, *Victorian Suburb: Study of the Growth of Camberwell* (Leicester, 1961), John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: A History of East London* (New Haven and London, 2012); Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840-1880* (London, 1978);

the capital, with co-operative strength concentrated at the London periphery. The urban variable can also point to some of the ways in which the city itself helped to structure key aspects of co-operative citizenship. For example, the buying of co-operative goods and services took place in particular spaces, within co-operative communities superimposed upon, or inserted into, the existing urban and suburban fabric, while the opportunities of London civic life presented by layers of governance - described as a "Chinese puzzle" by the *Co-operative News* - offered a way to advance co-operative agendas in the public sphere.[10]

Peripheral areas of London are commonly described as suburbs, and have a historiography of their own.[11] However, there are uncertainties around definition, and some assumptions in the literature are problematic when applied to West Ham and Edmonton. Although their location on the fringes of London is suburban, they do not fit, for example, into the model which assumes a suburb created in the interwar period by the building of new housing in "remote suburban estates who had limited contact with the civic authorities."[12] West Ham, in particular is anomalous here. As Ruth MacManus and Philip J. Etherington have argued, insufficient attention has been paid to development and change within the suburb long after it was established, "once it no longer stands as the historically typical suburban form."[13] By the end of the First World War, West Ham was a very large, very populous, predominantly working-class industrial area, whose culture and appearance resembled inner London areas.[14] Furthermore, both West Ham and Edmonton had considerable local employment opportunities, and so the dependence of these areas on transport links to central London is,

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[10] 'The Fight for London: a Call for Co-operative Effort', *Co-operative News*, 18th January 1919, p53. The *Co-operative News* was the national weekly paper of the co-operative movement in Britain.
[11] F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Suburbia* (Leicester, 1981); Mark Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs: Social Change and Urban Dispersal in Post-War England* (Manchester 1998); Ruth McManus and Philip J Etherington, 'Suburbs in Transition: New Approaches to Suburban History' in *Urban History*, Vol. 34, no. 2 (2007), pp317-337
[12] Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain, 1870-1939', *Contemporary British History* Vol 22, no 2, pp215-216
[13] Ruth McManus and Philip J Etherington, 'Suburbs in Transition' p.319
[14] J. Marriott, 'Beyond the Tower'

by 1918, perhaps less than had originally been the case, and new local transport routes point to a more complex set of interrelationships which took in Essex, Middlesex, and neighbouring peripheral boroughs.

Interwar Citizenship

Citizenship has been described as a reciprocal relationship between the individual and the state or locality, in which rights and responsibilities are conferred upon and guaranteed for that individual through the status of 'citizen', and through which an idea of preferred behaviours is encouraged.[15] In the interwar period, citizenship was a central theme of national debate, which suggests that a desire for clarity surrounded an issue which had been muddied by social, economic and political changes during and after the First World War, so that competing citizenship models left "the social dimensions of citizenship ill-defined".[16] There has been increased interest in citizenship among historians over the last 25 years, in the light of the 'cultural turn', a scholarly development which has expanded the understanding of political culture to include not only formal political activity, but also alternative forms of political agency expressed, for example, through 'active citizenship', a mode of engaged and informed participation in civic and national life.[17] In this study I argue that London co-operation primarily positioned its citizens in relation not to the local authority or the state but to its own wider project of social and economic transformation. While governments, local and national, tended to stress the stabilising rhetoric of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, others, including co-operators, saw the potential of citizenship as a platform from

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[15] B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen'p204; D. Heater, *Citizenship In Britain: A History* (Edinburgh, 2006); B. Beaven, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester 2005).

[16] R. Weight and A. Beach, 'Introduction', *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain 1930-1960* (London and New York, 1998), p7; Peter Brett, 'Citizenship Education in England in the shadow of the Great War', *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* Vol 8, no

[17] For example, Peter Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester, 1996) ; Edmund Neil, 'Conceptions of Citizenship in Twentieth Century Britain' (Review Article), *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol 17, No 3, 2006, p428

which social change could be effected.[18] Both groups attempted to address the uncertainty around citizenship through education. For example, In London, the London County Council's concern with citizenship education emerged not only in proposals for civics classes, but also in educational memoranda demonstrating a concern for teaching the values and beliefs conducive to citizenship through education for leisure, the provision of a wide range of books in school libraries, and the involvement of children in school governance.[19]

The teaching of history was an important strand within citizenship education, in order to encourage an identification with the national story, and thence with the nation itself. Laura Carter has also identified an alternative current of historical thinking, in which the history of the everyday was to create "democratic, rather than revolutionary, citizens", exemplified by the popular works of George and Marjorie Quennell.[20] Co-operative history shared with the works of the Quennells a celebration of self-help, mutuality, and the skills of artisans, and both can be seen as popular strands of the history of ordinary people which predated the academic development of 'history from below'.[21] However the co-operative movement produced its own history textbooks, and these were didactic, structural accounts of the problems of economic systems organised around a critique of traditional political economy and particularly competition. They created an alternative view of the past than the usual national story, stressing the effects of industrial and legislation on working people in a condemnation of the capitalist system, and presented capitalism as the penultimate stage in economic and social arrangements, soon to be superseded by co-operation.[22]

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[18] B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen', p213
[19] London County Council Education Committee, *Development of Education in Public Elementary Schools, Memoranda nos 1-10* (London, 1923). See also J.Keating, 'Approaches to Citizenship Teaching in the First Half of the Twentieth Century – the experience of the London County Council', *History of Education* Vol 40, no 6, pp761-78.
[20] Laura Carter, 'The Quennells and the 'History of Everyday Life' in England, c.1918-69', *History Workshop Journal* Vol. 81, Issue 1, April 2016, pp106-134
[21] L. Carter, 'The Quennells', p129
[22] See, for example, Isa Nicholson, *Our Story: For Young Co-operators* (Manchester, 1903) which was the standard volume used for teaching children about co-operation until the 1920s; Julia Madams, *The*

Citizenship debates may be understood as ways of influencing, controlling and negotiating shifting and unstable boundaries and criteria of belonging. For example, renegotiation and redefinition of citizenship can be tracked through parliamentary debates about the franchise, where the boundaries of citizenship (constructed around rate-paying or property-owning, for example) were continually re-drawn as soon as excluded groups, particularly women, met the relevant criteria to be full citizens. Nicoletta Gullace argues that, as the First World War was ending, citizenship became associated with patriotic 'service' to country, through motherhood, as well as military service, and that this conceptual shift, contributed towards the enfranchisement of women in 1918 and 1928.[23] However, older historical relationships and the persistence of traditional, gendered notions of citizenship persisted.[24] After the First World War, for example, women's citizenship was linked with 'national efficiency' and maternalist responsibility (as it had been after the Boer War) while a post-war 'partnership' model of co-citizenship firmly implied domestic and maternal duties for the female partner.[25] However, while some historians have understood the promotion of social citizenship in the interwar period in the context of elite anxiety and a wish for control, others have explored the progressive possibilities offered by the identity of 'citizen'.[26] Helen McCarthy, for example, identifies "a rich and pervasive discourse of citizenship" in the interwar period, with an emphasis on the potential empowerment offered by mass democracy. This sense of empowerment is apparent in the ways in which women, including some co-operative women, used the identity of 'citizen' as a claim for female public participation and a lever for rights and

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Story Re-told (Manchester, 1921); A.H.Acland and B.Jones, *Working Men Co-operators* (Manchester, 1914).

[23] Helen McCarthy, *The British people and the League of Nations: Democracy, citizenship and internationalism c. 1918-1945* (Manchester and New York, 2011) p116; N. Gullace, *The Blood of our Sons: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (New York and Hampshire, 2002), p8

[24] L. Tilly, 'Women, work and citizenship', *International Labour and Working-Class History* 52 (Fall, 1997) pp1-26

[25] B. Beaven, *Leisure, citizenship* p9. Examples of parliamentary language about a 'partnership' model of citizenship can be found at HC Deb 28 March 1928, vol 215, c1417, 1431

[26] B. Beavan*, Leisure, citizenship* p3

reforms.[27] The Women's Co-operative Guild had long engaged in 'citizenship work', and for them this meant public intervention in matters directly affecting the lives of their members, such as the endowment of maternity, divorce and housing.[28] However, most co-operative women were not members of Guilds and did not engage in public activity, and so their engagement with citizenship through co-operation is more difficult to assess.

Gender and consumption

The theme of gender within the co-operative movement has been addressed almost exclusively through the Women's Co-operative Guild, the extent to which they were an independent, feminist organisation, and what kind of feminism they espoused.[29] Little attention has been paid to the Men's Guild, and Mixed Guilds which were fewer in number and have left relatively few records compared with the Women's Guild. Nevertheless, the Men's Guild did have a voice through the co-operative press, and it is possible to discern differences in the ways in which the Men's and Women's Guilds conceptualised citizenship through their priorities and activities. However, most co-operators, male and female, did not become members of Guilds. Trade figures, attendance at meetings and participation in voting have therefore been used by historians to try to gauge the strength of investment in co-operative ideals among ordinary members. Based on this quantitative approach, some have

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[27] See, for example, Catriona Beaumont, Lynn Abrams and Karen Hunt, 'Citizens not Feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organisations in England, 1928-39', *Womens History* Review Vol 9, no 2, pp411-432; Esther Breitenbach and Valerie Wright, 'Women as Active Citizens: Glasgow and Edinburgh c. 1918-1939', *Women's History Review* 23:3, pp401-420; Anne Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: the Campaign for Women Magistrates in England and Wales, 1910-1939', *Women's History Review* 16:4, pp501-518; Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (Kindle Edition, 2005).

[28] G. Scott *Feminism*, ch.4

[29] Gillian Scott's detailed assessment presents the Guild as an independent organisation with national influence. In contrast, Barbara Blaszak argues that the Guild's activities were mediated and controlled by men within the movement, but this is based upon a very limited study of the 'Womens Corner' in the *Co-operative News* and does not examine wider Guild activities at a local or national level. G.Scott, *Feminism,* ch3; Barbara Blaszak, *The Matriarchs of England's Co-operative Movement: A Study in Gender Politics and Female Leadership* (Westport, Conn., 2000).

concluded that most co-operators were only interested in the dividend.[30] My study proposes an alternative approach to understanding co-operative citizenship, and argues that the identity of the citizen-consumer was suggested and offered to members through the connections made between purchasing and the wider values of the movement through co-operative retail spaces, branding and advertising,. Loyal buying could then be understood as active citizenship, tethered to the wider success of London co-operation, enacted primarily by women who were predominantly responsible for family budgeting. In London, this loyalty was tethered to the wider success and expansion of London co-operation. The extent to which co-operators, and especially women co-operators, inhabited this potential identity is almost impossible for historians to access, but I would argue that the sustained efforts of the London Co-operative Society towards the construction of a consistent picture of what co-operation stood for through its spaces and products shows that officers of the society, at least, believed this to be vitally important.

The co-operative citizen-consumer must be seen in the context of the interwar development of a 'politics of consumption', and the emergence of the 'consumer' as an identity during this period. Matthew Hilton suggests that consumption potentially contributed to the shaping of political consciousness, and became "the site upon which battles over new forms of citizenship and political expression have been fought", offering the possibility of morally and politically engaged purchasing.[31] However, June Hannam and Karen Hunt have drawn a distinction between consumption-based organisation for consumerist ends, and that which aimed to influence wider political ends.[32] For Hunt, a politics of consumption "has as its

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[30] For example, Paul Johnson, *Saving and Spending; the working-Class Economy in Britain 1870-1939* (oxford, 1983)

[31] Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in 20th Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge, 2003), p6; Matthew Hilton, 'The female consumer and the politics of consumption in twentieth century Britain', *The Historical Journal* Vol 45, no 1 (March 2000), pp103-128

[32] June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain 1880s to 1920s* (London and New York, 2002), p135

starting point overt political demands which use some aspect of consumption as their focus *and* around which new consumer-centred tactics are developed."[33] On this basis, Hunt argues that the Women's Co-operative Guild, for example, did not practice a politics of consumption, because "the Guild rarely used their collective power as consumers for wider political ends, using instead more conventional pressure group tactics."[34] But of course, they did both. A decontextualized view of the Women's Co-operative Guild fails to see Guildswomen not only as Guild members but also as co-operative consumers and co-operative society members. The Guild consistently promoted unfailing loyalty to the co-operative store, and co-operative shopping was itself an overt use of collective consumer power for political ends, because co-operative shopping both powered all the other activities of the co-operative movement and was itself a demonstration of the viability of an alternative economic model, so presenting an alternative production/consumption nexus. Co-operative shopping explicitly linked consumption with the transformation of the individual and of society. By choosing co-operatively-produced, co-operatively-sold goods, capitalism could be side-stepped and deprived of economic and (perhaps) political support, and the concrete effects of this form of consumption on private trade are evidenced by the growing co-operative market share, and by the sustained campaign against co-operation by private competitors during the 1920s and 1930s.[35]

Co-operative history

Co-operative history has two distinct historiographies. The first is made up of histories produced by the movement itself from an early stage in the development of the modern

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[33] Karen Hunt, 'Negotiating the boundaries of the domestic: British socialist women and the politics of consumption', *Womens History Review*, 9:2, p390

[34] Karen Hunt, 'Negotiating the boundaries' p393. This seems to refer to the Guild's use of petitions, investigative work and reports to governmental committees on matters such as maternity, divorce and housing.

[35] Neil Killingback, 'Limits to Mutuality: Economic and Political Attacks on Co-operation during the 1920s and 1930s' in S.Yeo, ed., *New Views of Co-operation* (London and New York, 1988).

movement. They are part of the conscious auto-historical tendency identified by Peter Gurney, who argues that co-operative history was always seen as “an active ingredient in a developing movement culture.”[36] One important strand of this movement culture was the long tradition of commemorative volumes, such as jubilee and centenary histories of particular societies or areas.[37] These were intensely local documents, praising local co-operative founders and worthies, and were often organised around a thread in which heroic early struggles led to later success. Most were written by local co-operators themselves, not by practised historians, and they have been dismissively described as “bland and celebratory”.[38] It is possible, however, to understand jubilee histories and commemorative volumes as being the autobiographies of the co-operative movement, with all the problems and insights that that genre implies. They are not dispassionate, detached and systematic studies, which raises questions in terms of their validity as history. But as examples of the ways in which the movement sought to represent itself at a particular moment, they may be treated as primary sources for the nature of co-operative consciousness, identity and pride.[39] W.H.Brown’s *A Century of London Co-operation*, for example, was filled with both detailed statistics and utopian language, and was intended both to inform and to inspire.[40]

Despite being a working-class movement, co-operation received relatively little attention from historians of the labour movement before the 1980s, with the exception of G.D.H.Cole, whose narrative Gurney has described as sympathetic, but marked by his belief that state-wide solutions would be needed to supplement co-operative efforts if real social transformation

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[36] Peter Gurney, ‘Heads, Hands and the Co-operative Utopia: An Essay in Historiography’, *North-West Labour History* 19, 1994/5 Co-operative Issue, p4
[37] For example, W.H. Brown, *A Century of London Co-operation* (London, 1928)
[38] Peter Gurney, *Co-operative Culture,* p3
[39] I am drawing here on David Vincent’s approach to working-class autobiography, in which he argues that the value of autobiography lies in its subjectivity, as self-analysis may reveal class consciousness, and the relationship between self and the wider society. See David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, (London, 1982), p10
[40] W.H,Brown, *Century*.

was to be achieved.[41] The marginal position of co-operation within labour history may be ascribed, at least in part, to the non-revolutionary aspect of co-operation, and also to the traditional focus of labour history on the structural aspects of political activism and power, and on the relations of production rather than consumption. When co-operation was discussed, the nineteenth century movement was found more relevant to the interest of labour historians in class formation and consciousness, and the area of co-operative strength, the North-West of England, was an obvious focus.[42] Less attention was paid to alternative co-operative areas until recently, and the slower and shallower spread of co-operation within London has attracted few historians. Stephen Yeo's edited volume, *New Views of Co-operation* has a consistent theme of working class agency, and of the possibility that working people could produce and alternative society, even if that society was never actually created.[43] For Peter Gurney, co-operative culture was constituted by a combination of economic and business models (such as mutuality), ideas (such as the co-operative commonwealth), and co-operative purchasing, participation in local societies and other day-to-day decisions and actions. In this, Gurney's work marked an important new direction in the study of co-operation. Of particular significance for this study, is his consistent challenge to the supposed tension between the dividend and idealism which allegedly compromised the integrity of the movement. Gurney argues instead that the dividend itself was an expression of co-operative ideals rather than a distraction or departure from them.[44]

Nicole Robertson included the London Co-operative Society in her important comparative analysis of the relationships between seven co-operative societies from around the country and their local communities. Her work has a useful focus on the place of co-operation within

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[41] G.D.H. Cole, *A Century of Co-operation* (London, 1945); P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture,* pp3-4
[42] J.Wilson, A.Webster and R. Vorberg-Rugh, *Building Co-operation: A Business History of The Co-operative Group, 1863-2013* (Oxford, 2013) pp8-9
[43] Stephen Yeo, 'Introductory: Rival Clusters of Potential: Ways of seeing Co-operation' in Stephen Yeo, ed., *New Views of Co-operation* (London and New York, 1988), p5.
[44] P. Gurney *Co-operative Culture* pp10-11, and chapters 2-5

different local contexts, and some of the distinctive forms and challenges of London co-operation, such as the difficult London retail environment, begin to emerge from the comparisons with other societies.[45] Robertson begins her study in 1920 and so the reconstructive rhetoric in the years immediately before 1920 and the circumstances which led to amalgamation (which I discuss in this study) are largely beyond the scope of her work. I argue that the moment of opportunity which seemed to be offered by reconstruction in terms of social and economic reforms affected the ways in which London co-operative citizenship was conceptualised.[46] This study also responds to calls by historians of co-operation for more local studies of co-operation, so that the diversity of co-operative practices and their links to locality may be better understood, and thence feed into a clearer picture of the national movement.[47]

The terms and structure of this study

The co-operative movement was a large, multifaceted entity with a long history, and it has been necessary to impose some limits on this study and to exclude some aspects of co-operation. I have chosen to look at retail societies rather than wholesale or productive societies. Citizenship and locality is one of the major themes of this study, and retail societies were situated within specific communities and provided the fundamental nexus between the co-operative citizen and the co-operative movement, whereas wholesale and productive societies had a wider reach and distributive orbit. I am interested in retail societies and co-operative activity in the West Ham and Edmonton areas, for a number of reasons. In 1920, the Stratford Co-operative and Industrial Society (based in West Ham) and the Edmonton Co-operative Society amalgamated to form the London Co-operative Society, which established a

[45] Nicole Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960*, (Surrey, England and VT, USA, 2010), p18
[46] Sidney Pollard, 'The Foundation of the Co-operative Party' in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History* (London and Basingstoke, 1971)
[47] J.Wilson, A.Webster and R. Vorberg-Rugh, *Building Co-operation* p7; Gurney

significant focus for London co-operation, due to the size of its membership and its trading area. Although the West London Society later joined the London Co-operative Society, co-operation in south-west London merits a separate study, and one which would do justice to the long history of co-operative presence in West London, and especially the relationship between co-operation and the 'municipal mecca' of Battersea in the early twentieth century.[48] For this reason, the West London Society is a very minor part of this study. The large and successful Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, based in Woolwich, has already been the subject of two books, and therefore much of the primary material has already been surveyed and evaluated. Moreover, the RACS never amalgamated with the London Co-operative Society, maintaining an independent status, and developing a reputation for its commitment to formal co-operative education.[49] It, too, plays a very minor part here. An examination of the international dimensions of the movement are also beyond my scope here. They are barely mentioned within West Ham and Edmonton local co-operative records, although they are sometimes discernible at a day to day level in the occasional Guild lecture on International Co-operation, in the lyrics of co-operative songs, and in the provision of classes in Esperanto.

