

# Co-operation in Oxfordshire, 1860–1913

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Until recently historians seeking an understanding of retail co-operation had to rely primarily on general or outdated studies.<sup>1</sup> In 1976 Patricia Hollis observed that 'we still need a rounded account of co-operation' and nearly two decades later John Walton could still lament the subject's 'limited visibility to many historians'.<sup>2</sup> Currently, however, the topic is attracting renewed interest and this has generated a welcome expansion of the literature. Several issues have emerged, but two stand out. One, addressed by Martin Purvis, concerns the process of geographical diffusion of co-operation, and the other, explored by Peter Gurney, is the process by which co-operation's idealistic and radical challenge to capitalism was eroded over the course of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>3</sup> Detailed regional analysis is beginning to shed light on these matters, though the number of studies is as yet quite small.<sup>4</sup> It is to augment this body of material that the present investigation has been undertaken.

The choice of locality is not arbitrary. Although sustained co-operative activity in Oxfordshire dates only from the mid-1860s, the county subsequently became one of the most active centres in the south of England. Further, whilst Oxfordshire co-operative societies were heterogeneous in character, they nevertheless constituted a coherent group, interlinked by membership of the influential Oxford District of the Co-operative Union. Their substantial contribution to national co-operative ideology and practice serves to confirm that strong, innovative co-operation was by no means confined to industrial and, predominantly, northern towns.

The spatial and chronological development of co-operation in Oxfordshire is summarised in Figure 1 and Table 1.<sup>5</sup> By 1911 co-operation extended to approximately one Oxfordshire family in three, making it the eleventh highest proportion among English counties and the second highest in the south.<sup>6</sup> Membership stood at around 15,400, of whom 59 per cent belonged to the Oxford Co-operative and Industrial Society,