The Co-operative Party was formed in 1917, and has been understood as a response to governmental antipathy towards co-operation during the First World War and, perhaps, as part of a general shift to the Left within the Labour movement.[50] However, the circumstances of its formation, and the debates within the movement, as well as the detail of its relationship with the government and with other parties, are not discussed here. The Co-operative Party was significant (and contentious) for the movement as a whole, in that it represented a radical

[48] On Battersea as a 'municipal mecca' , see Sean Creighton, 'The 'Municipal Mecca' in Bill Lancaster and Paddy Maguire, eds., *Towards the Co-operative Commonwealth – 150 Years of Co-operation. Essays in the History of Co-operation* (Manchester, 1996).
[49] John Attfield, *With the Light of Knowledge: A Hundred Years of Education in the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, 1877-1977* (London, 1981); Rita Rhodes, *An Arsenal for Labour: The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society and Politics 1896-1996* (Manchester, 1998).
[50] Pollard, 'Foundation' pp185-6

departure from a longstanding avoidance of party politics, and it was important for the London Co-operative Society because the election of Alfred Barnes and R.J.Morris to Parliament in East Ham and Tottenham, representing London Co-operative Society areas, gave London co-operation a foothold in national government and boosted the profile of London co-operation. That said, its impact on the day to day co-operative practices of members in London in this period seems to have been fairly limited. The co-operative movement had long petitioned local MPs of all stripes on matters of co-operative interest, and it continued to do so. Electoral campaigning for co-operative MPs was prominent in, for example, the *London Citizen*, but the nature of the campaigns seems to have been essentially an extension of the kinds of campaigning already carried out for local election candidates.[51]

In terms of co-operative education as a structuring factor in co-operative citizenship, this study focuses on the education of adults rather than children. Within co-operation, formal classes played a relatively small part in the lives of most members, as take-up was consistently small. Participation in the movement itself, in the widest sense, was seen as educative, and encompassed association, meetings and voting, and everyday purchasing decisions, which mainly concerned adults. Young people's classes, Circles and Junior Co-operator's groups are therefore mentioned as part of the general educational work of the societies, but a detailed examination is beyond the scope of this study.

This study examines the factors which structured London co-operative citizenship in the years 1918-1925. Although I examine these factors in turn, the overall argument of this study is that seemingly disparate aspects of the experience of being a co-operator worked together to suggest and reinforce a model of London co-operative citizenship. In Chapter 1, I use the concept of the urban variable to discuss the uneven spread of co-operation in London, and its

[51] Alfred Barnes was elected as MP for East Ham South and Robert Morrison for Tottenham North on a Labour Co-operative ticket in 1922.

strength in West Ham and Edmonton, considering the importance of population growth, industrial development and transport. This discussion problematizes the idea of West Ham and Edmonton as suburbs, despite their position on the periphery of London, in terms of their character and their relationship with London. I then go on to consider some of the ways in which co-operative presence was organised to suggest a co-operative locality within an urban space. Chapter 2 examines the particular challenges faced by the London Co-operative Society in its attempt to expand trading into central London areas in this period and the ways in which this expansion was connected to ideas of London co-operative citizenship. It also discusses the importance of placing co-operators into in civic and public roles, in terms of a conception of active citizenship which intended to further co-operative visibility, agendas and influence in public life. Next, chapter 3 discusses the concept of the Co-operative Commonwealth, and what this meant to London co-operators as part of multiple sense of belonging. In considering some of the ways used to assess engagement with the Co-operative Commonwealth, I argue that the idea of the citizen-consumer was an important component in connecting everyday purchasing choices with the wider aims of London co-operation, and that it may throw some light on citizenship among co-operators not engaged in co-operation in more obviously active ways. In chapter 4, the education of the London co-operative citizen is explored through a wide interpretation of the educative potential of the movement itself. I argue that formal classes, recreation and association, co-operative spaces and co-operative buying all contributed to the contours of a potential London co-operative citizenship. In conclusion, I offer an assessment of the contribution that this case-study has tried to make to existing historiographies, and its wider significance. Finally, I signal some of the ways in which co-operative agendas were to develop in the later 1920s and 1930s in the light of national and international political developments, potentially altering the character of co-operative citizenship.

CHAPTER 1

"INTERCONNECTED IDEAS, SPACES AND STRUCTURES": THE URBAN VARIABLE, PERIPHERAL LOCALITY AND LONDON CO-OPERATIVE CITIZENSHIP[1]

London co-operative citizenship emerged within a set of frameworks. The development of the East and North London fringes, and the conditions prevailing across the wider city, gave rise to concentrations of co-operative activity in these peripheral areas, and their identity contributed to a physical and conceptual framework for local citizenship, including London co-operative citizenship. As Matt Houlbrook has observed, "London was unique in terms of its sheer size, its roles as a financial, political, maritime, imperial, and cultural capital, and its racial and social composition."[2] This unique character may help to explain why co-operation spread more slowly and unevenly into London than it did within the co-operative heartlands of, for example, North-East England and Scotland. Martin Purvis contends that co-operation did best in 'atypical' areas of London, and yet it is difficult to imagine what a 'typical' London area would have looked like, so diverse was the capital.[3] Clearly, however, some areas of London were more conducive to co-operative growth than others. The concept of the urban variable helps to illuminate the connections between their geographical position at the edge of the city, their specific histories, cultures and employment patterns which shaped the peripheral localities of West Ham and Edmonton, and the character of an environment in which co-operation could become established.[4] Rapid urban growth, industrialisation, and transport contributed to the growth of working-class communities and cultures within which co-operation found a place.

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[1] Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2016), p.312
[2] Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Pleasures and Perils in the Metropolis*, (Chicago and London), p9
[3] Martin Purvis, 'Crossing Urban Deserts: Consumers, competitors and the Protracted Birth of Metropolitan Co-operative Retailing', *International Review of Retail Distribution and Consumer Research* Vol 9, no 3, pp 230-234
[4] See, for example, Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite*

Growth and development

From the late nineteenth century, as the population of central London began to fall, the surrounding counties of Surrey, Kent and (especially) Essex experienced dramatic growth, effectively extending the urban conurbation outwards into the home counties and creating large areas of suburban development.[5] Edmonton, originally part of Middlesex, has received comparatively little attention from historians. West Ham, on the Essex-London border, has been more extensively investigated, perhaps because of its "spectacular growth" and "industrialization and urbanization at speeds unprecedented in metropolitan history."[6] However, West Ham and Edmonton, which were geographically close, shared some significant characteristics. Like many other areas on the fringes of London, both West Ham, and (particularly) Edmonton, were known in the late eighteenth century as genteel rural areas, relatively sparsely populated, with large houses and estates for the well-to-do. Both grew rapidly during the nineteenth century to become large, densely populated communities. Connection to London was established early. Stimulated, perhaps, by the presence of affluent residents, both West Ham and Edmonton acquired early coach services into central London along good roads by the early nineteenth century.[7] Both areas saw pre-nineteenth century industrial development associated with access to the river Lea, a canalised river flowing into the Thames, which had been used for commercial transportation for many centuries, and which connected them to the Thames and the heart of London. The Lea also created opportunities for early local industrialisation; there were mills at Edmonton and West Ham by the eighteenth century, and later the river was used as a resource in dyeing, printing, tanning, chemical works and fertiliser production, and other water-intensive processes, in West Ham. After the Metropolitan Building Act of 1844 tightened rules relating to pollution and noxious trades in the central areas, more industry

[5] Patricia Garside, 'London and the Home Counties' in F.M.L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950: Volume 1 Regions and Communities*, (Cambridge, 1990) p508
[6] John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower,* p245
[7] Victoria County History of Edmonton, www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol5/; Victoria County History of West Ham, www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/essex/vol6/

moved out to West Ham to escape regulation.[8] By the early nineteenth century there were substantial working-class communities in both areas, especially in West Ham where such communities were further enlarged by the opening of the Victoria Dock in 1855, the Albert Dock in 1880 and the George V Dock in 1921.[9] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many industries relocated to the Lee Valley, which lay between Edmonton and West Ham; land was relatively cheap there, and river access facilitated the delivery of supplies and the despatch of finished goods. New industries were also attracted, and drew upon the established community of skilled workers who lived close by.[10] For example, munitions production was concentrated in the Lea Valley during the First World War, drawing on a resident pool of skilled munitions workers organised around the Royal Small Arms factory at Enfield Lock near Edmonton.[11]

The railways are often stressed as a vital factor in the growth of London's suburban areas, usually because new lines and stations enabled commuting into the centre. Cheap train fares into London for workers attracted those displaced from central areas by redevelopment or rising housing costs, and helped to create new working-class suburbs.[12] F.M.L. Thompson suggests that, in some areas, including Edmonton, "workmen's fares and workmen's trains reluctantly but decisively promoted the rapid development of working-class suburbs" after the introduction by legislation of cheap fares from 1864.[13] However, in West Ham and Edmonton, the railways also had other effects (including, perhaps, the 'seeding' of the co-operative idea in these areas).[14] In West Ham the railway provided a major centre of local skilled employment, when the Eastern Counties Railway transferred its main

[8] John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower*, p247
[9] Ibid, 271-273
[10] Peter Scott, *Triumph of the South: A Regional Economic History of Early Twentieth Century Britain* (England and USA, 2007) p 151. Scott cites the transfer of the furniture industry from inner London areas such as Hackney and Shoreditch, to Edmonton and Tottenham, which Scott dubs 'furniture boroughs'.
[11] Graham Dalling, *Southgate and Edmonton Past: A study in divergence* (London 1996) p102
[12] Simon Abernethy, 'Opening up the Suburbs: Workmen's Trains in London 1860-1914', *Urban History* Vol 42, no 1, (2015) pp70-88
[13] F.M.L.Thompson, *The Rise of Suburbia*, p19. Simon Abernethy has recently argued that analysis of the use of workmen's trains suggests that not only better-paid skilled workers, but also lower-paid unskilled and casual workers also moved to more outlying areas due to these cheaper rail services. Abernethy, 'Opening up'.
[14] W.H.Brown, *Century*, p100

works to Stratford in 1847, building new housing for its workers in the 1850s and 1860s.[15] The Stratford Industrial and Co-operative Society was established in Stratford in 1861, by a group of railway workers - echoing the experience of societies outside London, it was formed by a core group of local skilled men who shared a trade and a workplace, as was typical for the establishment of co-operative societies.[16] Its first store, in Maryland Street, was close to the railway works and the homes of many of the railway workers. The relationship between the railways and Edmonton co-operation is also significant, though less direct. The stimulation of suburban development in Edmonton after the arrival of the railway led in turn to the expansion of local public transport, including trams, to serve the growing community. Edmonton Co-operative Society was established in 1888 by tram workers – again, local skilled men with a shared occupation and a single employer.

"An appendage to the city"?[17]

Historians have understood West Ham and Edmonton to be 'working-class suburbs'.[18] In terms of their location, on the periphery of London, they may certainly be understood as suburban. And yet, that description is problematic in a number of ways. 'Suburb' implies more than geographical location, but precisely what it means presents a definitional problem for historians.[19] A further difficulty arises because the relationships between London and its periphery were diverse, and the impact of London on outlying areas was affected by locality.[20] Mark Clapson has nevertheless offered an outline of the "basic social and spatial components of the suburbs". He suggests that they are located outside the centre of towns or cities but are still within the "urban orbit", usually within commuting distance of the centre (because primarily residential), dependent upon the centre for

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[15] www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/essex/vol6/pp43-50

[16] John Attfield, *With light of Knowledge,* p1.
[17] Andrew Saint, 'Introduction' in Julian Horner, ed.,, *London Suburbs* (London, 1999) p 9
[18] See, for example, John Marriott, *Beyond the* Tower, p 141
[19] For an overview on the development of different definitional models for suburbs, see R. McManus and P. J. Etherington, 'Suburbs in Transition'
[20] P. Garside, 'London, Home Counties', in p497

work, shopping and leisure, and tend to be socially homogeneous.[21] However, especially in the case of West Ham, its size of population, employment patterns, and sense of facing both inwards to London and outwards to Essex (as well as having strong connections with other peripheral areas) militates against any simple suburban dependency, and by 1918 it more closely resembled a town in some respects, situated near to London but not entirely dependent upon it, having a self-contained local identity. For West Ham and, to a lesser extent, Edmonton, Clapson's social and spatial components of suburbia are not a good fit by the early years of the twentieth century, as both areas had undergone substantial physical and social morphologies.[22]

In describing the relationship between the suburb and the metropolitan centre, F.M.L. Thompson has referred to "a modern arrangement of central town and dependent suburbs" while Andrew Saint asserts that "The suburb is, by definition an appendage to the city."[23]Jerry White's case for the role of public transport – trains, the underground, trams and buses – in London's outward expansion, also relies upon a relationship of dependency. White contends that public transport was "the means of making suburban expansion work", because it "could bring the new suburbanites into London's offices and shops in the City and West End".[24] However, transport also helped to develop local connectivity and a sense of local geography and community. Alan Jackson's detailed research into London suburban transport points to a need to understand suburbs as developing and changing in character over time. Jackson shows that, by the first decades of the twentieth century, services did not only run between centre and periphery. In fact, many of the new routes for trains, buses and trams were not connecting with central London at all, but were operating wholly within peripheral areas, or were linking peripheral areas with each other. For example, between 1901 and 1932, new tram services linked Tottenham with Walthamstow and East Ham with Barking and some routes

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[21] M. Clapson *Invincible Green Suburbs*, p2
[22] For a discussion of the idea of social morphology, see R. Mc Manus and P. J. Etherington, 'Suburbs in Transition'
[23] F.M.L.Thompson, *The Rise of Suburbia*, p.5; Andrew Saint, 'Introduction' p. 9
[24] Jerry White, *London in the 20th Century*, (London, 2001) p30

headed towards the countryside, connecting Edmonton with Freezywater on the Hertfordshire border. Suburban rail routes from Stratford also moved deeper into Essex, with new stations at Newbury Park, Fairlop, and Chigwell.[25] Jackson observed a similar pattern in the development of bus routes, in that once the key radial routes were established, connections were built within and between the outer areas.[26] This suggests that many journeys were undertaken locally, implying a demand for local and inter-area travel for work, shopping and leisure, and demonstrating that West Ham and Edmonton were not simply London-dependent communities. The patterns of expansion of the co-operative Societies attest to this. The Stratford Society had branches in both inner London areas - such as Bow and Poplar – and as far afield as Southend in Essex, due to a series of earlier amalgamations with small co-operative societies, while Edmonton had a foothold in the centre, with branches in Holborn and Euston, and outposts to the west in Finchley. These networks of co-operative stores transcended any simple notional organisation of space into centre and periphery, and suggested a sense of co-operative community which transcended local boundaries. An early advertising tactic used by the London Co-operative Society made use of this distinct sense of locality and local transport networks by encouraging customers to travel to specialist co-operative outlets, and promising to refund bus fares if high-value purchases were made.[27]

Local culture

While Edmonton and West Ham were socially mixed, the working-class presence was dominant by the late nineteenth century. There was a mix of housing, including large single-family houses. The building of such houses in a neighbourhood has been taken to indicate middle-class residents seeking suburban domesticity and privacy within the family home.[28] But substantial, middle-class houses in both areas do not necessarily indicate a large number of middle-class residents. We owe a

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[25] Alan A .Jackson, *Semi-detached London: Suburban development, Life and Transport* (London, 1973) Appendices 2 and 4
[26] Alan A. Jackson, *Semi-detached London* Appendix 3
[27] London Co-operative Society, *Fifth Report and Balance Sheet Half Year Ending September 2nd, 1922*, p12
[28] FML Thompson, *The Rise of Suburbia*, p8

very detailed account of the social, housing and industrial situation in West Ham before the First World War to the work of the Outer London Survey Committee, which attempted an analysis similar to Booth's investigations into the East End. Describing West Ham as a "modern industrial borough", the Committee report reveals the extent to which apparently middle-class housing was actually occupied by lower income groups.[29] One example, Caistor Park Road, had substantial six-room terraced housing, but almost all of the houses were informally divided and occupied by two or more families. In Plaistow Ward, even small houses were subdivided, sometimes into single rooms, and were occupied by casual workers who sometimes occupied beds in shifts, a practice known as 'nursing'.[30] The 'single-family' dwellings supposed to typify suburban development were thus not always used as intended in West Ham by the early twentieth century. Less detail of actual occupation is available for Edmonton, although the Victoria County History asserts that "by 1900 Edmonton … had become a working class area dominated by small, terraced houses, as had nearby Tottenham."[31] As John Marriott has argued, Eastenders moving out to West Ham would have felt at home, recognising the housing conditions, working class culture and appearance of the area as very similar to the inner London areas they had vacated. Certainly, autonomous working class institutions associated with skilled trades – thrift societies, trades unions, friendly societies – were represented in West Ham and Edmonton, while the presence of settlements and missions similar to those established in, for example, Whitechapel, suggests middle-class concern over the lives and conditions of the inhabitants.[32]

By the early twentieth century, with the rapid rises in population, some peripheral communities were easily as populous as substantial provincial towns and cities, and according to the 1921 census, West Ham, with a population of 300,000, outstripped Newcastle. Although Edmonton was much

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[29] Edward G. Howarth and Mona Wilson (compilers), *West Ham: A Study in Social and Industrial Problems, Being the Report of the Outer London Inquiry Committee* (London, 1907), p1
[30] Edward G. Howarth and Mona Wilson (compilers), *West Ham* p40-47
[31] www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol5/p149
[32] J. Marriott, *Beyond the Tower* p247

smaller, it too had a large, working-class population, a self-contained local economy and an identity as an independent community.[33] These areas were on the edge of London, and were well-connected to central London through transport and employment, but also had their own civic identity through their local councils. If we understand West Ham and Edmonton as being similar to independent towns, then the establishment of co-operation there seems less like an atypical London phenomenon, and more like what happened in numerous other working-class communities around Britain. However, the links to a wider London gave a particular dimension to co-operative citizenship here. Local concerns could take on metropolitan and even national dimensions, ambitions for civic participation extended beyond local areas, and transport connections to neighbouring areas in all directions, all combined to offer a very wide-ranging field for the expansion of trading and influence.

In 1889 West Ham became a County Borough (though local justice was still administered through the county of Essex) and in 1894 Edmonton became an Urban District. Dion Georgiou, in his discussion of locality and nested citizenships in outer London, has argued that local government legislation changed the administrative status and shape of communities in the late nineteenth century, and complicated the sense of the locality.[34] The creation of new local government areas cut across old ties and suggested new connections. Because of the proximity to London and high levels of local interconnectivity through transport links, it is likely that few people actually lived their lives entirely within the boundaries set out by local government. It seems more likely that community was imagined and lived across these boundaries as much as within them. For co-operators, having a sense of belonging to their local store (which in turn belonged to them as shareholders) suggests a coexistent but alternative sense of community based on co-operative activity. However, by the end of the First World War, both the Edmonton Co-operative Society and the Stratford Co-operative

[33] Sylvia Collett, *Edmonton School Board* Occasional paper no 47 (Edmonton Hundred Historical Society, 1985). Encapsulating social and economic development of Edmonton in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Collett argues that "once manpower was available, it gradually took on economic life of its own."
[34] He also notes that sometimes, local identities were insufficiently fluid to allow harmonious working relationships between areas, so that arguments broke out over carnival procession routes and the naming of events. Dion Georgiou, 'Only a local affair', p18

Society had stores across a very wide area which extended into the East End, with a small number in more central areas such as Holborn, as far west as Finchley, and out into Essex at Leigh and Southend. These trading areas, united in 1920 by the amalgamation of the Edmonton and Stratford Societies to form the London Co-operative Society, offered a challenging environment for any cohesive notion of co-operative citizenship based on locality.

Lived geographies - creating co-operative spaces in West Ham and Edmonton

Co-operative communities were given physical shape and concrete form, in part, by buildings and spaces, forming "popular, lived and potentially subversive geographies" which occupied the same spaces as, and often cut across, other senses of community and locality.[35] The topography of co-operative community co-existed with and was superimposed upon urban geographical organisation, and co-operative activity mostly took place within a space which had a shape and a boundary determined by co-operative trading areas, and which did not conform (except accidentally) to local council, electoral or parish jurisdictions. As well as visiting stores, co-operators used a variety of buildings and spaces, including co-operative halls, local schools, church halls and Labour and Trade Union buildings.[36] The great municipal buildings, including Town Halls, were also used for large meetings, rallies and social events.[37] Some co-operative stores had meeting rooms suitable for smaller gatherings, and society premises were used for co-operative social gatherings after hours.[38] Co-operators also met in the open air - in rambling groups, for speakers meetings, or in gatherings to support the 'van missions' during election campaigning.[39] In this way co-operators inhabited a wide range of local spaces and by doing so, inflected them as both local and co-operative spaces.

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[35] S.Gunn, 'The spatial turn: changing histories of space and place' in Gunn, S. and Morris, R.J., eds., *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850* (Hants, England, 2001).

[36] London Co-operative Society, *First Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks ending December 7th 1920*

[37] For example, a Co-operative Rally at Ilford Town Hall took place in February 1921. London Co-operative Society *Second Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks ending March 1st, 1921, p7*

[38] For example, employees held a party in the Packing Room of the Canning Town laundry. Canning Town Branch Minute Book, 4th December 1914. Bishopsgate Institute Library LCS/D/57F/1

[39] An Open Air School was held at Romford, with a combined programme of lectures and rambles. *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol IX (New Series) June 1918, No. 9, p103; Joint Labour and Co-operative outdoor

It is worth noting, however, that although co-operators may have had a visible presence in the public spaces of their local areas, there were tensions between co-operative ideas of ever-widening community and those expressed through West Ham and Edmonton local government. While the Stratford and Edmonton Societies had been keen to grow, after their amalgamation there was an even greater interest in moving into central London to create a city-wide co-operative community. Their interest in electing co-operators to the London County Council and to Parliament showed their desire to participate in centralised power structures which would enable the wider promulgation of co-operative ideas. However, local government in West Ham Council and Edmonton Council seemed to be moving in the opposite direction. In the case of Edmonton, local government legislation had changed its relationship to neighbouring areas. Edmonton had been part of the very large Edmonton Hundred (for Poor Law administration) but as the population grew, Edmonton Hundred proved too big for administrative purposes, and so the area was divided. Edmonton saw its size reduced, and areas which had once been part of Edmonton became separate Council jurisdictions in the 1880s and 1890s.[40] As well as a shift in a sense of locality, there were material consequences, as the split of Southgate from Edmonton in 1881 deprived Edmonton of the valuable rates revenue from the more affluent Southgate, leading to rates rises in Edmonton.[41] West Ham's experience was different. The Council had resisted incorporation into the London County Council, and when incorporation was again discussion just after the First World War, there was local feeling against it. Mansfield House Magazine (the magazine of the Mansfield House settlement based in West Ham) argued that "London is overgrown and over-centralised… If it is to come soon to a question of

meetings were held in summer 1921 at the gates of Central Park, East Ham .*London Citizen* (East Ham edition) No. 1, June 1921; "Van Missions held in the South East Ham and North Tottenham Divisions" were reported in the *London Co-operative Society Third Report and Balance Sheet, Half-Year Ending September 3rd 1921* p11. These activities were not unique to co-operators – some are reminiscent, for example, of those stimulated by Robert Blatchford's *Clarion* newspaper, which included cycling and walking clubs and which also carried out 'van missions'. See Denis Pye, *Fellowship is Life: The National Clarion Cycling Club 1895-1995* (Bolton, Lancashire, 1996).

[41] Graham Dalling, *Southgate and Edmonton Past,* p91

incorporation with the LCC under present conditions, let us fight against it with all our powers."[42] This may, of course, reflect the wish of the settlement to retain local philanthropic influence in West Ham. But it may also be connected with a more widespread concern on the periphery of London over the expansionist ambitions of the LCC, and a desire to preserve local control, independence and diversity.[43]

New urban civic spaces were created in West Ham and Edmonton, designed for the reinforcement of local identity through municipal ritual and display, and separate from areas of commerce and industry.[44] In Edmonton, for example, Fore Street became the focus for development as new building land became available, and the building of the Town Hall, Library and Public Baths there became a new civic space.[45] The creation of civic spaces implies a relationship between the built environment and local citizenship. Co-operative spaces within these localities, however, had a different rationale. In London, most co-operative buildings were not physically separated from commerce and industry; the stores were themselves commercial enterprises, and publicly expressed their distinctively co-operative commercial function.[46] Robertson, in discussing the impact of co-operation on the communities in which it was located, argues that co-op buildings "were identifiable externally as belonging to a co-operative society".[47] However, due to the high cost of land and construction in London, co-operative buildings were not always purpose-built and were often refurbished older buildings, so that the creation of a distinctive, recognisable co-operative architecture in London was not possible during this period. A unifying effect was achieved, to some extent, with the use of co-operative iconography, such as beehives and wheatsheaves, symbolising interdependence, mutual support and co-operative effort. Even when not completely standardized,

[42] 'West Ham Pride', *Mansfield House Magazine*, Vol XXVI, no 3, May and June 1919, p33
[43] Ken Young and Patricia Garside, *Metropolitan London: Politics and Urban Change 1837-1981* (London, 1982), pp11-12
[44] B. Beaven, *Visions of Empire* p21
[45] The Town hall was built in 1884, the Public Library in 1897, and the Public Baths in 1899. See The Victoria County History of Middlesex, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol5/pp142-149
[46] N. Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement*, p42
[47] N. Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement*, p42

such motifs served as visual linking devices that transcended boundaries between boroughs. The beehives and wheatsheaves which appeared on co-operative buildings were familiar and recognisable and served to evoke an alternative moral rhetoric of co-operation. [48] Flags and banners were also used as markers of co-operation, and to draw attention to its stores. For example, the co-operative store in Lansdowne Road, Edmonton, boasted a flag pole atop a small tower, from which flew a rainbow flag.[49] In the run-up to the Stratford-Edmonton amalgamation the Buildings Committee recognised the importance of a new, recognisable signifier of the new society, and began to discuss "the matter of designing a 'LCS' monogram."[50] Thereafter, 'LCS' served to unite disparate co-operative sites which had previously belonged to separate societies

The choice of name for the amalgamated society – the London Co-operative Society - used the wider city as a signifier of its ambitions, and signalled the desire for London to become a co-operative city. It drew an anxious response from the West London Co-operative Society over both naming protocols and trading boundaries. While there were ongoing issues of overlapping co-operative trading areas in London (usually settled through negotiation and formal agreement), these disputes generally arose between neighbouring societies, whereas most of West London's stores were, some considerable distance away from those of the London Co-operative Society. West London complained that most of their name had been used without notice or permission and proposed that a new name should be found – but they also called for clarity on the trading boundaries of the new society, suggesting that they believed that their local boundaries might be breached. The London Co-operative Society asserted their right to the name as it had been voted for by Stratford and Edmonton members. In formulating an answer as to trading area, the new society was very clear about the scope of its London-wide project. The Joint General Committee agreed that "our present trading areas are in the East and North districts of London" but warned that "we anticipate

[48] For the moral rhetoric of architectural decoration, see S. Gunn, *Public Culture*, p 42
[49] H.G.Hawkes, *Tottenham Shops – A Personal Memory* p18
[50] Stratford Co-operative Society, Ltd Minute book, Buildings Committee 12th August 1920

extending citywards as developments proceed, which substantially argues in favour of our claim to the proposed new title."[51] This signalled a desire for co-operative expansion in London which could override any existing local territorial claims asserted by West London.

As their trading areas grew, co-operative societies needed to keep their members informed of new outlets in order to secure the highest volumes of trade (upon which depended the capital needed for expansion, and all the other activities of the society). Co-operative leaflets and pamphlets, distributed through stores, and shareholder reports, frequently included lists of co-operative stores and services. These delineated the scope and extent of co-operative enterprise as an alternative space of consumption, but they also served to suggest criteria of belonging based around co-operative principles and alternative mappings of locality which were ideologically rather than geographically shaped. The *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* published such lists in almost every issue, and this strategy was also used extensively after the formation of the London Co-operative Society. Indeed, its First Report and Balance Sheet included a two-page feature listing every branch, department stores, and specialised outlet (such as dairies and butcheries) in the newly-amalgamated society, with full addresses. This served to familiarise members with the newly-enlarged co-operative community, and the new shops and services which they were encouraged to patronise. A further inducement was offered to members to travel for co-operative shopping, as the Management Committee undertook to refund tram and bus fares "on all purchases in our Dry Goods Departments" over 20 shillings.[52] This implied that a somewhat distant co-operative enterprise was more a part of the community than a privately-owned shop a few streets away, because of its co-operative values.

[51] Stratford and Edmonton Co-operative Societies Joint General Committee, June 17th 1920, Stratford Co-operative Society Ltd. Minute Book LCS/D/57A/9

[52] London Co-operative Society, 'Our Service at Your Service', *The First Report and Balance Sheet, December 7th, 1920*, pp11-12. This can also be seen as a marketing device to increase the sale of Dry Goods, always the first department to suffer in times of economic downturn.

Co-operative societies in West Ham and Edmonton attempted to establish co-operative communities which made linked co-operative enterprises across local boundaries. Although they were constrained in their ability to control architecture and spaces, and despite the widely-dispersed locations of their stores and buildings, their use of iconography and of frequent 'listings' features in co-operative publications suggested an imagined, alternative co-operative community, which they hope to expand across London. London co-operative expansion was a two-fold effort, with the aim of increasing co-operative trade and membership across the city, and of extending co-operative influence through elected representation on councils and other civic bodies. Two key factors which shaped the idea of London co-operative citizenship were therefore the need for loyal buying at the co-operative store, in order to help to build up capital resources for expansion, and the support of co-operative and allied candidates standing for elected office, so that co-operative agendas could be furthered in London. The circumstances of London helped to shape the ways in which these aspects of citizenship could be enacted. Access to new stores was dependent upon finding spaces within London's competitive trading environment, while engaging with co-operative political campaigns involved a sense of locality which saw co-operative progress nested within a wider civic progress.

CHAPTER 2

"COVERING THE METROPOLIS WITH A CLOUD OF CO-OPERATIVE WITNESS": EXPANSION OF CO-OPERATION IN LONDON[1]

The negative view of London as a 'co-operative desert', formed in the nineteenth century, was beginning to change by beginning of the twentieth century, and by the 1920s, the huge improvement in London was widely acknowledged. *The Wheatsheaf*, a national co-operative magazine with local sections, noted in a feature on London that – "All this region used to be a co-operative desert… The new co-operative directory shows well over 100 branches of the London Co-operative Society…And these are not just shops, but live centres of a living movement".[2] However, despite considerable progress, even the relentlessly positive Stratford co-operator W.H. Brown had to admit that "London is not yet won for Co-operation."[3] A concerted effort to expand into central London was required, and the post-war moment seemed an auspicious time to attempt this. Julia Bush has characterised the immediate post-war period as one of hope across the Labour movement, as post-war reconstruction seemed to offer the possibility of implementing reformist agendas, and she identifies "a new mood of self-assertion, of determination to defend war-time gains and of ambitions for a better future".[4] Lloyd George, perhaps attempting to attract working-class votes from a growing Labour Party, promised social and economic reforms in the run-up to the 1918 General Election. But, in addition to those specific specific pledges, Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow argue that "reconstruction under Lloyd George acquired characteristically far-reaching, if vague connotations" which seemed to be connected to war time sacrifice, both in the army and on the home front. This raised expectations about the future. [5]

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[1] W.H. Brown, *Century*, p11
[2] Martin Purvis, 'Crossing urban deserts'
[3] W.H Brown, *Centenary*, p10
[4] J. Bush, *Behind the Lines,* pp 193-195
[5] Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow, *Interwar Britain*

Reconstruction, expansion and London co-operative citizenship

The co-operative movement had been discussing reconstruction locally and nationally since the early years of the war, and the possible implications and opportunities for co-operation, and the programmes of societies across the country were, according to the *Co-operative Educator*, dominated by reconstruction and social problems.[6] The 1916 pamphlet *After the War: the Work of Co-operation* anticipated post-war economic difficulty, but saw the continuation of governmental control over industry and utilities as a highly desirable development, arguing that "It is enormously to our interest that the State should keep its hold over means of communication and of finance, retaining the railways, controlling shipping, and making banking an affair of the State." [7] And wartime experience on local committees and pressure groups had provided co-operators with additional avenues of local and national influence, on which they were keen to capitalise. The *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* discussed a significant shift in attitudes as the war came to an end. It argued that "The world has gone far since 1914. Labour has realised its importance and its power. Never again, we hope, will the people of this country be satisfied with the mere charitable tinkering with the problems of poverty."[8]

Discussions about reconstruction opened up a space for the consideration of social and economic reforms amid hopes of a different future and once these possibilities were raised, the Government struggled to control the ensuing ideas and debates, and recognised that demands would be made which the government would be unwilling or unable to meet. A Minister of Reconstruction, Christopher Addison, was appointed by Lloyd George in 1917, for a maximum term of two years. At the committee stage of the New Ministries Bill, there were immediate attempts to limit the extent of the powers of the Minister of Reconstruction, and to contain reconstructive fervour. The Marquess

[6] 'Weekend and Two-Day Schools', *The Co-operative Educator with which is incorporated the College Herald* (Co-operative Union Ltd., Manchester), Vol III no 4 October 1919, p.120
[7] Central Committee of the Women's Co-operative Guild, *After the War: the Work of Co-operation* (Manchester, 1916) pp1-7
[8] 'Editorial Notes', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine*, Vol X, November 1918, No 2, p13

of Salisbury tabled an amendment to the wording of the Bill (a modified version of which was subsequently adopted), suggesting that the remit of the new minister be restricted to "matters directly arising from the War." He expressed concern that "There is a sort of feverish desire in some quarters to deal, in the name of reconstruction, with every subject under heaven" adding that many people "think they can have a new heaven and a new earth."[9] Evidently, the elasticity of the meaning of reconstruction allowed it to be shaped to particular agendas, including that of co-operation, and the London co-operative movement in the East and North of the city expressed this mood of opportunity through a renewed determination to expand into the centre of London.

Expansion of trade and amalgamation

A focus on trading success and expansion in London was not necessarily an alternative to, or a distraction from the idealistic side of co-operation. Rather, it was an acknowledgement of the fact that the wider aims of the movement fundamentally depended on trade, and also that successful co-operative trading was a powerful demonstration of the validity of co-operation as an alternative to capitalism. The chief hope of increasing trade in London was vested in the creation of the London Co-operative Society, formed initially from the Stratford and Edmonton Societies. The prospects for the amalgamation looked favourable. By 1920, both the Stratford and Edmonton societies had already absorbed other, smaller societies, and were large and successful, with a geographical reach extending well beyond their immediate areas.[10] However, in attempting to expand across the capital, the newly amalgamated society was to face the many of the same challenges which had made co-operative activity in central London difficult in the first place, including the social and community structures, occupational groupings and working patterns, and a competitive retail environment particular to London itself. [11]A common tactic in tackling these difficulties was a

[9] HL Deb 14 August 1917 vol 26 cc 357-362
[10] W.H.Brown, *Century*, ch XII
[11] Purvis 'Crossing Urban Deserts'

recourse to the wider aims of the movement, and the overarching vision of the Co-operative Commonwealth, to incentivise loyal buying and hence raise capital.