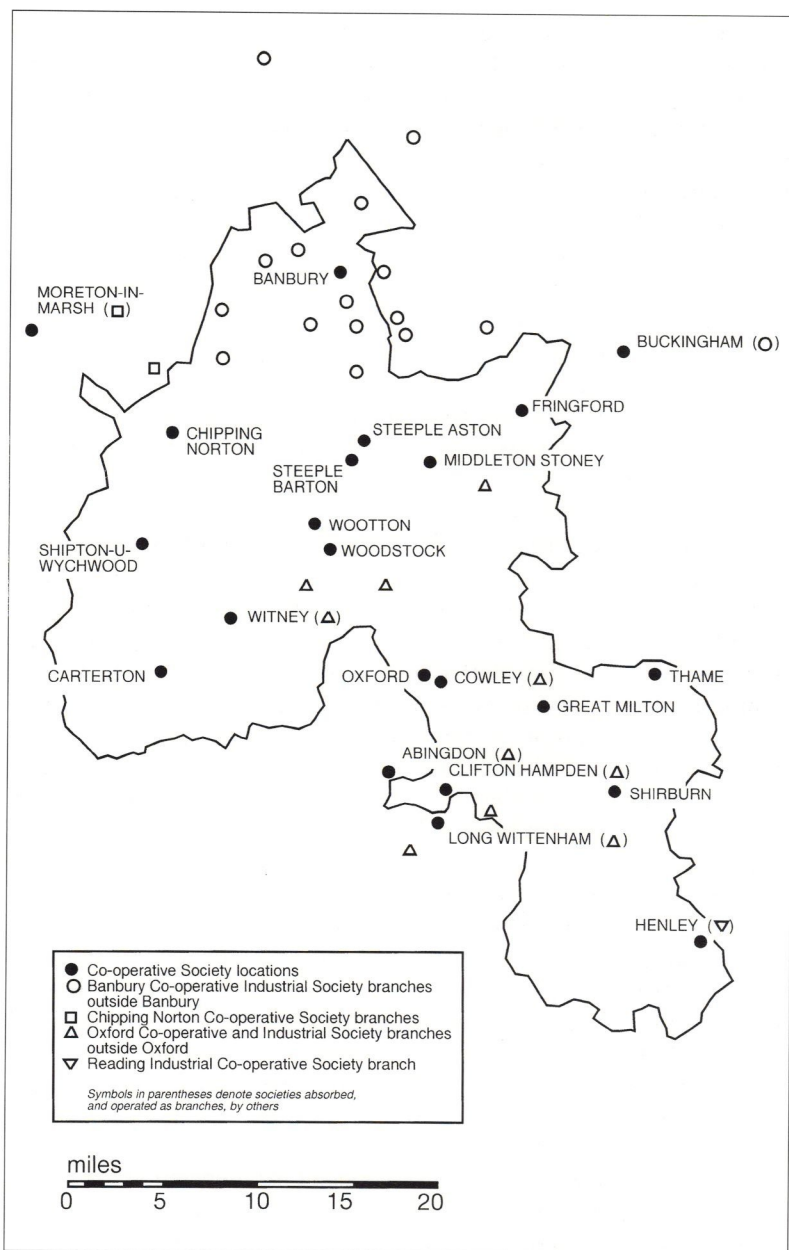


Figure 1: Geographical Distribution of Retail Co-operative Activity in Oxfordshire, 1860–1913.

whilst two other urban societies, the Banbury Co-operative Industrial, and the Chipping Norton Co-operative, contributed 25 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. Three village societies at Steeple Aston, Middleton Stoney and Carterton accounted for the remainder.<sup>7</sup> As Table 1 shows, this position had been achieved by more than half a century of co-operative endeavour in which these, and several other societies defunct by 1911, had participated. Their experience prompts a number of questions. Why were societies established in particular locations and at particular times? Why did some survive and others fail? Who were the leaders and members and what were their motives? How did co-operation relate to other working class movements? How was co-operation perceived by the middle and upper classes? To what extent and for what reasons did co-operative objectives change over time? These questions are not merely of local importance, for answers at regional level can greatly enhance understanding of co-operation as a national phenomenon.

Co-operation was not entirely new to Oxfordshire in 1860. The 1794 Mongewell store, described in Holyoake's *History of Co-operation*, was essentially a paternalistic, rather than co-operative, enterprise, but the Owenite phase of co-operation was represented in 1829–30 by a short-lived Oxford society and, for around three years from 1852, Banbury plush weavers ran a co-operative grocery store in conjunction with an attempt at co-operative production following a strike.<sup>8</sup> Nationally, the well-publicised success of the Rochdale Pioneers after 1844 rejuvenated flagging co-operative spirits, and more than 130 new societies were established between 1844 and 1859.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps three quarters were in the northern counties of Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire and excepting a few isolated outposts, co-operation remained absent from the south-midlands and southern England. However, at the end of the 1850s a sharp increase in foundations occurred, with more than five hundred societies formed over the next decade. Around 60 per cent of them lay outside the north-west, as knowledge of co-operation spread more widely across the country. This diffusion was not, though, a gradual outward radiation. Rather it was a broadly simultaneous response in different localities to what was perceived as the phenomenal success of northern societies. Apart from a few evangelists, northern co-operators were too preoccupied with their own affairs to take an active interest in other regions, but in Oxfordshire, as elsewhere, pamphlets such as *Co-operative Advantages, as Realised by the Good Folk of Rochdale*, and the propagandist *Co-operator*, founded in Manchester in 1860, were obtainable, and several societies had 'got at their head keen men of the North' who had migrated to the county, bringing with them valuable knowledge and experience.<sup>10</sup> A powerful myth grew around the northern societies and their