London was not alone in seeming to be stubbornly resistant to co-operation. For example, at the close of the 1916 Congress, Swansea was described as “more or less a co-operative desert” despite being a highly-industrialised area with a large working-class population.[12] But London really mattered to the Co-operative movement, despite its rooted strength in the north and the north-east of England, and in Scotland. London was the capital city, the centre of national and Imperial life. The successful presence of co-operation in the heart of London would have been powerfully symbolic of the centrality of co-operation to British life, and many co-operators believed that the example of London could exert an influence on other regions and help to spread co-operation even more widely.[13] Yet, co-operation had had difficulty attracting support and achieving stability in inner London, despite numerous attempts to begin co-operative ventures from the 1820s onwards. By 1918, despite success in outer areas such as West Ham and Edmonton, penetration into the centre of the capital was still sparse and disappointing. Many London stores were started, but most failed to thrive. Even those with centralised support, such as those established and supported directly by the Co-operative Wholesale Society’s “People’s Co-operative Society” struggled, and failed after only five years[14]. This had led to the labelling of London within the movement as a ‘co-operative desert’ from the late-nineteenth century, and the implication was drawn that Londoners did not have the co-operative spirit.[15] Given the number of attempts at retail co-operation in the capital, however, a lack of co-operative spirit seems an inadequate explanation, and both early-twentieth century and

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[12] *The Forty-Eighth Annual Co-operative Congress Report, 1916*, (Manchester, 1916) p658

[13] See, for example, Mrs C. Ganley, ‘Progress and policy of the London Movement’, Paper Read at Quarterly Conference, London Joint Committee, Paslow Hall, Ongar, 26th July 1930. Ganley argued that “London is not the whole of the country but it can do its proportion and influence the rest very considerably.”

[14] The People’s Co-operative Society Ltd., begun by the Co-operative Wholesale Society in 1894, went into voluntary liquidation in 1899 – see W H Brown, *Century*, p113

[15] For example, Percy Redfern argues that this was the case from the 1870s. Percy Redfern, *Told in Brief: The History and Purpose of the CWS by the author of ‘The Story of the CWS’* (Manchester 1934) p.12

modern sources have tended to focus instead on the unique challenges posed by London to the spread of co-operation.

Even before amalgamation, there had been signs that both the Edmonton and Stratford Societies were trying to make connections with other London societies through, for example, social events and celebrations, and by reporting news from other societies in the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine*.[16] However, many co-operative officials believed that such informal connections were not enough significantly to advance the cause of London co-operation. Alfred Barnes, then a member of the General Committee of the Stratford Society, set out his concerns about the increasingly tough trading environment. He argued that, in the context of widespread consolidation and amalgamation in private business, amalgamation of London co-operative societies was becoming a commercial imperative. He proposed three options: four societies to the North, South, East and West of London; two societies to the North and the South of the Thames; or "That the whole of the Societies should amalgamate and become the London Co-operative Society, and thus make London as it should be, the first Co-operative City in the World." This third option revealed idealistic ambitions far beyond mere commercial success, although this ambitious scheme was never achieved.[17] It is worthy of note, however, that some six weeks before this letter appeared, the General Committee had already appointed a delegate to a special sub-committee set up to consider amalgamation.[18] As the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* later admitted, perhaps somewhat defensively, that "There has been no agitation among the members for this step… the members of the Management Committee have

[16] For example, the Edmonton Society invited other London societies to their Summer Garden party. Minutes of the Education Committee, 1916-1918, 11th August 1916; the Stratford society celebrated the impressive trading figures of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society. 'News and Comments', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol IX (new series), August 1918, no.11, p119

[17] Alfred Barnes, 'Our Letter Box', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol IX (new series), September 1918, no. 12, p126

[18] General Committee, July 1918, Stratford Co-operative Society Minute Book

their fingers on the Metropolitan Co-operative pulse, and it is correct functioning on their part to advocate great changes." [19]

The democratic structures of the Society nevertheless required that both the Edmonton and the Stratford members must agree to any such amalgamation before it could take place and a long consultation process was begun. Some objections were raised – for the most part, on the grounds that amalgamation was unnecessary. For example, Mr S.W.Moule, a member of the Stratford Society Management Committee, opposed amalgamation on the grounds that the society would probably expand anyway, giving some indication of the confidence with which the society viewed its future prospects.[20] After a lengthy series of consultative meetings, discussions, and the airing of views in the pages of the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* the membership of both societies voted to amalgamate, in a move that created the largest society in Britain with a membership of almost 100,000.[21] The long-serving president of the Edmonton Society, J.Maton, on the eve of amalgamation, explicitly linked it to a wider hope for social transformation. He looked forward to the prospect that the new society could "make possible a complete Co-operative service" helping to create an expanding alternative sphere of co-operative consumption across London, and argued that "in our hands we hold a mighty weapon for the permanent improvement of society."[22]

Challenges to expansion in London

The retail environment

In economic terms, London presented an extremely competitive retail environment, with expensive building plots, retail space, wages and deliveries.[23] This was particularly true in the central London

[19] 'Editorial Notes', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol X, August 1919, no 11, p85
[20] S.W.Moule in 'Our Letter Box', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol X, Vovember 1918, No. 2, p.14.
[21] N. Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement*, p92
[22] J.Maton, 'Committee Report', *Edmonton Co-operative Society Report and Agenda for Half-Yearly General Meeting of Shareholders*, October 1920
[23] M.Purvis, 'Crossing Urban Deserts', p 232

areas. High costs frequently led to shops being undercapitalised – and this was one major impetus for amalgamation of societies in London (another being the provision of a greater range of shops and services to attract more members and capture a greater share of their purchasing). An undercapitalised store was vulnerable to recession and other vicissitudes of the market, and was in danger of appearing dowdy compared with well-financed competitors, such as the growing multiples, J. Sainsbury and Lipton[24]. Alfred Barnes, president of the Stratford Co-operative Society, complained in 1920 that "In the provinces very often the finest buildings were co-operative buildings, but in London they simply could not put up buildings sufficiently imposing to attract the average Londoner."[25] London consumers were used to great deal of choice in where they shopped, and the co-operative societies could not afford to disregard their higher expectations. Certainly, the London Co-operative Society was very concerned about the appearance of its stores, with a programme of refurbishment and the installation of electric lighting carried out throughout the 1920s.[26] Competitions for product display and window dressing, often organised to promote particular products, departments, or seasonal ranges, also encouraged staff to be diligent and imaginative in making their stores look attractive.[27]

Location

Choosing an appropriate site for a London store could be complex, and was affected not only by local competition, but also by the organisation of the city itself, as well as by the organisational structures of the co-operative movement. W H Brown stressed the importance of siting stores in places where they would attract likely co-operators, such as the suburbs, because these were "where people lived, and where the wives did their shopping". He saw the City and West End as

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[24] M.Purvis, 'Crossing Urban deserts', p236

[25] Proceedings of a special conference, 'One Society for London – suggested linking of the London Societies' held at Woolwich, May 29th 1920, reported in *Comradeship: Organ of the Education Department of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society*, July 1920, p 167

[26] For example, after a fire at a West Ham store, refurbishment included the provision of electric lighting. Minute Book LCS Sub-Committee no. 3 – Engineering, Works, Stables, Traffic, Architect – 1922-23

[27] Sidney Foster, *London Co-operative Society, General Managers Report 4TH March 1924-4th March 1925*

inherently antipathetic to co-operative views because they were were "overrun by financiers and joint stock companies, trusts, syndicates, and other devices of the investor of capital".[28] He was also scathing about any efforts, such as the People's Co-operative Society, which "sought to plant stores in areas that did not call for self-governing shops" arguing for the importance of independent, autonomous local effort in the success of stores.[29] And yet the structure of the co-operative movement, in which each shop was an independent, self-governing entity, caused its own problems. Some stores were isolated and unsupported by a local co-operative community. Too many stores in one area, on the other hand, effectively competed for the same co-operative customers. Boundary disputes therefore arose, both within and between societies.

In many cases, formal agreements were drawn up between disputing societies, and subsequent disagreements fairly easily settled. For example, in 1907 a boundary agreement was drawn up between the Edmonton Society and the neighbouring Enfield Highways Society, with some adjustments made in 1915, which shows that the agreement was still being consulted, discussed and updated.[30] Some cases, however, were more protracted, fractious and time-consuming. A disagreement between the Anchor Co-operative Society and the Stratford Society over an Anchor Society branch in an area of Poplar thought to be within the trading area of the London Society dragged on for two years, involving countless meetings, letters, proposals and counter-proposals and recourse to arbitration, because the Anchor Society refused to honour the existing boundary agreement and Stratford disagreed with the suggested changes. It was finally resolved when the Stratford Society took over the Anchor Society, thus gaining the control of the Poplar Branch which had originally started the trouble.[31] Such disputes and militate against any view of the co-operative

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[28] W.H.Brown, *Century*, p177

[29] ibid p113

[30] In the Memorandum of Agreement, between the Edmonton Co-operative Society Ltd and the Enfield Highway Co-operative Society Ltd., 23rd September 1907, the signatories "hereby mutually agreed that the above named Societies will adhere to the boundary laid down in Schedule A herewith and will undertake not to deliver goods to any person residing in the other Society's district as defined by the aforesaid boundary."

[31] General Committee and Special General Committee Minutes, *Stratford Society Committee Minute Book,* September 4th 1918 – September 7th 1920

movement as a harmonious, coherent organisation and suggest that strong local ideas about area and community could undercut co-operative unity, with locality exerting the stronger pull. But it also speaks to the reliance of all societies on trading success in order to survive – the Anchor's dogged determination not to give way to Stratford over the Poplar store probably indicated financial difficulties which were only finally resolved by the takeover.

Choice

Another potential pitfall for co-operation in London was the failure to provide the kinds of goods required by the discriminating London consumer who was accustomed to a great deal of choice. This was, in fact, something of a nationwide problem after the war when shortages persisted, and was inadvertently highlighted by the national co-operative paper, *Co-operative News*, in 1919, when it campaigned for loyalty to the local co-operative store through its 'Women's Corner'. Rashly inviting shoppers to explain why they were not loyal to their store in their purchasing, the Woman's Corner received an avalanche of (mostly critical) letters, some from London co-operators, complaining about poor service, lack of stock and a narrow range of goods, with some co-operators praising their local private stores.[32] There were genuine problems. Alfred Barnes, then President of the Stratford Society, complained in 1917 that co-operative stores had been treated unfairly, and that inadequate supplies of rationed commodities had been allocated to co-operative stores. This was because the Society's quota was based on 1915 trading levels, and this failed to take account of rising membership levels, so that many customers were disappointed.[33] But whatever the reason, failing to satisfy customers risked losing custom and members, with serious consequences for expansion plans. London societies, both before and after amalgamation, repeatedly and forcefully urged

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[32] The original call for loyalty, by 'Mary' appeared in *Co-operative News,* 11th January 1919. There were so many letters in response to the article that they were published in the 'Women's Corner' over several subsequent editions.

[33] 'The President's Annual Review of 1917', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol IX, No 4, January 1918, p39

customers to be loyal to stores by reminding them of the relationship between buying, trading success and the spread of co-operation across the capital.

Attacks

Campaigns against the co-operative movement organised by private traders increased during the inter-war period and, arguably, affected London disproportionately. After 1918, widespread consumer discontent about scarcity of food and consumer goods, and about continuing high prices, was expressed in terms of a 'moral economy' which condemned profiteering[34]. The co-operative movement joined in this condemnation, calling for a continuation of war-time food management controls and highlighting unfair pricing. The Stratford Co-operative Magazine, along with the *Daily Herald*, protested in 1919 that plentiful supplies of fish had not resulted in the expected lower prices, suggesting that "the market is being rigged to maintain the present exhorbitant prices." It was quick to suggest a co-operative solution, concluding that "Private ownership in the production and distribution of essential needs must be eliminated. Production must be for use."[35] Pronouncements such as this, combined with the fact that by 1920, co-operative stores took 18%-20% of sales of groceries and provisions nationally, gave rise to organised attacks on co-operation from private traders.[36] These attacks took several forms. Groups of traders organised boycotts of co-operative stores by customers and wholesalers, joined together to fix prices, and exerted pressure on employers, including the government, to forbid their employees to be involved in co-operation.[37] All were damaging, but the pressure on government workers not to join co-operative societies, may have had the greatest impact on London co-operative societies, because London was home to a large number of government workers because of its role as the central hub of national government and administration. T.W. Mercer, in a discussion of London co-operative problems, complained that

[34] Chris Wrigley, *Lloyd George*
[35] *The Stratford Co-operative Magazine*, Vol X, June 1919, no 9, p69; 'The Great Fish Scandal'; *Daily Herald*, 14th July 1919
[36] Neil Killingback, 'Limits to Mutuality' p207.
[37] Neil Killingback, 'Limits to Mutuality' p 209; Martin Purvis, 'Crossing urban deserts' p228

from the 1880s onwards, private traders attempted to prevent civil servants from joining co-operative societies, and believed that this deterred “many able men in secure positions from becoming ardent co-operators.”, thus slowing the development of London co-operative societies.[38] That the Government were influenced by private traders is supported by a report that Bonar Law, when leader of the Conservative Party, rejected a suggestion for collaboration with co-operative enterprises to facilitate clothing supply. He remarked that “it was useless for the government to recognise co-ops in any way” as “there would be such a howl from private traders”.[39]

Employment structures

There were further barriers to the development of co-operation in the capital city relating to the employment structures within which their working-class customers operated. Martin Purvis describes “the multiplicity of trades, a virtual absence of the factory system and the irregularity of work and pay for many.”[40] Both the Edmonton and Stratford Societies were initially formed by groups of skilled men in relatively secure positions in the same trade, as was the typical pattern across the country, but that was not representative of local employment patterns, which were “extraordinarily piecemeal and varied”.[41] London’s multiplicity of trades may have been helpful to co-operative resilience in times of recession, helping to insulate it’s communities from the worst effects of economic depression. However, in North and East London, the preponderance of trades marked by casualization and insecurity may have affected trade and membership more negatively. Co-operative prices were not the lowest prices, because of the insistence on high quality, unadulterated goods and union wages, and because of the drive to provide a regular dividend as an incentive to membership. Those in poorly-paid and irregular occupations could therefore find

[38] T.W.Mercer, *Towards,* p88
[39] Jones to E.F.Wise, 10 July 1919, *Whitehall Diary* vol. 1, p.89, quoted in Chris Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour: The Post-War Coalition 1918-1922* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1990), p208
[40] M. Purvis, ‘Crossing Urban Deserts’ p 232
[41] Julia Bush, *East London Labour*, p2

themselves priced out of co-operative membership.[42] Even if co-operative membership and trading was affordable, wider participation in the movement could be difficult. For those not working locally, travelling to and from work could militate against co-operative participation by considerably extending the working day, especially for those using workmen's trains which ran at very early and late hours so as to utilise underused capacity of trains and tracks. As Fred Hall, Director of Education for the Co-operative Union recognised, "the workers in the warehouses, shops and offices in London, though they have, nominally, a shorter working day than the operatives in the mills and workshops of Lancashire and Yorkshire, often have a longer day when the time occupied by travelling to and from work is included. They are away from home longer."[43] Travelling to work also increased the likelihood that workmates would not necessarily live in the same communities, and would miss the opportunity to socialise outside work.[44] A multiplicity of occupational groups, therefore, may have been something of a bulwark against recession, but could form a potential barrier to association, which was a central plank of co-operative life and citizenship.

The trade slump 1921-1923

In 1921, a nationwide economic slump hit co-operative societies across the country, as members were laid off or faced short-time arrangements. This was a vulnerable moment for the London Co-operative Society, coming so soon after the amalgamation. The Society was still finding its feet, attempting to re-organise its combined systems and structures to enable the operation of a very large society covering a dispersed geographical area, to stamp its new identity onto established co-operative enterprises, and to expand into new areas. The records of the LCS reveal its struggles, in the early 1920s, to maintain confidence and membership. The main appeal to the co-operative citizen was for loyal purchasing, on which depended the survival of the society and London

[42] Julia Bush states that "dockers were the largest group of workers in West Ham and Poplar, and the second largest in East Ham and Stepney". See Julia Bush, *East London Labour,* p2

[43] F. Hall, 'Co-operation in Relation to Social Problems', *The Co-operative Educator,* Volume 3, No 1, January 1919, p17

[44] M. Purvis, 'Crossing Urban Deserts', p232

expansion, in the face of a low dividend.[45] The call for loyal customer support from members became progressively more urgent, and the General Committee pressed "every member to support the Society consistently and completely, and to increase the number of members by recommending the Society to those who, at present, are not supporting us with their trade."[46] It is significant that the June Shareholder's Report carried prominent advertisements for a Hire Purchase Scheme for large items such as furniture and bicycles, and for a clearance sale of 'dry goods'. These non-food items were the first to be cut from constrained household budgets, and sales in these areas had declined sharply.[47] From 1923, the society began to recover, and trade and membership rose, but this economic downturn had checked the momentum of the society.

Civic and public life

Working-class people in public life

Running in parallel with the bid for expansion of the trading area, there was an associated bid to ensure the election of co-operative candidates, or those with co-operative allegiance and sympathy. The co-operative movement were not alone in seeking and winning elected representation – all sections of the labour movement attempted to win representation for their candidates to further their aims.[48] London certainly offered rich possibilities for active citizenship, with its plethora of voluntary and civic opportunities, and, as Pat Thane has pointed out, local government was an especially powerful forum between the wars, since "local authorities at this time had considerably more power and independence than in the later twentieth century."[49] But to what extent could

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[45] London Co-operative Society, *First Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks ending December 7th 1920*, p2
[46] London Co-operative Society *Third Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks ending June 4th 1921, p2*
[47] London Co-operative Society *Third Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks ending June 4th 1921, pp7-10*
Paul Johnson has discussed the development of Hire Purchase from the 1860s, arguing that this method of purchase expanded considerably during the First World War, (and so the LCS clearly risked losing custom if it failed to offer Hire Purchase terms). P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending,* p157.
[48] Brad Beavan, *Visions of Empire* p8
[49] Pat Thane, 'The Impact of Mass Democracy on British Political Culture, 1918-1939' in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye, eds., *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (UK, 2013), p63

working-class people become involved? [50] Nick Hayes, in his study of urban elites in Nottingham, argues that there was greater continuity of tenure by the wealthy and aristocratic in positions of civic responsibility than had been thought.[51] Hayes is clear while that middle-class participation increased between 1900 and 1950, there was no major influx of working-class people into civic life.[52] However, the continuing involvement of wealthy people in civic life did not preclude the participation of working people, and it would be a mistake to assume that their relatively small numbers were unimportant, judging by the time, energy and resources devoted to supporting co-operators to be elected or appointed to various local bodies, with successes reported at Co-operative Congress, and in local co-operative publications.[53] Hayes explicitly excluded the co-operative movement, trades unions or friendly societies from his study, and so was not able to reflect upon the role played by these predominantly working-class organisations in providing support, training and preparation for public roles in the wider community. However, as Catherine Webb had observed, "The training in association and in business habits which the co-operative society gives to its members are a valuable means of fitting them to take their share in municipal government."[54] J. Reeves, the Secretary of the Education Committee for the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society in South-East London urged the training of co-operative society members for civic duties. He argued that the Guilds should be actively involved in "the various committees dealing with reconstruction…local councils, war pensions, food control, and child welfare committees." [55] Co-operation had a role in preparing and developing members for public life, while reconstruction provided additional opportunities for co-operators to participate in discussions about the way in

[50] H. Meller, 'Women and citizenship: gender and the built environment in British cities 1870-1939' in Colls and Dodd, *Cities of Ideas: Civil Society and Urban Governance in Britain, 1800-2000* (Ashgate, 2004), p231
[51] Nick Hayes, 'Counting Civil Society: Deconstructing Elite Participation in the Provincial English City, 1900-1950', *Urban History* Vol 40, no 2 (2013), p313
[52] N. Hayes, 'Counting Civil Society', p311
[53] See, for example, *London Citizen* (East Ham and Tottenham editions), from 1921.
[54] Catherine Webb, *Industrial Co-operation: The Story of a Peaceful Revolution* (Manchester, 1904) p224
[55] *The Co-operative News*, 18th January 1919, 'Educational Activities: Bold Programme at Woolwich' p53

which society was to be rebuilt after the War, and to insert into them co-operative values and principles.

Given the mixed composition of public bodies, any changes in civic personnel are best understood by re-defining urban elites as “those individuals, from any social background, who held leadership positions in the key institutions in the town.”[56] This acknowledges changes of the composition of urban elites in London while avoiding the assumption of decline. Hayes’ article highlights the importance of local historical research in augmenting, complicating and sometimes challenging dominant historical narratives, in this case that of a decline in urban elites from the 1880s. The specificities of London indeed suggest a slightly different picture to that painted by Hayes’ study of provincial Nottingham. For London, a narrative of an elite retreat from the centre leaving a working-class core surrounded by wealthier suburbs does not quite fit. In terms of timing, Savage and Miles argue that in London, because of limited space and population pressures, suburban development began early. Middle- and upper-class populations which formed the urban elite began to leave central areas for the suburbs earlier than in other cities (from the 1880s). These urban areas then became predominantly working class.[57] However, the provision of cheap workmen’s trains on routes heading north and east from Liverpool Street also enabled working people to commute to work, and contributed to the creation of working-class communities on the edges of London.[58] Additionally, Simon Gunn has described an alternative conceptualisation of the way in which London was divided, describing a faultline across London “between a proletarian East End and fashionable West End”. This offers a further complication to any simple notion of centre and periphery.[59]

[56] B. Beaven, *Visions of Empire*, p 7.
[57] M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940* (London, 1994) pp 57-63
[58] S. Abernethy, ‘Opening up the Suburbs’
[59] Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City 1840-1914* (Manchester UP, Manchester and New York, 2000), p 60

Co-operative citizenship and public life in London

For some sections of the co-operative movement, such as the Women's Co-operative Guild, elected office had long been an aim, with 'citizenship' within the Guild generally meaning public action or intervention of some kind. The war had given co-operators, including Guildswomen, new opportunities to take up public roles. For example, dissatisfaction with the social composition of Food Control Committees, in which working-class groups and the co-operative societies were not well represented, prompted the creation of Food Vigilance Committees which were intended to put pressure on the government to rectify the situation, and to introduce fairer food distribution.[60] In March 1918 the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* reported that "The Walthamstow Women's Guild has representatives on… the Food Vigilance Committee, and the Food Control Committee – a record which testifies to the public value of the guild movement."[61] In May it announced that "The Barking Women's guild has formed a local Food Vigilance Committee. Other powerful local organisations have affiliated…Well done, Barking ! This is the work which counts."[62] Seats on local councils, Boards of Guardians (until their abolition in 1929) and the London County Council were also targeted. When the London County Council was established in 1889 a new tier of local government additional to local councils was created, charged with a wide range of Metropolitan responsibilities ranging from housing and parks to the Fire Brigade and asylums.[63] Although West Ham and Edmonton were outside the LCC area, the Stratford Society had stores in Bow, Bromley, Limehouse and Poplar, while the Edmonton Society traded in Holborn and Euston. These wide-ranging trading areas extending into LCC territory, mean that the Societies had an interest, presence and membership within LCC jurisdiction. Local government now had an expanded definition, encompassing the wider city.

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[60] Bernard Waites, 'The Government of the Home Front and the Moral Economy of the Working Class" in Peter H. Liddle, ed., *British Social and Military Experience in the First World War* (London, 1985), p186
[61] *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol IX, March 1918, no 6, p70
[62] *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol IX, May 1918, no 8, p95
[63] Susan D. Pennybacker, *A Vision for London: Labour, Everyday Life and the LCC Experiment* (London, 1995), pp1-32

The elections to the London County Council in March 1919 were discussed within the movement as an important opportunity for co-operators. Languages of war, or perhaps protest, were often used. The expressions 'fighting' for London or 'advancing on London', underlined the seriousness and strenuousness of the collective effort required, and W.H. Brown later spoke of co-operation having secured the circumference of London.[64] Campaigning for co-operative candidates would, of course, expose new audiences to co-operative ideas, while existing co-operators would be encouraged to develop "that civic spirit which is essential for transforming London into a better, brighter and happier city."[65] But a more specific aim, and an overtly political one, was to secure influence for co-operators in forming educational policy. The London County Council controlled schools across London, and the chance to influence thousands of London children through the content of their school curriculum was important to the co-operative movement. The Co-operative News warned that "We have to guard against the elementary schools being turned into early training grounds for young soldiers and to prevent false imperialist teachings from being placed before the children."[66] This expresses the responsibility of London co-operators to exercise their civic duty and practise 'active citizenship' to a particular end – to represent and advance co-operative principles in public life in London.

It is also the case, of course, that through membership of co-operative societies, those with other political agendas were able to gain access to the co-operative movement and perhaps attempt to influence its direction. Within the Women's Co-operative Guild, as in the wider political arena, there were persistent anxieties about the presence of communist activists among the membership, and formal attempts to outlaw this through rule changes.[67] There are also indications that the lively associational working-class culture which may have helped to make a home for co-operation in

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[64] Mrs C.S.Ganley, J.P., 'Progress and policy of the London Movement', read at the Quarterly conference of the London Joint Committee, Paslow Hall, Ongar, 26th July 1930; W.H.Brown, *A Century of London Co-operation* (London, 1928), p177
[65] ibid
[66] 'The Fight for London: A Call for Co-operative Effort', *Co-operative News* 18th January, 1919, p53
[67] Gillian Scott, *Feminism,* chapters 1, 7.

Stratford and Edmonton was regarded as something of a mixed blessing within the movement. An article in the Stratford Co-operative Magazine entitled 'An Open Letter to the Stratford Guilds' and signed 'Yours in the Commonwealth, Onlooker', suggests that even if other influences did not actively subvert the co-operative effort, involvement with other groups could be seen as a serious distraction. Onlooker complains that "Friendly Societies, political parties, trade unions, chapel guilds, adult schools, electoral associations – claim our attention". Instead, "We want people who are co-operators all the time and every time."[68] However, in some circumstances Co-operators were interested in collaborating closely with other compatible organisations in order to extend their influence more widely. In 1919, the Stratford Society agreed to take part in the May Day Demonstration in London, at which Mr Maton, president of the Edmonton Society, was to speak. And in August 1920, at a General Committee Meeting of the Stratford Society, co-operative officials considered an invitation from the West Ham Trades Council to become involved with their council of action (co-ordinated groups of working-class organisations, often brought together by the Trades Councils in support of particular concerns, such as strikes and boycotts). It was agreed to send a representative, and to invite trades council representatives for a return meeting.[69] Such opportunities were assessed on a case by case basis, and only taken up if they were thought to be helpful in furthering co-operative aims. Opinions as to the wisdom of such decisions were freely aired – for example, some members disagreed with the decision to participate in May Day because of its overtly political nature, while others felt that the Society should confine itself primarily to business matters, indicating that co-operative ideals were not a priority for some co-operators.[70]

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[68] *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol X, January 1919, No 4, p31

[69] Stratford Co-operative Society Ltd., Minute Book, 25th August, 1920

The interests of Trades Councils and those of the Co-operative Societies overlapped in their concern for the unionisation of labour and the enforcement of union rates, especially with regard to the anti-union policies of the grocery multiples (who were direct competitors of co-operative trading). See Alan Clinton, *The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain, 1900-40,* p115

[70] 'Editorial Notes', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol X, June 1919, no 9, p68.

Conclusion

The expansion of co-operation in London, in both trading and civic terms, depended upon creating a larger sense of community and local engagement which went beyond the immediate vicinity of home. Trading and political campaigning were supported by a conceptual framework which linked loyal buying and voting with the dissemination of co-operation across the city, and offered co-operative ideas as the basis for a shared citizenship distinct from national and municipal citizenships. A further conceptual tool available for the building of co-operative citizenship was the idea of the Co-operative Commonwealth, a society run on co-operative lines, in which social and economic relations were transformed. The Co-operative Commonwealth potentially offered an alternative framework for citizenship from the nation or the municipality, through both the anti-competitive philosophy it encapsulated and the transformative project it suggested. The extent to which the Co-operative Commonwealth was embraced as a genuine hope among ordinary co-operative members is hard to assess, but what is clear is the extent to which the Co-operative Commonwealth was evoked, especially after 1920, in terms of co-operative progress in London.

CHAPTER 3

"A MIGHTY WEAPON FOR THE PERMANENT IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIETY": THE CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH AND LONDON CO-OPERATIVE CITIZENSHIP[1]

As we have seen, the areas in which co-operation became established on the periphery of London provided both a physical framework for co-operative citizenship, and also a conceptual framework which emerged from associated ideas of locality. The ideal of the Co-operative Commonwealth, a transformed society run on co-operative lines which would supercede capitalism, presented a potentially significant additional variable for citizenship for co-operators. London co-operators had the possibility of a multiple sense of belonging: to London, with its city-wide administrative structures, its national Parliament and its Imperial position; to their own Borough or District with its local administrative apparatus and priorities; and to their co-operative locality with its own boundaries, alternative values and alternative sites and spaces of consumption and association. The Co-operative Commonwealth was reaffirmed as the primary aim of the co-operative movement at the Co-operative Congress in 1920. Capable of shaping both the actions of the co-operative citizen and the goal for which they were aiming, the Co-operative Commonwealth framed a potential alternative locus of belonging and citizenship, directing the actions and hopes of the ideal co-operative citizen towards a future tied not to the existing state but to transformed social and economic arrangements. This intensification of focus on the ideological underpinning of co-operation within a cognitive space opened up by post-war reconstruction, raised questions about what sort of world was wanted and how it might be reached.

[1] *Edmonton Co-operative Society Report and Agenda, Half-Yearly Meeting of Shareholders, October 1920,*p3

“The deeper purpose of our movement” - The Co-operative Commonwealth

Historians of co-operation have noted that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Co-operative Commonwealth was discussed more and more within the co-operative movement.[2] Whether this was because of confidence, or anxiety about its relevance and power for co-operators, is open to question. The War provides a possible explanation. The First World War directly affected the co-operative movement - membership increased, the expectations of members changed, and the production and distribution of food, around which the movement was built, was politicised by state involvement. Further, “The ideological connotations of co-operation were distinctly sharpened by the experience both of the war itself and of the immediate aftermath of escalating industrial conflict and open class hostility”.[3] To this can be added the moment of opportunity which seemed to be created by debates about reconstruction, and subsequent frustration, disappointment and anger as that opportunity faded. Certainly, after the First World War the concept of the Co-operative Commonwealth was brought explicitly to the foreground of the movement at national level. At the Co-operative Union Congress in Bristol in 1920, Reverend Ramsay, the President of the Congress, reaffirmed that “the purpose and aim of our movement is the organisation of a Co-operative Commonwealth,”[4] as he called upon the Congress to approve a proposed rule change which would position the achievement of the Co-operative Commonwealth as “the first and foremost among the objects of our co-operative movement.” This was a forceful assertion of the importance of the Co-operative Commonwealth – but there were also hints of concern when Ramsay suggested that material success may have become an overarching preoccupation, overshadowing “the deeper

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[2] The precise dating of this renewed interest in the co-operative commonwealth is, however, disputed. Gurney traces it to the 1890s, while Blaszak situates it in the years after the First World War. B. Blaszak, *Matriarchs*, p 1: P. Gurney *Co-operative Culture*, p45

[3] Bill Lancaster and Paddy Macguire, “Introduction: The Co-operative Movement in Historical perspective” in Bill Lancaster and Paddy Macguire, eds., *Towards the Co-operative ommonwealth; essays in the History of Co-operation,* (Manchester 1996), pp 8-9

[4] Reverend Ramsay, Inaugural Address to Congress, *Report of the Co-operative Congress, Bristol, 24th, 25th and 26th May 1920* (Manchester, 1920), p55

purpose of our movement" and requiring corrective action.[5] In a rousing speech, which was received with cheers and a standing ovation by the audience, Ramsay expounded upon the moral, ethical and spiritual dimensions of co-operation. He argued that co-operation, not capitalism, represented the ultimate stage of human evolution. Capitalism was merely a transient stage beyond which human beings were designed to develop, so that "In seeking to build a Co-operative Commonwealth we are thus obeying and fulfilling the great biological laws of life."[6]

There was no single definition, however, of what the Co-operative Commonwealth meant, nor a clear route to its achievement. Did the Co-operative Commonwealth imply a utopian critique of capitalist values or was it a viable, practical alternative to capitalism? Was the Co-operative Commonwealth to be realised through centralisation, modern co-operative production and loyalty of retail societies to co-operative wholesale societies? Would the Co-operative Commonwealth replace capitalism altogether, or could it exist alongside capitalism as a parallel but alternative space of community and consumption? Such vagueness (or flexibility) rendered the idea of the Co-operative Commonwealth adaptable, allowing it to be understood in different ways. For example, an article in the Co-operative News on co-operative industrial expansion explained the Co-operative Commonwealth in practical terms, as "The great ideal…by which is meant that co-operators should be not only co-operative consumers but co-operative producers". This suggested a closed and self-sufficient system of production and consumption, perhaps separate from capitalism, but not necessarily designed to supplant it.[7] More loftily, W. H. Brown described the Co-operative Commonwealth as "a magnificent declaration of principles" and called for the development of Co-operative Consciousness in each co-operative citizen.[8] This suggested an ambitious and all-encompassing vision of the Commonwealth, but gave no concrete sense of how it could be reached.

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[5] Reverend Ramsay, Inaugural Address to Congress, *Report of the Co-operative Congress, Bristol, 24th, 25th and 26th May 1920* (Manchester, 1920), p50

[6] Reverend Ramsay, Inaugural Address to Congress, *Report of the Co-operative Congress, Bristol, 24th, 25th and 26th May 1920* (Manchester, 1920), p51

[7] *Co-operative News* 25th December, 1919, p66

[8] W.H. Brown, *Century*, pp.9-12

One route was suggested by the Co-operative News, which ran articles inviting customers to enter the Co-operative Commonwealth through loyal co-operative purchasing, making a connection between the everyday, practical choices of co-operators and wider social and economic transformation.[9] Many co-operators undoubtedly found this plethora of possibilities perplexing, and there was a danger that confusion could lead to scepticism or disengagement. Thus, a 'weary co-operator' complained that "Few of us of the rank-and-file would say… that we have found in co-operation a universal principle which we understand as capable of being the foundation of all the organisation of life" and asked for a clearer and more precise definition of the Co-operative Commonwealth and the way to reach it. [10]

It is difficult to gauge whether there a strong connection between the ideal of the Co-operative Commonwealth, as expressed By Reverend Ramsay at the Co-operative Congress, and the everyday experience of London co-operators. The majority of members left no direct records of the extent of their ideological investment in co-operation. The more active members might attend meetings of shareholders, recreational clubs and guild meetings, or entertainments laid on by their society. For most members of co-operative societies, however, the main (and perhaps the only) point of regular contact between members and the wider movement was the co-operative store. Through these points of contact, a sense of the Co-operative Commonwealth, and the part played by the individual member in its realisation, could be offered. The shape of Co-operative Commonwealth citizenship was suggested by the physical and psychic spaces of co-operation, and through the choices of the consumer-citizen in the purchase of co-operative goods. Many of these goods, in turn, were branded in ways that announced their difference from other brands, and would have created a visible and continuing reminder of co-operative values within the home.

[9] See, for example, *Co-operative News*, 11th January 1919, p37
[10] *The Co-operative Educator*, Vol III, No. 3, July 1919, p67

Assessing local co-operative citizenship

Co-operative societies had considerable independence through the decisions of locally elected management committees. Federal structures, such as the Co-operative Union which advised societies on legal and educational matters, offered "linkages rather than directives" since societies were not obliged to follow advice given.[11] Aspects of local diversity do, therefore, emerge from society records, but evidence for the local reception of ideas about the Co-operative Commonwealth in these records can be elusive. The records of local co-operative societies suggest a preoccupation with trade matters – suppliers, shopfittings, transport, personnel. Geoffrey Crossick complained that "The reports of the local co-operative societies, where they have survived, are mundane and dull. One finds in them only a limited idealism…"[12] However, business meetings are unlikely places to look for expressions of ideology and principle. Co-operative committee meetings were, indeed, largely pragmatic affairs, designed to work through agendas, resolve problems and agree actions. The lack of utopian language and ideological debate in these records is, therefore, not surprising and does not necessarily equate to a lack of interest in such matters by the committee or the society.