**Table 1: Chronology of Oxfordshire Retail Co-operative Societies 1860-1913.**

| Society                                                         | Dates Extant                       | Peak Membership |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Adelaide Equitable and Industrial (Oxford)                      | 1860-1863                          | Unknown         |
| Oxford (university museum builders)                             | 1860-1863                          | Unknown         |
| Witney Industrial Co-operative                                  | 1865-1867                          | 28 (1867)       |
| Woodstock Industrial and Provident                              | 1865-1867                          | 44 (1866)       |
| Banbury Co-operative Industrial                                 | 1866-1913+                         | 3,912 (1912)    |
| Chipping Norton Co-operative                                    | 1866-1913+                         | 2,191 (1913)    |
| Fringford Co-operative                                          | c. 1868-1869                       | Unknown         |
| Shirburn Co-operative                                           | 1869-1906                          | 59 (1899)       |
| Oxford Co-operative and Industrial                              | 1872-1913+                         | 9,662 (1913)    |
| Shipton-under-Wychwood Co-operative Industrial and Provident    | 1872-c. 1887                       | 56 (1873)       |
| Thame Industrial Co-operative                                   | 1873-1874                          | Unknown         |
| Steeple Aston Co-operative Industrial                           | 1872-1913+                         | 261 (1912)      |
| Steeple Barton Co-operative                                     | 1873-c. 1880                       | 47 (1879)       |
| Cowley Co-operative and Industrial                              | 1876-1879<br>(absorbed by Oxford)  | 77 (1876)       |
| Henley Industrial Co-operative                                  | 1876-1882<br>(absorbed by Reading) | 35 (1880)       |
| Oxford Mutual Supply                                            | 1879-c. 1881                       | 67 (1880)       |
| Middleton Stoney Co-operative                                   | 1882-1913+                         | 103 (1902)      |
| Witney Co-operative and Industrial                              | 1888-1899<br>(absorbed by Oxford)  | 178 (1894)      |
| Great Milton                                                    | c. 1891-1892                       | Unknown         |
| Wootton                                                         | c. 1891-1892                       | Unknown         |
| Clifton Hampden Co-operative                                    | 1893-1897<br>(absorbed by Oxford)  | 72 (1896)       |
| Carterton and District Agricultural and Industrial Co-operative | 1907-1913+                         | 69 (1907)       |
| Oxford Food Reform                                              | 1909-10                            | Unknown         |

achievements were frequently vaunted in the letter columns of Oxfordshire newspapers; 'We have only to visit the stores in the ... North, to be assured that co-operation is a power which the working classes should

cling to as their sheet anchor', enthused a correspondent to the *Oxford Times* in 1869, citing the success of Manchester and Oldham societies.<sup>11</sup> And in 1888 an advertisement in the *Witney Gazette* prominently displayed the impressive dividends paid by the Mirfield (Yorkshire) Society, announced that it was 'managed by a Witney man', and called on the 'working men of Witney and District' to 'join the Witney Co-operative and Industrial Society, and help to bring about similar results'.<sup>12</sup>

In the absence of effective national leadership before the creation of the Central Board in 1870, and indeed for many years thereafter, acquisition of co-operative information depended largely on local initiative. Purvis argues that in regions with an urban-dominated settlement hierarchy, initial diffusion was likely to be outwards from towns to surrounding communities, whilst in regions comprising independent neighbourhoods, societies might develop autonomously at an early stage.<sup>13</sup> In Oxfordshire, both mechanisms operated, though even together they do not provide a complete explanation, since local circumstances often determined the level of interest within a particular town or village.

The earliest societies appear to have originated independently of each other. The first, the Adelaide Equitable and Industrial, was established in 1860 by group of Oxford working men who had been in the habit of meeting 'to discuss the current news and, in general, to educate themselves' and, at about the same time, another was formed by workmen employed in building the University Museum.<sup>14</sup> Five years later, societies were established in Witney, by 'a little band of working men' and also in Woodstock; in 1866 co-operation was extended to Banbury.<sup>15</sup> Of these early foundations, only Banbury survived. The two Oxford societies merged in 1863 but were dissolved shortly afterwards, the remaining stock being distributed among the members by ballot, and the first Witney co-operators, with 'very little knowledge ... to guide them' and in the face of 'much opposition from the middle class', soon abandoned their scheme.<sup>16</sup> Woodstock got off to a good start, with a membership of forty-four and sales of more than £2,200 in its first full year – compared with just twenty-eight members and sales of £514 at Witney – and in 1866 the *Oxford Times* was able to report that 'the society continues in a healthy and prosperous condition'.<sup>17</sup> But the situation quickly changed, for sales slumped by £1,000 in the next year and in February 1868 the society collapsed. It had become, the former secretary admitted,

hopelessly insolvent ... not a shilling of their capital is ever likely to be returned to shareholders and the accounts of book debts are in such a confused and complicated state, through the carelessness of successive

managers that it is almost impossible to estimate the exact position of the affair.<sup>18</sup>