However, in London the formation of the London Co-operative Society in 1920, and its determination to spread co-operation across the capital, gave particular impetus for the consideration of loftier ideas, and for reflection on how the new London society might contribute towards the Co-operative Commonwealth, and references to higher ideals do appear in a range of sources from that period. Business records were, in fact, peppered with references to wider transformative agendas. For example, in the autumn of 1920, a final committee report was prepared for the shareholders of the Edmonton Society, as it amalgamated with the Stratford Society. The chair of the Edmonton management committee, J.Maton, a long-serving officer of the Society, set this local amalgamation firmly in the context of the larger aims of the movement. Having reflected

[11] B.Lancaster and T. Macguire, *Towards the* Co-*operative Commonwealth*, p4
[12] G. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite,* p171

upon the history, expansion and overall success of the Edmonton Society, he asserted that "Co-operation means the creating of a new social order... Our object is to replace Capitalism by Co-operation." He described the new London Co-operative Society as "a mighty weapon for the permanent improvement of society".[13] In the subsequent records of the London Co-operative Society, trade success and co-operative ideals were seen to be vitally intertwined. In an article for the staff magazine *The Beehive*, Sidney Foster, General Manager of the LCS, reminded staff that the performance of their duties could directly influence the future of society, and called upon them to be directed in their work by the underlying principles of the movement. If staff could offer "just that extra interest and enthusiastic service which the advocates and exponents of a great principle are usually glad to render" then "we shall show by results the superiority of the co-operative system over the competitive system."[14] Publicity materials, as well as advertising new products or setting out prices, also referred to the wider ideals of the movement. For example, in 1925, as part of a campaign to increase trade and membership, the London Co-operative Society produced new publicity materials, which included a leaflet explaining "the fundamentals of co-operative ideals, ideas and co-operative trade." As Sidney Foster, asserted, there is "Something more in a Co-operative Society than just a straight line of business."[15]

While the officers of the London Co-operative Society seemed to have been engaged with the idea of the Co-operative Commonwealth, it is less clear whether ordinary members were similarly engaged. It has been claimed that most members of co-operative societies were not concerned with the ideals of the movement, but were only interested in the dividend on purchases. Indeed, the dividend did provide help to many families who had no other way of saving. [16] It is difficult to determine the precise extent to which this was the main, or only, attraction to co-operative society

[13] J.Maton, Final report to the Committee, *Edmonton Co-operative Society Report and Agenda for half-Yearly General Meeting of Shareholders*, October 1920

[14] Draft article for *The Beehive*, bound with *LCS General Manager's Reports 4 March 1924-4 March 1925*

[15] Official report of Delegate conference, CWS Assembly Rooms, Leman Street, 5th January 1925

[16] See, for example, Paul Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, whose discussion of the co-operative movement focuses almost entirely on the 'thrift' and 'dividend' aspects of co-operative membership.

membership, and it is likely that, as Robertson has suggested, membership had “a multitude of meanings” for members, and that these meanings changed according to their changing needs and situations.[17] Interest in the dividend did not necessarily preclude an engagement with co-operative theory, of course. While some joined a Co-operative Society because of its political and social connotations, others were led, through the dividend, to a deeper engagement with co-operative ideas. For example, Mrs Layton, a Women’s Co-operative Guild member, confessed that she became aware of the wider aims of co-operation only after she began to shop regularly at the co-operative store in order to maximise her dividend.[18] It was particularly important for new societies to establish confidence and demonstrate stability through reliable dividends. Soon after the London Co-operative Society was formed, the trade slump resulted in the temporary suspension of the dividend in 1921.[19] Caroline Ganley, a member and later an officer of the society, recalled this as a dangerous moment because “members began fearing the stability of the London Co-operative Society” and some withdrew their capital. Realising the threat to the survival of the Society, a dividend was paid for one quarter, with the result that “confidence was established and the society never looked back from that time.”[20]

Commitment to the ideal of the Co-operative Commonwealth has also been assessed through the participation of members in the democratic processes of societies. Nicole Robertson has drawn attention to the difficulties of co-operative societies across the country, including the London Co-operative Society, in attracting members to shareholders meetings to vote on society matters. [21] In London, attendance at meetings, and voting for Society officers seems to have fluctuated. In January 1918, in a round of voting at branches for Stratford Society officers, for example, only 8 votes were

[17] N.Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement*, p214
[18] Mrs Layton in Margaret Llewelyn Davies (ed) *Life as We Have Known It, by Co-operative Working Women* (London, 1977/1931) p.38
[19] *Minute Book: General Committee*, London Co-operative Society, 6th May 1921
[20] Caroline Ganley, unpublished autobiography, pp78-9
[21]Nicole Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement,* p59;

cast at the Upton Park Branch.[22] However, good attendance was reported for the Quarterly Shareholders Meeting in April 1919.[23] Attendance at meetings, however, was not necessarily an indication of interest in the ideals of co-operation. A letter to the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* complained that "At the last Quarterly Meeting, immediately after the dividend was passed, a large number, as is usual, walked out, although there were many important issues… to be discussed."[24] However, the assumption of indifference overlooks some of the problems experienced by London workers, such as very long working days due to travelling time. [25] The Women's Co-operative Guild also realised that, for some of their members, lack of confidence borne of ignorance of the conduct of formal public meetings may have deterred people from attending, and so much of their 'citizenship work' was devoted to the development of women's confidence and familiarity with the formal structures of public life. [26]

Inhabiting co-operative spaces - co-operative shoppers as citizen-consumers

It was widely recognised that women's loyal buying was crucial to the success of co-operative stores and services and thus to the wider aims of the movement. The role of women as co-operative consumers was emphasised by the Womens Co-operative Guild, often as a way of claiming a fuller representation for women within the management and governance of Co-operative Societies and organisations. [27] However, the extent of most women's ideological commitment to the Co-operative Commonwealth, and their understanding of themselves as Co-operative commonwealth citizens, remains elusive. Membership of the Womens Co-operative Guild at least suggests, though does not guarantee, a measure of sympathy with its wider aims. In the case of some co-operative women, their wider political activities or the manifest commitment to co-operation demonstrated through

[22] *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol IX, 4th January 1918, No 4, p42
[23] 'Editorial Notes', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol X, June 1919, no.9, p68
[24] Charles Hughes, letter published in 'Our Letter Box', *Stratford Co-operative Magazine*, Vol.IX, May 1918, no.8, p.102
[25] F.Hall, 'Co-operation in relation to social problems', *Co-operative Educator*, Vol III, No 1, January 1919, p 37
[26] G. Scott, *Feminism* (Kindle edition) Loc. 1873
[27] G.Scott, *Feminism* (Kindle edition) Loc. 3692

years of local work point to the strength of their investment in co-operative citizenship.[28] However, the enduring problem for historians has been to understand the vast majority of women co-operators who never joined the Guild and rarely or never came to meetings or classes. It is not possible to assess precise motivations for such women as these were very rarely recorded. Barbara Blaszak repeatedly argues that most women never 'bothered' to join the Guild, which suggests indifference or apathy to the movement beyond co-operative shopping. She also suggests that the leadership was more radical than most ordinary women wanted to be. However, Blaszak herself also details the heavy domestic burdens of childcare, housework and (sometimes) paid work which women had to shoulder.[29]

The model of consumer-citizenship is useful here, as a form of citizenship offered to ordinary co-operative shoppers based upon their social and co-operative role. Frank Trentmann used this model to help to illuminate the ways in which consumption and citizenship could be connected through Free Trade. Through consumer choice, buyers both expressed and supported Free Trade, and in this way buying and citizenship and wider national agendas were tied together.[30] The consumer-citizen had, in fact, been at the heart of co-operation since the 1850s, with co-operative purchasing always commanding the wider interest of the movement.[31] It is significant, though, that in the immediate post-war moment, consumption itself had acquired greater visibility through public debates about prices, profiteering and government control of production and distribution, particularly of food, forming a popular morality and a politics of consumption. This offered a means of entering the political arena through shopping, as consumption assumed a socio-moral dimension.[32] Shopping was

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[28] For example, Mrs Gasson of West London, who was a member of the War Emergency Workers National Committee, or Mrs Viggis of Stratford, who was involved in numerous local co-operative activities, including the setting up of new Women's Guilds.

[29] Blaszak, p152. This does not explain why most men did not join the Men's Guild, whose aims were less overtly radical and more closely aligned with mainstream co-operative educational and associative aims.

[30] Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation* (Oxford and New York, 2008).

[31] As Peter Gurney has pointed out, Trentmann's work concentrates on the period 1900-1930, and thus misses the role played by the co-operative 'consumer-citizen' from the 1850s. See Peter Gurney, 'Wanting and Having p97-109

[32] Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism*, p2; Mica Nava, 'Modernity tamed? Women shoppers and the rationalisation of consumption in the interwar period', *Australian Journal of Communication* Vol.22 (2), 1995, p14

also increasingly represented as an area of expertise, with women shoppers addressed as capable, shrewd and discriminating, as part of a tendency towards the rationalisation and management of consumption.[33] For many women the calls of childcare and domestic responsibility limited their sphere of action to their immediate locality (although this began to change as transport links improved), and citizen-consumption offered a citizenship that could be practised in the local area and in the home.[34]

Within the co-operative movement buying and citizenship were intimately connected and mutually reinforcing, since the realisation of the Co-operative Commonwealth depended first and foremost upon thriving stores. The first duty of co-operative citizenship was, therefore, loyal buying. Consistent messages about loyal buying appeared in the co-operative press and in shareholder reports, leaflets and pamphlets, and this was especially the case as the London Co-operative Society attempted expansion at a moment of economic downturn in the early 1920s. But even if these were never sought out and read, the message was put across in the stores themselves through display, promotion, advertising and branding, which contributed to a shared system of co-operative meaning.[35] Branding and packaging of goods carried messages about co-operation. Some invoked popular co-operative iconography, like the Wheatsheaf brand. Certain 'lines' were also given names of significance to co-operation – for example, children's footwear styles were named 'Our circle' (the name of a childrens' co-operative magazine) and 'Young co-operator'. Other brands indicated the places of co-operative production. The 'Pelaw' brand was named after a co-operative production complex in north-east England, thus suggesting a wider geography of co-operative endeavour, while the EDCO and LCS brands explicitly referenced London-based production.[36] Such visible branding around the home constantly reinforced the presence of co-operation in the life of the co-operative

[33] Mica Nava, 'Modernity tamed? pp7-11
[34] Helen Meller, 'Women and citizenship'
[35] On advertising as part of a shared system of meaning, see Frank Trentmann, 'Introduction', p12
[36] Advertisements for co-operative brands appeared in, for example, the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine, The Wheatsheaf,* and *The London Citizen*.

shopper. In addition, by 1925 a form of 'direct-mail' advertising was also used and personal letters and handbills were sent to the home addresses of members, taking co-operative messages into the home of every member.[37]

The place of advertising within co-operation was somewhat ambiguous. Insofar as advertising was designed to stimulate the wishes and desires of consumers, and perhaps even to mislead consumers about the quality and the utility of goods, it sat uncomfortably with the co-operative creed of production for use.[38] However, from the early twentieth century a shift in the approach of the movement to advertising, due to the pressing need to stay competitive, may be detected.[39] By 1914, many co-operative societies (for example, Edmonton) were allocating dedicated budgets for advertising and promotion, and when the General Co-operative Survey Committee called for a National Advertising Scheme in its 1919 report, the profile of advertising was further raised across the movement.[40] For the newly-formed London Co-operative Society, with a new name to promote and ambitious plans for expansion, effective promotion was seen as essential. In the joint preparatory meetings leading up to amalgamation, the Edmonton and Stratford Societies formed an advertising sub-committee with a budget of £1000.[41] As the society grew, the General and Sales managers were keen to keep abreast of new developments in the increasingly professionalised field of advertising and promotion. In 1924, for example, the General Manager of the LCS asked the General Committee for £100 to spend on "moveable and illustrated sales devices… The Sales Manager…and myself have seen several models at the recent trade exhibitions."[42]

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[37] For example, a direct mail butchery promotion is mentioned in LCS General Managers Report 4th March 1925, LCS General Manager's Reports 4th March 1924-4th March 1925.
[38] Gurney 1996 p66. I am grateful to Stefan Schutt, Victoria University, for drawing my attention to this ambiguity.
[39] Schwarzkopf, Stefan, 'Innovation, modernisation, consumerism: the co-operative movement and the making of British advertising and marketing culture, 1890s-1960s' in L.Black and N. Robertson, eds., *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History* (Manchester and New York, 2009) p 197
[40] Edmonton Co-operative Society Trade Accounts, January 1914; Cole, *Century*, p294
[41] Stratford Co-operative Society Minute Book, Joint Meeting 20th June 1920
[42] London Co-operative Society, General Managers Report, October 1st 1924

There appears to be a disconnection, or at the very least a difference in emphasis, between the role of citizen-consumer offered to women co-operators by co-operative literature, advertising and promotion, and the Women's Co-operative Guild and their citizenship work, which stressed citizenship as public participation and intervention. There is certainly evidence that not all women accepted a domestic role as citizenship. Mrs Barton, objecting to domestic items such as knitting patterns in a proposed women's co-operative paper, complained that newly enfranchised women "wanted something better than sock or crochet patterns. Woman would never take her place side by side with man if the stockings were always on the table. Women had brains, and should use them as co-equals with men in the city, the state, and the Co-operative movement."[43]However, alongside this desire for a wider citizenship, more traditional feminine preoccupations were also displayed by Women's Guild Members. For example, the Stratford Co-operative Magazine regularly included pages whose content was contributed by a local branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild. These were overwhelmingly composed of recipes and household hints.[44] Whether this signalled an uncritical acceptance of the domestic role, a display of domestic skill, or that Guildswomen had a mixture of political and domestic interests, we cannot know. Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the longstanding president of the Womens Co-operative Guild, reminded co-operative women that "The woman's basket gives her great power in co-operation, and now that she carries a vote in her basket she will have great power in politics!... to the co-operative candidate, when the time comes, they should give their votes."[45] This trope - that of the power of the shopping basket – was frequently used, as here, to invoke a more politicised version of women's traditional role, with consumption presented as a powerful component of co-operative citizenship.[46] The co-operative press, both local and national, also addressed women directly in their role as consumers, pointing out their economic

[43] Mrs Barton (probably Eleanor Barton, later to become President of the Women's Co-operative Guild), *Wheatsheaf Conferences Report, 1918* (Manchester, 1918)
[44] See, for example, the Women's Page contributed by the Walthamstow Women's Co-operative Guild in the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Vol IX, March 1918, no.6, p.69. The extent of editorial direction as to the content of these pages is not known.
[45] Margaret Llewelyn Davies, 'The Vote in the basket', *London Citizen* (East Ham edition), No. 1, June 1921, p3
[46] 'Don't Spend without thinking!', *London Citizen* (East Ham edition), no. 15, August 1922, p3

power within the movement. The 'Women's Corner' in the Co-operative News urged women to leave their quarterly dividend in their society and not automatically withdraw it. [47] This underlines women's economic importance to the movement as consumers and investors, in that their untouched dividends contributed to the capital available to societies for expansion, education and propaganda.

The making of co-operative citizens

The invocation of the Co-operative Commonwealth through the experience of the citizen-consumer may be understood as part of a larger process of the making of co-operative citizens by educating co-operative members in the alternative behaviours, values and economic processes of co-operation. Indeed, the experience of buying co-operatively, and having the surplus value returned to the shopper rather than appropriated by producers and retailers, both prefigures a transformed society and demonstrates its possibility. In this way, participation in the co-operative movement at its most basic level by shopping was seen to be educative, as was involvement in all other aspects of the movement. More formal co-operative educational activities, such as classes and lectures, were taken up by relatively few co-operators. Nevertheless, they were an important component of the wider educational project of co-operation, which aimed to transform individuals into co-operators.

[47] 'Women's Corner', *Co-operative News* 11th January, 1919, p56

CHAPTER 4

"LOYALTY IS THE CHILD OF KNOWLEDGE": EDUCATION AND THE LONDON CO-OPERATIVE CITIZEN[1]

The Co-operative Commonwealth required the education of its prospective citizens, in terms of behaviours, knowledges, and psychic structures. It was also connected to the expansion of co-operation in London, since a 'true co-operator', one who lived by the principles of the movement, was likely to be a supporter of co-operative candidates for elected office and a loyal co-operative buyer. Co-operative consumption produced the trade surpluses which paid for educational activities, and maintained the independence of societies from patronage which might compromise its principles, and also enabled the opening of new stores in London's expensive retail environment.[2] The relationship between economic and social systems and individual development meant that the transformation of the individual was seen as a constituent part of the hoped-for transition from capitalism to co-operation, as Reverend Ramsay argued in 1920. It was believed that, just as particular systems produced particular types of people (for example, capitalism produced self-seeking, self-centred people), so co-operatively educated and transformed individuals would contribute to the transformation of economic and social systems from capitalism to co-operation.[3] This hope of non-revolutionary transformation was reinvigorated as ideas of citizenship, and education for citizenship, were being discussed as part of an envisioning of the post-war world.

Education for citizenship was a significant theme within interwar public discourse, especially in the light of the extensions of the franchise in 1918 and 1928, resulting in mass democracy. As Helen McCarthy has argued, mass suffrage shifted political attention towards "the challenge of integrating and socializing a mass citizenry" through, for example, encouraging new voters to join political

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[1] 'Report of the Central Board, *The Fifty-Fourth Annual Co-operative Congress Report*, *1922* (Manchester, 1922) p7

[2] P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, pp38-40

[3] Reverend Ramsay, *The Fifty-Second Annual Co-operative Congress Report 1920* (Manchester, 1920), pp 50-52

parties.[4] Some citizenship education was broadly organised around knowledge of local and national governmental and democratic structures, particularly as these related to voting. In some cases, for example, in the citizenship education offered to soldiers both during the First world War and as they were waiting to be demobbed, it was explicit that such education was intended to diffuse discontent and revolutionary feeling. The rights, responsibilities and benefits of citizenship and the social and economic reforms promised by the coalition government were mobilized to suggest a more equal future.[5] However, citizenship could also be understood as a moment of opportunity and potential power, and was used as such by some women's groups, who preferred the term 'citizenship' to that of 'feminism' when making claims for public participation.[6] Education for co-operative citizenship was shaped by the need to create citizens of the Co-operative Commonwealth, whose allegiance to that ideal would permeate every aspect of life. The goal of co-operative education was, as Peter Gurney puts it, "an educated and active membership organised around, and empowered by, consumption."[7]

At the 1882 Co-operative Congress, the historian and political economist Arnold Toynbee proposed that, given the provision of elementary education by the state, the special work of co-operative education ought now to be the education of the citizen. By the 1880s citizenship had become complex, with a tension between the power of the franchise (extended to many working-class men in 1867), and the challenges of capitalist industrial practices to traditional skills and autonomy. Toynbee argued that a programme of citizenship education was required to educate each member of the community "as regards to the relation in which he stands to other individual citizens, and to the community as a whole." Toynbee did not lay out a complete syllabus, but suggested that the history of political institutions, the industrial system, the condition of the working classes, the history

[4] Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal* Vol. 50, no. 4, (Dec. 2007), pp891-892
[5] S.P.Mackenzie, *Politics and Military Morale: Current Affairs and Citizenship Education in the British Army, 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992), chapter 2.
[6] C.Beaumont et al, 'Citizens not feminists'.
[7]P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture'*, pp29-30

of social ideas, and sanitary education ought to be taught, as the basic foundations of citizenship education and as a way of both contesting a capitalist narrative of natural competitiveness and of forging ties of brotherhood between working men. This he saw as a necessary prerequisite for wider social and economic transformation through collective action.[8] Several of the subjects suggested by Toynbee (particularly industrial history) continued to form the spine of co-operative classes for decades to come.