The failure of these early societies was hardly surprising in view of the lack of business acumen and retailing experience of their promoters, the hostility of private traders, and the reluctance of people to join an enterprise whose principles they ill-understood. But one society, Banbury, was able to overcome these difficulties. At the end of its first year it had a membership of ninety and a year later this had risen to 222. By 1870 sales had reached £15,171 and membership had grown to 793.<sup>19</sup> Banbury's success subsequently played a key role in the dissemination of co-operation not merely in Oxfordshire but widely across the country. Its influence reached far beyond the county through regular reports in *The Co-operator*, national lecture tours by its leaders, a postal advice service, and via the well-known *Banbury Tracts*; the latter explained the advantages of co-operation in a series of simple 'popular' fiction sketches and were distributed nationally with print runs of around 30,000. Soon after its formation, the Banbury Society began to advise and encourage prospective co-operators in neighbouring communities and it was instrumental in the creation of several societies locally, including Chipping Norton, Oxford and Steeple Aston. Under its first secretary, John Butcher, Banbury was especially keen to extend the advantages of co-operation to agricultural labourers, and this resulted in the establishment of a remarkable string of small village branches. It was Banbury too which pioneered inter-society association by organising the first conference of midland societies in 1872, thus anticipating the 1873 national reorganisation into regional sections each divided into districts.

A second society which took on a 'missionary' role, though never quite with the zeal of Banbury, was the Oxford Co-operative and Industrial. Founded in 1872, its energies were initially devoted to building up membership within the city but from the late 1880s, with around 1,500 members, it began to extend its sphere of influence, partly through the creation of new branches outside Oxford, but also by taking over of a number of struggling local societies at Clifton Hampden, Witney and, just across the county boundary, Abingdon and Long Wittenham. Oxford overtook Banbury in terms of membership in 1889, though not in terms of sales until 1903. By 1913, it had grown to become a major enterprise with a share capital of more than £100,000, owned by 9,662 members, and sales totalling £189,366.<sup>20</sup>

Even where Banbury or Oxford lent their support, the initial motivation for society foundation usually came from within a community. Occasionally, societies originated by chance rather than planning, as for

example, Chipping Norton which evolved from the success of what had been intended as a one-off bulk purchase of coal by a group of working men in the town.<sup>21</sup> Even Banbury, according to one account, originated from the unanticipated surplus accruing to a Christmas meat club.<sup>22</sup> Other foundations were prompted by specific factors, such as Middle Barton which seems to have been an offshoot of the local branch of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union and whose first quarterly meeting closed with 'three cheers for co-operation and the union'.<sup>23</sup> The very short-lived Oxford Mutual Supply came into existence in consequence of divisions within the existing Oxford society, and Carterton was founded to combine the supply of agricultural materials with retail co-operation by a newly created settlement of small-holders. But whether co-operation came to a community by chance or design, there still had to be one or more 'prime movers'. In towns it was almost inevitable that eventually somebody from within the skilled working class would set the process in motion, but the introduction of co-operation to villages, either as branches of one of the town societies or as independent enterprises, often depended on middle or even upper-class initiative. Thus, Steeple Aston, the most dynamic of Oxfordshire village societies, was created largely through the efforts of the village schoolmaster, and the vicar took the leading role in the establishment of the Banbury Society's Sibford Gower branch. At Long Hanborough the Oxford branch store was financed by the Duke of Marlborough, many of whose estate workers lived in the village, whilst the Middleton Stoney Society was established by the Earl of Jersey whose seat was Middleton Park.

Closely related to the issue of diffusion is the question why some societies succeeded whilst others failed. Purvis identifies a range of community characteristics unfavourable to co-operation, including economic decline, irregular wages, lack of occupational coherence, residential dispersal of working people, and a dominance of small-scale industries in which the prospect of becoming a small master made individualism more attractive than mutual association.<sup>24</sup> The best prospects for co-operation, he concludes, occurred in 'middle-ranking industrial settlements', or 'centres in which the social climate most favoured independent exercise of group initiative by workers'.<sup>25</sup> On evidence from the north-west, Walton suggests that co-operation, at least in its early years, was likely to be most successful in communities with an established tradition of working class action. He also sees links with well-paid and regular employment, enabling people to save whilst spending and to pay a little more for unadulterated goods, and with communities that were expanding quickly enough to require additional retail services but not so fast as to lose their sense of identity.<sup>26</sup>