As Jonathan Rose has argued, there has been a long tradition amongst working-class radical groups of intellectual autonomy as they sought to develop "their own ways of framing the world", and co-operators sought a similar intellectual independence. [9] Believing that the values of capitalism and competition dominated the workplace and the state school, and suspicious of philanthropic intervention, the co-operative movement sought to provide an independent alternative education which would create a critical approach to social and economic circumstances, and which denied stability and permanence to capitalism as a social and economic stage.[10] In addition, capitalism's dominant rhetoric of competition was challenged by the effects of association within co-operation, which developed and demonstrated an alternative model of working together for a common aim. Fred Hall, Adviser of Studies for the Co-operative Union, described co-operation as "a mode of life as well as a method of trade; it is a view of what is desirable in social relationships."[11] As Gurney suggests, "co-operative knowledge was more than just the accumulation of certain ideas and facts but implied a particular sensibility, one which emphasised humanity's *social* nature."[12]

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[8] Arnold Toynbee, 'Address to the Annual Co-operative Congress', *Report of the 4th Annual Co-operative Congress, Oxford, May 29th, 30th and 31st, 1882* (Manchester, 1882), p60
[9] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London, 2001), p7
[10] P. Gurney, '*Co-operative Culture*', p36
[11] Fred Hall, *Further Prospective developments of Co-operative Education* (Manchester, 1918), p10
[12] P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, p40

The Co-operative Union and local co-operative education

The Co-operative Union, based in Manchester, was the central body through which co-operative education was organised, operating through a Central Education Committee which planned and administered classes, correspondence courses, syllabuses and grants. Eight regional educational associations worked with local societies and organised regional conferences and educational events.[13] The Union was perpetually disappointed in the low participation rates in educational classes nationally, and was engaged in an ongoing campaign to engage more co-operators, both adults and children, in formal education.[14] Although national participation did grow from 20,838 in 1918-19 to 30,650 in 1925-1926, this still represented a tiny proportion of the total membership.[15] The Co-operative Union plans for a Co-operative College in Manchester demonstrated the ambitions of the national movement to provide high-level educational courses, and to train co-operative teachers.[16] *The Co-operative Educator* argued that the movement must train its own independent teachers, who should themselves be sincere co-operators and that this "will ultimately be the work of our co-operative college."[17] However, the Co-operative Union's fundraising initiative which hoped to raise an ambitious £50,000 for the establishment of the Co-operative College, struggled to reach its target. In 1921, Congress reported that only £16,000 had been raised, indicating a lack of enthusiasm for the project at local level, at least during a period of straitened post-war finances.[18] There is almost no mention at all of the Co-operative College in the minutes of the Stratford Society, the Edmonton Society or the London Co-operative Society between 1918 and 1925. In 1920 the

[13] Pushpa Khumbat, 'Learning Together', p8
[14] Pushpa Khumbat, 'Learning Together', p9
[15] Pushpa Khumbat 'Learning Together, Appendix, Table 1 – Co-operative Education – National Statistics (1918-1939)' p18. The London Co-operative Society alone had a membership of almost 100,000 on formation. See First report and balance sheet.
[16] Co-operative Union plans for the Co-operative College were first raised before the First World War, but were reinvigorated after 1918. Fred Hall, Adviser of Studies at the Co-operative Union, referred to co-operative colleges as "the ultimate development" and called for societies wishing to memorialize fallen co-operators to do so through contributing to the Co-operative College scheme. Fred Hall, *Further Prospective Developments of Co-operative Education* (Manchester, 1918), p.8
[17] J.Widdup, 'Co-operative Teachers and Teaching', *The Co-operative Educator* Volume III, No.1, January 1919, p21
[18] *The Fifty-Third Annual Co-operative Congress, 1921* (Manchester, 1921)

Stratford Society Special General Committee passed a resolution that “a grant of 1d per member for four years to the Co-operative Union College fund be opposed by the Chairman on behalf of this Committee”.[19] No reasons are given in the minutes, but at the very least this resolution suggests a disconnection between national ambitions and local priorities and practicalities, with the Stratford Society focusing upon the impending amalgamation and London expansion.

Co-operative societies, although they often sought guidance and support on educational matters from the Co-operative Union, had independence in deciding upon educational provision, which therefore varied widely. The activities of Education Committees were very broad. They organised formal classes, and supported the Women’s and Men’s Guilds and the children’s Circles and Junior Guilds, as well as organising sporting, cultural and recreational activities, and the balance between these different elements, and their role in individual societies varied considerably. The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, for example, made education its leitmotif. Within a decade of its establishment in 1868, it had allocated funds for education, set up an Education Committee and commenced a programme of classes and other educational initiatives such as the provision of libraries and reading rooms, giving equal weight to developing recreational and cultural strands.[20] The Stratford Industrial and Co-operative Society, on the other hand, was established before the RACS, but it grew slowly, and took years to begin any serious educational provision. According to their Jubilee History of 1911, an Education Committee was formed in 1895, over 30 years after the establishment of the society, and its educational programme was modest.[21] The local societies were not obliged to make use of the Co-operative Union lists of approved speakers and suggested subjects, which it produced to assist Educational Committees to set up their educational

[19] Special General Committee, 23rd August 1920, Stratford co-operative Society Ltd Minute Book.
[20] John Attfield, historian of the society, explains this focus on education with reference to the rich working-class culture within which the RACS took root, and also to the contribution of notable co-operators such as Joseph Reeves, who saw education in its broadest sense as preparation for social change. John Attfield*, In Light of Knowledge*, Introduction and Chapters 1-3.
[21] J.H.Bate, ‘The Educational Work’ in W.H.Brown, *The Stratford Co-operative and Industrial Society Limited Jubilee Retrospect, 1911* (London, 1911) p40

programmes. The programmes of the Guilds and of educational events published in the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* and the *London Citizen*, suggest that most speakers were drawn from the ranks of the local Guilds and the officers of the societies, giving these events a distinctly local flavour.[22] Notable local figures were also invited – for example, the Leyton Branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild invited Sylvia Pankhurst to speak.[23] In addition, not all subjects taught were those which the Co-operative Union approved and provided. For example, Esperanto did not appear on the Co-operative Union list of classes, but classes in Esperanto were held by the London Co-operative Society.[24]

One vexed question was that of instruction in technical subjects, which was always far more popular than classes such as co-operative theory and industrial history. In 1922 the Central Education Committee reported to the Co-operative Congress that the numbers of classes for bookkeeping – 785 – far outstripped those for 'co-operative subjects' such as Co-operation (148) and Citizenship (11).[25] This can be seen as evidence of an instrumental attitude towards education and the movement itself among co-operative members and employees, although a pragmatic desire for greater income, prospects and job security is understandable given that, as Gurney reminds us, many co-operators "often had to negotiate a path between sufficiency and scarcity".[26] However, there was also a compelling business case for good technical skills among employees. As Sidney Foster, General Manager of the LCS pointed out, the co-operative movement required their employees to have a high standard of technical expertise. This, combined with excellent customer

[22] See, for example, the *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* Guild pages, 1916-1918
[23] Programme of the Leyton Women's Co-operative Guild, *Stratford Co-operative Magazine*, Vol X, January 1919, no.4, p.32. Sylvia Pankhurst became associated with the area when she set up the East London Federation of the Womens Social and Political Union, later the East London Federation of Suffragettes, the main office of which was in Bow, within the Stratford Society trading area. Sarah Jackson and Rosemary Taylor, *East London Suffragettes* (London 1914)
[24] Pushpa Khumbat, 'Learning Together, Appendix – Table 2 – Range of Subjects Taught by the Co-operative Union'
[25] 'Report of the Central Education Committee', *The Fifty-Fourth Annual Co-operative Congress Report, 1922* (Manchester, 1922), p196
[26] P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture'*, p51-2

service would, he argued, serve to demonstrate to customers the clear superiority of the co-operative system over an exploitative capitalist system which did not invest in its staff.[27]

The Guilds

The Education Committee of the London Co-operative Society was responsible for giving support and financial grants to the Women's Co-operative Guilds and the Men's Co-operative Guilds, as they were regarded as educational groups. Of the two, the Women's Guild was longer-established and more vigorous, with more branches and more members. The Men's Guild, which was begun at Stratford by Charles Potter, an officer of the society, had, of course, suffered major setbacks during the war, as men were called up or moved out of the area for war work, and the immediate post-war years saw a revival in membership.[28] The Women's and Men's Guilds had different agendas regarding citizenship. For the Women's Guild, citizenship work was mainly oriented towards the public sphere, and the achievement of reforms of concern to their membership of (mainly) working-class, married women.[29] Perhaps for this reason, supporting Guildswomen in their entry into public roles both within the co-operative movement (where women were poorly represented on committees) and on Boards of Guardians and Local Authorities, had always been important, and lists of successes were included in their reports to Co-operative Congress each year.[30] The Men's Guild had a somewhat different focus, that of education and propaganda. The aim of the Men's Guild was "to make men co-operators...to change the character of men" through classes, lectures and propaganda events and, crucially, through fellowship, which was imagined as a homosocial experience involving, for example, open-air activities. Encouraging branches to prepare summer

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[27] 'From the Manager's Office', April/May 1924, bound with 'LCS General Manager's Reports, 4th March 1924-4th March 1925

[28] W.H.Brown, *Century*, p169

[29] G. Scott, *Feminism,* Kindle edition, Loc 497

[30] For example, in 1922 the Women's Co-operative Guild reported an impressive list of Guildswomen in public office including 12 magistrates, 180 serving on Municipal Housing Committees, 190 Poor Law Guardians and 10 sitting as London Borough Councillors. 'Report of the Women's Co-operative Guild', *The Fifty-Fourth Annual Co-operative Congress Report, 1922* (Manchester, 1922) p184

programmes of outdoor activities, the *Co-operative Guildman* extolled the educative value of rambling, especially to urban dwellers, and suggested that "men who try to cook their own tea over a fire with wet sticks and sodden moss learn more about self-help and co-operative life than they will ever learn in any dusty classroom".[31] And, in what seems to be a rather pointed reference to the strategies of the Women's Guild, the Men's Guild asserted that "success does not depend upon its power to put men on co-operative committees and public councils."[32] However, despite the differences exhibited by the Guilds nationally, at a local level they do not appear to have been so far apart. The programmes of the Guilds of the Stratford Society seem rather similar to each other, with lectures on political and social subjects, meetings devoted to rules and other branch business, and social or recreational meetings.[33]

Education and propaganda

Co-operative education was aimed at developing existing co-operators, but also had an outward-facing agenda which was sometimes indistinguishable from, propaganda. Before amalgamation, propaganda came under the auspices of the Edmonton Co-operative Society Education Committee and included events such as concert meetings and conferences, which also had an educational purpose.[34] When the London Co-operative Society was formed, this arrangement at first continued, with the Education Committee covering Guilds, classes and "propaganda meetings"[35] However, from the beginning of 1921, in the context of the selection of London co-operative candidates for the expected general election, the profile of the London Co-operative Representation Committee, whose role was to organise campaigns for co-operative and allied candidates in elections both local

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[31] 'Work in Summer', *The Co-operative Guildman* Vol I, No. 1, March 1925, p10
[32] 'Our Own Business', *The Co-operative Guildman* No. 3, May 1925, p.20
[33] See *Stratford Co-operative Magazine* 1918-1920 for a range of Guild activities.
[34] See, for example, Edmonton Co-operative Society Minutes of Education Committee, July 1916-1918. On August 4th, 1916, the Education Committee Minutes record a brief discussion of the difficulty of continuing propaganda work in wartime.
[35] See, for example, the *London Co-operative Society First Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks Ending December 7th, 1920*

and national, began to rise. This suggested a shift within the London Society towards political representation as a priority.[36] In 1921, the Education Committee had its funding cut, and was forced to suspend an intended increase in activities, while the Representation Committee, on the other hand, repeatedly asked for – and received – funds for electoral work, even in the midst of the trade slump.[37] This reflects the very high priority now being given by the movement to elected office. However, campaigning and voting could also be seen as valuable educational and propaganda initiatives in themselves. In the Municipal elections of 1920, seven London Co-operative Society candidates stood for office. Not all were elected, but the Representative Council reported that "In Southend and West Ham we put up a good fight, and we believe the propaganda has been valuable."[38] And when co-operative candidates stood for Parliament in Tottenham and East Ham, the associated public meetings "have been an effective means of educating the people in co-operative politics."[39] On 3rd June 1921, the Representation Committee, supported by the Co-operative Union, launched a free monthly newspaper, *London Citizen*, in East Ham and Tottenham (the two areas where parliamentary candidates were being fielded), and were also able to afford to appoint a full-time organiser. The pages of *The London Citizen* were full of advertisements for lectures and meetings of an educational nature, and give some insight into the range of educational opportunities available, and the culture of the local labour movement. These educational events tended to be held at big labour centres, such as the Labour Hall in Katherine Road, East Ham, and the Trades Hall in Bruce Grove in Tottenham, and these spaces were used by co-operators, trade unions and the labour party. The overwhelming majority of articles and features concerned

[36] The London Co-operative Representation Committee was formed on amalgamation, from the Edmonton and Stratford Representation Councils www.archive.coop/collection/personal-papers
[37] 'Agenda', London Co-operative Society, *Second Report and Balance Sheet, Twelve Weeks ending 1st March, 1921*, p1
[38] London Co-operative Society, *First Report and Balance Sheet, Week ending December 7th, 1920,* p8
[39] London co-operative Society, *Second Report and Balance Sheet, Twelve Weeks ending 1st March, 1921*, p8

forthcoming elections, both local and national, and attempts to persuade people to vote, along with the inevitable calls for loyal buying.[40]

The London Co-operative Society Education Committee had a more difficult time, but continued to make connections between education and wider co-operative aims. It described its activities just after amalgamation as being those of "concentration and consolidation" but it looked forward to "launching out upon new schemes which the amalgamation has made possible and necessary."[41] However, in 1921, the educational activities of the London Co-operative Society were substantially checked when a nationwide economic slump hit co-operative societies across the country, as their members were laid off or faced short-time arrangements. In March, 1921, the Education Committee regretted that "through lack of funds much of the existing educational work of the society has had to be curtailed and the demands for increased activity refused."[42] As the position worsened through 1921, the Education Committee summed up the position, making explicit the connection between the current financial difficulties, the achievement of the larger aim of the LCS, and the role of education in achieving those aims. They reported that "We regret that lack of funds has compelled us to cancel most of our work, but we are confident that as soon as our financial difficulties are removed we shall be in a position to make great strides towards establishing the Co-operative Commonwealth in the Metropolis." [43] While the General Committee focused on the very survival of the London Co-operative Society, the Education Committee continued to promote the larger, interconnected aims of London co-operative citizenship, including expansion. It reminded members that "The London Society is attacking a big problem in attempting to convert the Metropolis to co-operation and it is essential, for success, that the co-operative ideals and principles be kept to the

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[40] See, for example, *London Citizen* (Tottenham Edition), No 11, April 1922, which devoted its front page to co-operative and allied candidates in the forthcoming elections for the Edmonton Board of Guardians and Tottenham Urban District Council.
[41] London Co-operative Society, *First Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks ending December 7th, 1920, p7*
[42] London Co-operative Society *Second Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks ending March 1st, 1921, p7*
[43] London Co-operative Society *Third Report and Balance Sheet, Thirteen Weeks ending June 4th, 1921, p7*

forefront…" and underlined the necessity for the spirit of the pioneers among London co-operators.[44]

Formal classes had all but lapsed in 1921 and 1922, although Guilds continued to operate and new Guilds were formed. As the economic situation began to ease slightly in early 1923 the programme of formal education began to pick up. Over the next few years, the number of classes quickly multiplied, and the subjects offered very much reflected the agenda for co-operative education for citizenship suggested by Arnold Toynbee 40 years earlier.[45] By July of 1923, Industrial History classes had begun. The Education and Political committee asked that "Members desirous of studying Co-operation or any of the above or allied subjects…should notify the Education Committee and steps will be taken to form classes wherever possible."[46] Although there are clearly preferred subjects here (and there is no record of requests for classes which declined as unsuitable or undesirable for the co-operative citizen) the willingness to invite requests for classes from members suggests a degree of responsiveness to popular demand. If the classes arranged were those actually requested by members, they suggest a level of interest in co-operative principles, ideals and citizenship which extended far beyond the dividend: by January 1925 co-operation, economics, social history and a public speaking class had commenced, and the Education Committee was reporting a "large increase" in the number of adult classes, and plans for the appointment of a full time organiser for education.[47] In their reports to members, the Education Committee consistently reiterated the need for commitment to the wider aims of the Society and the movement, and their success in carrying on some sort of educational programme through the early 1920s is evidence of their determination and conviction. (Their insistence on reporting that they were heroically carrying on without funds was

[44] London Co-operative Society, *Report and Balance Sheet, Half-Year Ending September 3rd, 1921*, p12
[45] *Proceedings of the 4th Co-operative Union Congress, Oxford, May 1882* pp59-61
[46] London Co-operative Society, *Education and Political Committee Report, July 1923,* p4
[47] London Co-operative Society, *Education and Political committee Report, January 1925,* pp7-8

also, perhaps, part of a bid to prove their own worth to the LCS in an ongoing battle for a higher level of funds than the 1% of surplus that they had previously been granted.)[48]

Psychological transformation

In *The Co-operative Educator*, a headline article, 'A New Era', discussed post-war reconstruction and the Co-operative Commonwealth in terms of psychological change, arguing that "The Commonwealth will only come into existence when there is the spirit of the Commonwealth, when common weal rather than individual advantage is sought by all in the community."[49] It went on to argue that "Co-operation must replace competition in all men's activities".[50] Conventional education lacked the appropriate moral framework. The Bishop of Durham addressed the Co-operative Congress in 1921 on 'Democracy and Education', and was not convinced that mere exposure to knowledge through state education would be enough to produce a moral citizen. He argued that ""The results of education have been disappointing… imagination without moral discipline." The result was that "We have been sharpening wits without shaping character."[51] Participation in co-operation, on the other hand, was thought to alter attitudes. As the *Co-operative Educator* explained in its cover statement, "The objects of Co-operative Education are, primarily, the formation of co-operative character and opinions".[52] The importance of association within co-operation stems from this need to alter attitude as well as behaviour.