Some of these characteristics are observable in the Oxfordshire evidence. For example, the extraordinary dynamism of Banbury may have derived from the town's strong radical heritage, and the eventual dominance of Oxford can be accounted for by the city's demographic and economic expansion.<sup>27</sup> However, co-operation could also succeed in small villages where wages were low and population stagnant, and its failure in some towns, like Witney and Henley, was equally possible. In Oxfordshire, most society failures occurred at a very early stage in their development. Several attempts, including some in likely locations such as Wheatley, Charlbury and Burford, never even progressed beyond initial discussions, whilst the society at Thame, though formally registered, collapsed before it could commence trading. The Wootton and Great Milton enterprises survived for only a few months and the co-operatives at Fringford, Steeple Barton, Cowley, Henley and Clifton Hampden lasted only a few years, as did the early foundations mentioned above, and two later Oxford attempts.<sup>28</sup> Shipton and the second Witney society struggled more or less continually for a little over a decade and only one eventual failure, Shirburn, had a reasonably respectable lifespan of thirty-seven years.

The key prerequisite for co-operative survival was the presence of effective leadership; successful societies, whether in town or village, were led by men who combined enthusiasm and dedication with managerial skill. Without competent management a society would fail, as happened at Steeple Barton where in 1881 it was reported that 'there is no secretary, no committee, or society; the society has dwindled away to nothing'.<sup>29</sup> A second factor was the degree of support given by local people. For example, membership of the Shipton Society reached only around a quarter of the village households and that of Shirburn, for much of its life, about half. In contrast, Middleton Stoney had 'an almost guaranteed trade' in the village, and it was reported of Steeple Aston in 1898 that 'it cannot increase much more, as nearly the whole village is included in its membership'.<sup>30</sup> A minimum membership was necessary for commercial viability, to spread fixed costs, enable bulk stock purchase and withstand misfortune. Thus, the small Clifton Hampden Society never recovered from a flood which destroyed much of its stock shortly after its foundation and it had to be taken over, as a branch, by Oxford. A third influence was the strength of opposition of private traders. Most co-operators had to contend with some degree of hostility, particularly in their early stages, with private traders undercutting prices and persuading wholesalers to refuse to supply the co-operators with goods. In some localities, such as Chipping Norton, opposition was short-lived and largely ineffective, but elsewhere it could cause serious problems. At

Steeple Aston, for example 'fierce organised opposition' caused a slump in sales and profit in the late 1880s, whilst at Witney a sustained campaign by local traders almost stifled co-operative enterprise entirely, forcing the society's rescue by Oxford.<sup>31</sup> Finally, local economic circumstances had a bearing on co-operation's fortunes. Societies at Oxford and, to a lesser extent, at Banbury and Chipping Norton, benefitted from their location in growing towns with diverse economies. But at Witney, 'the depression of local industry [blanket making]' contributed to the society's demise whilst village societies and branches had to contend with agricultural depression and population decline.<sup>32</sup> 'In most country districts', the Oxford District Secretary reported to Congress in 1914, 'the tide of emigration is bearing away many of the most reliable members'.<sup>33</sup>

In town societies, co-operative leaders were typically skilled working men of exceptional drive and firm opinion. At Banbury, it was said in 1873 that 'John Butcher is the co-operative society and the co-operative society John Butcher'.<sup>34</sup> Originally a shoemaker, Butcher had been politically active in the Reform League in the mid-1860s and was a prominent member of Banbury's Temperance Society. His enthusiasm for co-operation predated his move to Banbury in 1863, and stemmed from dealings with the Rochdale Pioneers and having met Holyoake while previously employed at Buckingham. Butcher was 'an excellent accountant' who kept the society's books 'in a very able manner' until he left the town in 1873 to manage a CWS shoe works, established largely through his influence, in Leicester.<sup>35</sup> At Chipping Norton, whilst no single individual was dominant, the society could also draw upon men of uncommon ability. Reuben Burden was a joiner and small-scale builder and, like Butcher, an active temperance campaigner. In the 1902 town council election Burden 'had the audacity as a journeyman, with nothing but what he stood up in, to come forward as a candidate for the Chipping Norton Co-operative Society'. He was successful, and in 1906 he was elected mayor. Unfortunately, his contribution to co-operation, and to the town, was cut short by untimely death, whilst President of the society, in 1912.<sup>36</sup> At Oxford the driving force during the society's formative period was the trade unionist, George Hawkins, a compositor with the Clarendon Press. Hawkins was Secretary of the local Typographical Society branch and was instrumental in the creation of the Oxford Trades Council. He served as a Liberal city councillor and in 1893 became one of the first working men on the city magistrates' bench. Like Butcher, he was a strong advocate of the CWS, for which he left Oxford in 1899 to become London Branch Chairman. But before his departure, his contribution to co-operation had already been acknowledged by an invitation to preside at the 1893 National Co-operative

Congress.<sup>37</sup> Village societies did not have working men of the calibre of Butcher, Burden and Hawkins at their helm, though in these, as indeed in the town societies, a supporting role was often taken by dedicated and principled artisans and labourers. And the middle-class village co-operative leaders might also be untiring in their efforts. Of Steeple Aston, for example, it was written in 1882 that 'its success may in a great measure be attributed to self-denying exertions of its Secretary who has held the office from the Society's foundation'.<sup>38</sup> This was John Neale, schoolmaster, who as well as managing the society's affairs over a twenty-year period was a keen propagandist and regular attendee at District conferences, several of which were held, at his instigation, in the village.

Relatively little is recorded of the membership composition of Oxfordshire societies. In villages, co-operation might range across a broad spectrum of inhabitants, though some sections or even families could dominate. At Shipton, for example, a leading role was played by the Coombes family, the village carpenters, who contributed a quarter of the twenty-four members remaining at the society's dissolution.<sup>39</sup> In towns, members' occupations reflected the local industrial character. For example, several of those on the committee of the first Witney society, and the secretary of the second, worked in the blanket factories.<sup>40</sup> Chip-ping Norton's early members were 'principally factory operatives' employed, presumably, at the town's tweed mill, whilst in the mid-1870s, many town members of the Banbury Society worked at Samuelson's engineering works.<sup>41</sup> For Oxford, a members' nomination book survives for 1873 to 1903, and although only a fraction of the members is included, predominantly those with city addresses, it gives a good indication of urban occupational distribution.<sup>42</sup> The main categories are summarised in Table 2. Males within each occupational category were mostly skilled, such as carpenters (sixteen), joiners and cabinet makers (sixteen), tailors (ten), compositors (ten), masons (eight), shoemakers (four). Only twelve 'labourers' are recorded. At the other end of the spectrum, there were just twelve professional males, including farmers (three), schoolmasters (three) and one 'gentleman'. For females, the primary occupations were dressmakers (ten) and laundresses (five). Whether overall female society membership matched the nomination book's 30 per cent is uncertain, since there may be gender bias in decisions to make nominations and the membership pattern outside the city may have been different. Many women nominated their children, suggesting that some were widows and household heads, but the absence of occupations for most females and the fact that a substantial number nominated husbands indicates that a family's membership was not necessarily effected through men.

**Table 2. Membership Occupations of Oxford Co-operative and Industrial Society 1873-1903.**

| Occupation         | Number | Occupation                   | Number |
|--------------------|--------|------------------------------|--------|
| Males Woodworkers  | 33     | Males Miscellaneous          | 9      |
| Males Building     | 23     | Males Retailing              | 8      |
| Males University   | 20     | Males Misc. Commercial       | 8      |
| Males Clothing     | 15     | Males Misc. Skilled          | 7      |
| Males Printing     | 14     | Males Servants               | 6      |
| Males Professional | 12     | Males No Occupation Stated   | 13     |
| Males Railways     | 12     | Females Clothing             | 15     |
| Males Labourers    | 12     | Females Other Employed       | 9      |
| Males Engineering  | 10     | Females No Occupation Stated | 66     |

Source: Members' Nomination Book.

In villages, membership spread over a wider cross section of the community, encompassing not just skilled workers, but also, and perhaps predominantly, agricultural labourers. Thus, in 1911 Steeple Aston was 'a typical village society, most of its (261) members getting their living off the land', whilst in 1895 it was estimated that agricultural occupations accounted for half of the Banbury Society's 2,041 members, a reflection of its rural branch network.<sup>43</sup> Such figures serve to underline the fact that successful co-operation was by no means confined to the better-off sections of the working class.