Sport, cultural activities and recreation all contributed to the strong associational culture of co-operation, and offered a direct and personal experience of mutual effort which prefigured social relations within the Co-operative Commonwealth. W.H.Brown described this as "the glow of the

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[48] London Co-operative society, *Education Committee Report*, 4th January 1923. The Education Committee reported that "Undeterred by lack of funds, the committee have embarked upon a more ambitious programme of work…"
[49] 'The New Era', *The Co-operative Educator*, Vol III, No 1, January 1919, p.1
[50] ' The New Era', *The Co-operative Educator*, Vol III, No 1, January 1919, p2
[51] Bishop of Durham, 'Education and democracy', *Proceedings of the 53rd Co-operative Congress, Scarborough, May 1921,* p557
[52] *The Co-operative Educator*, Volume III, no.1, January 1919, cover statement

associative idea", and saw it as the origin of the development of co-operative consciousness.[53] The activities organised by the Education Committee were far more than pleasant social benefits. They were important in offering the opportunity to working together for a common aim and mutual benefit, which was the building block of co-operative endeavour and a prefiguration of the experience of the Co-operative Commonwealth. At the 1922 Co-operative Congress, the Report of the Central Education Committee acknowledged that falling revenues had led to the curtailment of much educational work, and advised local societies that "they should eliminate the entertainment type of activity rather than the more definitely educational work, such as classes and weekend schools."[54] However, this proposes a distinction between education and association which many co-operators would not have recognised. Catherine Webb, in her popular textbook *Industrial Co-operation*, had argued strongly for the value of social activities, and suggested that "To confine the meaning of education to serious book study only is to restrict its area in a manner at once narrow and artificial and out of keeping with the broad ideal upon which the movement rests."[55] Moreover, if the co-operative movement wished to compete as an employer, it needed to do as other large employers were beginning to do, and provide extra benefits for its workers. Beavan has argued that the provision of citizenship education and sports and leisure facilities developed by 'humanitarian' employers was intended to make "the moral as well as the economic case for 'enlightened capitalism.'"[56] Many co-operative societies, including the London Co-operative Society, provided similar education and facilities, thus demonstrating the success of their own alternative model to capitalism in their ability to keep pace with benefits said to be possible only as a result of capitalist profit.

[53] W.H.Brown, *Century*, p12
[54] 'Report of the Central Education Committee', *The Fifty-Fourth Annual Co-operative Congress Report, 1922* (Manchester, 1922), p36
[55] Catherine Webb, *Industrial Co-operation*, p210
[56] B. Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship*, p9

Musical groups and events were popular within the London Co-operative Society, and the example of musical activity London Co-operative Society serves to demonstrate the many interconnected functions of associational culture in London co-operative citizenship. The Stratford Ladies Choir, for example had formed in 1900 and was still very active into the 1920s, with an impressive record of winning local choral competitions.[57] In this, it offered a positive and successful example of co-operation the society, as well as associational benefits for its members. It also as providing them with a constructive leisure activity, for "The proper use of income and leisure is essential if the Commonwealth is to be established "[58] In 1921, the choirs and the orchestra which had previously belonged to the Stratford and Edmonton societies combined to form the London Co-operative Choral and Orchestral Society. While this may have been, at least in part, a cost-cutting exercise to streamline expenses, the choice of name nonetheless overtly connected the new Choral and Orchestral Society with the London Co-operative Society, and hence became a "valuable advertisement" for it, through giving public concerts and taking part in music festivals and competitions.[59] It also contributed to a sense of shared identity, which needed to be created within a new and very large society. As Nicole Robertson suggests, "Social events played an important role in drawing together members from different areas under the umbrella of the London Co-operative Society."[60] Despite a lack of funds for education over the following two years, choral work continued, and in 1923 the Education Committee noted that "The Choirs and Orchestra continue to play a useful part in the educational work of the society, and have publicly demonstrated in concerts and musical festivals that Co-operation is something more than shopkeeping."[61] The place of singing as part of other co-operative activities, such as Children's Circles and Guilds, rather than as a dedicated choral group, also had a wider value. Co-operative songbooks of specially-written songs, and the

[57] W.H.Brown, *Century,* p.169

[58] *Co-operative Educator*, Vol III, no 1, January 1919, p 2

[59] 'Education Committee Report and Accounts', *London Co-operative Society, Third Report and Balance Sheet Half-Year Ending September 3rd, 1921*, p12

[60] N. Robertson, *Co-operative Movement*, p93

[61] London Co-operative Society, *Education and Political Committee Report, July 1923,* p4

very act of singing together, were another opportunity to encourage co-operative values and to re-state co-operative principles. The preface to *Songs for Junior Co-operators* explained that the songs "will tend to promote the character-forming influence of co-operation… And as we *sing* them, let us *think* them, and then we shall *live* them."[62] The children's songbook was dominated by themes of international harmony, along with the conventional virtues of perseverance, honesty and kindness, while the adult version praised co-operative brotherhood, the nobility of workers and civic heroes.[63] Music-making thus became an experience of association, an advertisement for the success and values of the movement, and a vehicle for the inculcation of co-operative values, while concert-meetings, at which music and speeches were combined, provided propaganda. This is an apt demonstration of the interconnections between aspects of co-operative culture, and indeed, of the interconnected factors which have helped to structure co-operative citizenship.

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[62] W.R.Rae, 'Prefatory Note' in *Songs for Junior Co-operators* (Manchester, reprinted 1935)
[63] *Songs for Co-operators* (Twenty-second edition) (Manchester, 1933)

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that, in the period 1918-1925, there was a moment of opportunity for the emergence of a distinctive London co-operative citizen, shaped by the hope of postwar reconstruction, the particularities of London itself, and the transformative agenda of the co-operative movement. In the first chapter I used the urban variable to explore the specific character of West Ham and Edmonton, and discussed some of the problems inherent in using the term 'suburban' to describe established, industrialised working-class communities which had much in common with inner London areas both physically and culturally. I also examined some of the ways in which co-operative citizenship and community were inflected by their location within peripheral London areas. The attempt by the London Co-operative Society to extend its trade and influence into central London, discussed in Chapter 2, demonstrated some of the interrelationships between co-operative trade and co-operative ideals, and suggested that a preoccupation with trade matters within society management and committee records did not necessarily indicate a move away from co-operative ideals, but rather an understanding of the resources needed in order to pursue them, and that co-operative societies made the connections between the two explicit in a bid for loyal buying, and also in their efforts to gain positions for co-operators in London public life. Chapter 3 considered the significance of the Co-operative Commonwealth to London co-operators, and explored some of the ways in which co-operative idealism has been assessed, suggesting that the consumer-citizen was a potential citizenship available to ordinary co-operators which embodied aspects of the transformed society promised by the Co-operative Commonwealth. In Chapter 4, I stressed that the education of the co-operative citizen should be considered in the broadest sense, illustrating the educative possibilities of participation in the movement, and showing some of the ways in which co-operative citizenship was taught, and expressed through, co-operative classes, activities, and wider educative practices such as political campaigning.

Co-operation in London is a very small and specific case-study, yet the high levels of membership, involvement in debates concerning the 'moral economy' (especially around food) and the raising of the profile of co-operation in London due to the creation and subsequent growth of the London Co-operative Society, are all strong claims for the significance of London co-operation in the immediate post-war moment. This specific, local study offers a contribution to existing and more wide-ranging historiographies. In terms of urban history, this study suggests that the historiographical lens of the 'urban variable' which focuses upon the ways in which "particular historical episodes and processes are shaped by their specifically urban condition" can be helpful in understanding both the uneven spread of co-operation within London as a whole, and the relationship between the Stratford and Edmonton Societies and their places of origin.[1] As Richard Dennis has argued, the ways in which spaces have been understood and used are "products of political, economic, social and cultural processes", so that the relationships between these processes have helped to influence the shape of London co-operative endeavour. He has also insisted that space is active in shaping new identities, while Kenny and Madgin suggest that the urban variable can help to uncover the relationships between mental and physical landscapes in the urban setting.[2] In examining co-operation within the context of changing local boundaries and affiliations, this study draws on these ideas by suggesting not only the possibility of nested identities, but also the superimposition of distinct geographies of locality, one upon another, with communities and localities based on ideas as much as on administrative and topographical features.

This study responds to a call within co-operative history for more local studies, building on the comparative work of Nicole Robertson, and contributing to a growing understanding of the diversity of co-operative forms and practices within a national and international movement.[3] It also begins to address the neglect of London and its periphery; this neglect is found not only in co-operative history

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[1] Kenny and Madgin, *Cities*, p10

[2] R. Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Newcastel, 2007) p1 ; Kenny and Madgin, *Cities*, p23

[3] Webster

but also in many wider studies of civic pride and local identity, which have tended to focus upon provincial towns at an earlier historical moment.[4] Existing work on the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society by John Attfield is a significant exception. But because it analyses local identity in relation to co-operation rather than to civic structures, and because it is part of a long co-operative tradition of commemorative, jubilee and centenary histories, it has, perhaps, been overlooked. It situates co-operative activity (and particularly educational activity, for which the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society was famous) within a local cultural milieu linked to its history, industry and riverside location, and thus contributes to the understanding of local identities on London's periphery.[5] A similar study of co-operation in West London, and especially in Battersea, would help to illuminate the specificities of the fourth point of strength for co-operation in the capital, as well as the interrelationships between co-operation and municipal life.

Co-operative historians have repeatedly puzzled over the ideological motivation and commitment of rank and file co-operators, of whom so little is known. The customary reliance on quantitative approaches to this question, so that the amount spent by each member and the number of those voting and attending meetings is used to indicate the depth of commitment to co-operative ideals, perhaps results from the preoccupation with these measurements by co-operative societies themselves in the past. Their own concerns with the success or failure of their societies were frequently expressed through trading and voting figures. However, these were only some of the indices of co-operative citizenship. How people thought and felt is impossible to quantify, but this study suggests that a much broader sense of potential co-operative citizenship is at least implied by the Co-operative Commonwealth ideal. For example, the design of specific co-operative spaces, the presence in the home of co-operatively branded and packaged goods, and the cultural, mental and psychological development offered through the educative processes of participation, association and formal instruction, all refer (directly or indirectly) to the possibilities of transformed social and

[4] Georgiou, 'Only a Local Affair', p1
[5] John Attfield, *With Light of Knowledge*

economic arrangements in a post-capitalist society. Taking account of these citizenship possibilities also enables a discussion of gendered co-operative citizenship which is not limited to the Women's Co-operative Guild, an impressive and influential organisation but one which never commanded membership of the majority of women co-operators. Understanding co-operative shoppers – mostly women – as consumer-citizens offers a mechanism for understanding the possible relationship between everyday purchasing decisions, an identification with particular values and morals, and a sense of citizenship, for co-operative women.

The inter-war period has become a popularly-used unit of historical investigation. It is useful in many ways. It offers a relatively short span of years with the defined beginning and ending that cataclysmic national events, which often produce dramatic effects on the social, cultural and economic life, can provide. Such a defined period can be very useful in helping us to identify and examine prominent themes, for example, that of citizenship. However, in studying co-operation, this kind of periodisation may lead to the elision of important distinctions between shorter time periods within the interwar years. This examination of a particular moment in co-operative history – the immediate post-war years – has argued that the years 1918-1925 had a particular character for London co-operation. The coming together of many variables, national and local, both within the co-operative movement and outside it, helped to structure a distinctive London co-operative citizenship which involved the representation of reconstructive opportunity, urban space, the mechanisms of urban government, and the ambition of London-wide expansion, as well as loyal buying and local educational opportunities, as multiple aspects of the Co-operative Commonwealth. We cannot know exactly how many co-operators enthusiastically accepted and inhabited the role of co-operative citizen in all its facets, being loyal buyers, propagandists for the movement, and formal or informal students of co-operation. We cannot know how many pinned their hopes for the future on the achievement of the Co-operative Commonwealth. We can say with certainty that membership of the London Co-operative Society grew considerably during that time and that the trading area of the society expanded and the number of stores increased, along with the range of other services

offered. [6] And I would argue that we can also recognise the ways in which different aspects of the movement, including retail spaces and practices, educational philosophy, and day to day society business, contributed to an outline of London Co-operative citizenship available to members through participation.

By 1925, there were significant shifts in many of the factors which had helped to structure co-operative citizenship in the previous years. Nationally, many of the political hopes and promises of the immediate post-war years were not fulfilled – and in fact, many of Lloyd George's promises made at the time of the 1918 election, and many of the hopes inferred from his reconstruction agenda began to be rolled back almost immediately, with industry and utilities quickly returned to private hands, the promised extension of secondary education suspended, and the so-called Geddes Axe falling heavily upon public expenditure in 1922.[7] Relations with the trade union movement had been somewhat dampened by the experience of the 1926 General Strike. This was supported in practical ways by the co-operative movement, as it had supported earlier strikes, but many societies were badly affected by the experience as their staff were called out on strike and supply lines, even those intended to supply food to strikers, were disrupted. Many in the movement were also disappointed that those assisted did not become loyal and committed co-operators afterwards.[8]

Some aspects of local diversity were eroded by a centralising tendency within the movement, particularly in terms of retail expertise. Management became more professionalised, and management training more common.[9] Other areas of retail work were taken out of local hands. For example, a professionally-staffed Co-operative Publicity Department, set up in 1926, increasingly

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[6] "new records in capital, membership and sales" were reported in London Co-operative Society,*Quarterly Report for Thirteen Weeks ended December 5th, 1925* pp2-3. Membership stood at 150,025.

[7] The Geddes Axe was the name given to the recommendations of the Committee on National Expenditure chaired by Sir Eric Geddes. Chris Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour:The Post-War Coalition 1918-1922* (Hertfordshire, 1990) p309

[8] Peter Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester, 1996)

[9] Ref Pushpa

directed promotions and advertising policy, commissioning and distributing posters and promotional materials, so that local promotional materials and initiatives led by branch managers became rarer. This was followed, in the late 1930s, by a Market Research Department, whose research and analyses intervened in the customary expertise built up by branches about the customers in their immediate localities.[10] However, these innovations were not enough to prevent co-operative stores from struggling to accommodate the new "cultures of glamour" arising from the aspirational images offered by advertising and Hollywood film in the 1930s.[11] Charlotte Wildman argues that the co-operative movement distrusted this emerging culture of glamour which surrounded women's fashion, never fully embraced its retail potential, and acquired a dowdy image which deterred fashionable shoppers.[12]

In terms of trade and private competition, boycotts from manufacturers affected the ability of the co-operative stores to sell new consumer goods such as radios, and a co-operative model, the 'Defiant' could not compete with the increasing choice elsewhere.[13] The attacks on co-operation nationwide intensified with the creation, in 1930, of the National Organisations Co-ordinated Committee, which was an association of small-trader's groups who had combined specifically for the purpose of combating the threat to their trade from co-operation, and which called again for removal of tax exemption for co-operative societies. Ramsay Macdonald, who had a long association with the co-operative movement, and especially with the Stratford Society, had promised that he would not tax co-operative societies. However, the 1933 budget, although it retained the tax exemption for the dividend, brought in a tax on co-operative trading surplus.[14] This further strained

[10] Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'Innovation, modernisation, consumerism: the co-operative movement and the making of British advertising and marketing culture, 1890s-1960s' in Lawrence Black and Nicole Robertson (eds) *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History* (Manchester and New York, 2009) pp204-212

[11] Charlotte Wildman, *Urban Redevelopment and Modernity in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918-1939*, (London, 2016), p113

[12] C. Wildman, *Urban Redevelopment*, pp 135-136

[13] P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, p229

[14] Neil Killingback, 'Limits to Mutuality; Economic and political Attacks on co-operation during the 1920s and 1930s' in Stephen Yeo, ed., *New Views of Co-operation*, (London, 1988), pp217-224. W.H.Brown states that Macdonald had given assistance to both the Stratford and the Edmonton Societies in educational matters. The

co-operative societies as they tried to recover from the economic crash of 1929-31 and the subsequent depression.[15]

Within the context of an increasingly unstable international situation, especially in the 1930s, and fears about the rise of extremism on the Left and the Right, the use of radical language about the replacement of capitalism, which had been so boldly and unapologetically employed when the London Co-operative Society was formed, quietened somewhat within the movement. [16] There were still calls for the Co-operative Commonwealth, but these began to be balanced with a rather more conservative narrative of co-operation as a bulwark against revolution. By 1936, T.W. Mercer, although he still positioned co-operation as an alternative to capitalism, and identified the beginnings of the Co-operative Commonwealth in existing co-operative practices, was also arguing that the wealth held by co-operative societies in terms of property and the combined dividends of members was "one of the surest guarantees against any danger of revolutionary upheaval in Great Britain" and "a system of social insurance for which the state itself pays nothing".[17] Co-operative citizenship was here presented by Mercer as something more cautious, with the implication that those with a financial investment in co-operation, and thus a measure of personal security, would be unlikely to ferment the revolutionary upheaval so feared by some in the years before the Second World War. This only serves to highlight the significance of the earlier period as a distinctive moment, when social and economic transformation was openly sought. For this brief moment, London co-operative citizenship offered a potential model through which co-operative membership, at whatever level, might contribute to the transformation of society and the replacement of capitalism with the Co-operative Commonwealth.

London Co-operative Society supported his political campaigning, for example lending two co-operative cars in March 1921. W.H.Brown, *Century*, p166

[15] C. Wildman, *Urban Redevelopment*, p135

[16] See, for example, J.Maton in *Edmonton Co-operative Society Report and Agenda for Half-Yearly General meeting of Shareholders*, 1920, p3. Maton declared unequivocally that the aim of co-operation was to replace capitalism.

[17] T.W.Mercer, *Towards the Co-operative Commonwealth* (London, 1936), p 198

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