Much recent debate has focused on the objectives of co-operators. As in all movements which attracted large-scale support, these differed among individuals and, particularly, between leaders and followers. Whilst, though, the aims of both must be examined for a full understanding, it was the leaders who had most influence on the local character of co-operation. With no effective central authority for most of the period, co-operation in Oxfordshire remained a loose association of autonomous societies with differing philosophies and priorities, features evident even within the societies themselves. The most radical co-operators were driven by a sense of the profound injustice of a society in which 'the upper and middle classes have ... combined ... to take everything they could from the working man' and they aspired to 'nothing less than the complete salvation of Labour from all *wealth patronage and control*'. In essence, they sought 'the abolition of individualism, private enterprise, roguery and wrong', and its replacement by communal capitalism under which people 'should feel an interest in each other and not try to defraud each other as now'.<sup>44</sup> Thus, it was not to capitalism *per se* that the radicals

objected, but to 'the mad system of competition' which concentrated capital in 'such few but heavy lumps'.<sup>45</sup> The problem was how to bring about the necessary change. 'Capital must be met with capital' argued Banbury co-operators around 1870. 'It was necessary, if the workers desired to control capital, for them to own it'.<sup>46</sup> Yet, apart from a tiny minority who threatened 'violent, bloody, destructive revolution' as the only alternative to co-operation, the radicals firmly believed that the transformation should be achieved by consensus, operating within the rules of the existing social and economic system.<sup>47</sup> Individual capitalists could not be dispossessed since their wealth had been acquired 'in a lawful manner and under such circumstances, they must not go and take it from them'.<sup>48</sup> The only option therefore was to devote the surplus from retail co-operation 'to steadily accumulate capital to ... acquire the means of production in our hands'.<sup>49</sup> 'We want co-operation to extend to the mine, and the factory, as well as to the shop', enthused a speaker at Middle Barton, 'then were co-operation universal in its operations we ... should all work together for the happiness of all'.<sup>50</sup>

Of course, the radicals were not so naive as to believe that the profits from retailing would ever suffice to bring about universal community capitalism. This was never a practical goal, rather it was the ideal from which they drew inspiration. Even less ambitious projects for co-operators to form their own settlements, such as that which had initially motivated the Rochdale Pioneers, were, by the 1860s, recognised as impractical. But this does not imply that the radicals were content to limit their exertions to shopkeeping. As John Butcher admitted, if co-operation were 'simply confined to the establishment of provision stores', claims that it could transform the lives of working people would be 'preposterous'.<sup>51</sup> To 'so far change the condition of the labouring classes, that hard times would never come again', co-operators 'must do the same as had been done in ... France and Germany, where the working men in their co-operative societies were becoming large manufacturers'.<sup>52</sup> Co-operative production was, thus, essential to their scheme. This, though, raised questions over the appropriate relationship between production and the retail societies. Banbury, having failed to interest neighbouring societies in a proposed federal flour-milling venture, began milling as early as 1875. By 1900 its sales of flour to other co-operative societies across the midlands and south exceeded £21,000. Banbury also engaged in farming, as did Chipping Norton, and in 1901 the latter's total of 214 acres was the seventh largest of all societies in the country.<sup>53</sup> But there was constant debate over whether the profits on these enterprises should go to the workers by whose labour they were generated or whether they belonged to the parent society.<sup>54</sup> The latter view prevailed, though it failed to

silence recurrent complaints over the small profits, or sometimes losses, of productive activities in which large capital investment was tied up. This probably explains why direct involvement in production never developed further, and why leading advocates of co-operative production, like Butcher and Hawkins, put their faith in the CWS rather than in individual societies.

Whilst the radicals retained their distant vision of a co-operative millennium, one of the most immediate attractions of co-operation, to them as to many other activists, lay in its potential to raise the status of working people within the existing system. Co-operation meant 'the political and social equality of all citizens ... a well educated mind, a rightly developed soul, and a well understood purpose and fulfilment of life'.<sup>55</sup> It would 'elevate them in the social scale and the day would come when they would be thought a great deal more of than they are now'.<sup>56</sup> To a degree this would be achieved directly through association with co-operative activity with its implicit principles of self-help, thrift and responsibility, but emphasis was also placed on formal education. As early as 1869, Banbury resolved to allocate 2.5 per cent of its profits to an education fund 'to be deployed in diffusing information by means of tracts, lectures, reading rooms, library &c.'. <sup>57</sup> Chipping Norton made its first allocation in 1877, admitting that 'we ought to have gone into this question before'; Oxford voted 1.25 per cent of profits to education in 1878, and raised it to 2.5 per cent in 1895. <sup>58</sup> A major stimulus to education was also given by the 1882 National Co-operative Congress which was held in Oxford. Oxford was then still primarily concerned to consolidate its own position and it was not the society but university academics, especially A. H. D. Acland of Christ Church, who brought Congress to the city. <sup>59</sup> The university extension movement had begun in the 1860s and in 1878 the Oxford Delegacy was created with Acland, as Secretary, responsible for organising and monitoring lecture courses. Acland had already established links with co-operators in the north and in Oxford, and he recognised in co-operation a channel through which large numbers of working people could be educated on issues of economic and social importance. This was the main theme of the 1882 congress. An influential paper was delivered by Arnold Toynbee, the Balliol historian, calling on co-operators to make fuller educational provision for citizenship, and the Central Board was prompted to appoint a committee, whose members included both Toynbee and Acland, to advise generally on educational work. A series of lecture tours was undertaken, but nationally 'the co-operative movement was never wooed and won' and even local societies 'were less enthusiastic than had been expected'. <sup>60</sup> The Oxford Society, for example, admitted that 'up to the close of 1880 nothing

beyond the carrying on of social meetings ... was attempted' and regretted that the lecture courses which had commenced 'through the instrumentality of Mr. Acland and other well known members of the University' had to be suspended 'through lack of funds'.<sup>61</sup> Banbury, too, struggled to maintain its educational programmes before the late-1880s, whilst even a decade later it could be lamented 'that several of the village societies refuse to take any part in educational work'.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, substantial progress was made after 1890, particularly by Oxford and Banbury, with the latter, for example, holding regular debating classes and organising lectures covering practical aspects of co-operation and also 'academic' topics from science, history and literature. These were open not only to men but also to members of the society's Women's Guild which, though small in numbers, was beginning to shift its focus from 'domestic' issues to women's educational improvement and their preparation for involvement in social and public affairs.

In addition to their concern for the moral condition and social status of working people, co-operative leaders were keen to improve their economic circumstances. To this end, members were encouraged to build up their savings by depositing their dividends in the society. Thus, in 1875 Banbury co-operators were advised to 'put their money into the stores instead of the savings bank'.<sup>63</sup> It was estimated that, on the basis of 15s. per week expenditure in the store and a dividend of 1s. 6d., they would get a return of £2 18s. 6d. from £50 spent, compared with 30s. from the bank.<sup>64</sup> Over time, simply by buying their provisions from their society and saving the dividend a substantial surplus could accrue. For example, in 1912 Oxford members had a total of £9,912 deposited in the society, whilst the bulk of shareholdings stood between £40 and £60.<sup>65</sup> An important potential use of these funds was the raising of a deposit for the purchase of a house, and given the poor quality of much working class housing in Oxfordshire, this could have a substantial impact on living standards. Societies gave encouragement to this by granting mortgages – in 1912 outstanding housing loans by Oxford totalled more than £44,000 to 205 members – and by, themselves, building houses for sale or rent.<sup>66</sup> By the 1890s, the capital funds of Oxfordshire town societies substantially exceeded the amount required for retail investment and Banbury, Oxford and Chipping Norton were all directing much of their surplus into housing. In 1913 Banbury's housing investment for rental in the town and in ten of its branch villages stood at £6,000, whilst even the small Steeple Aston Society had two cottages let to members.

Co-operative leaders were exceptional men, but they could not manage large town societies alone. Particularly during their early years, with little capital, limited stock and rented premises, societies relied heavily on

members' assistance. At Banbury 'the work of fitting the shop was done by members in the evenings' and at Oxford the committee acted as salesmen until the society could afford to employ a full-time shopkeeper.<sup>67</sup> Generally, the characteristics of society committees mirrored those of the membership, that in Oxford, for instance, being 'dominated by printing workers, workers from the building and allied trades, engineers and railwaymen'.<sup>68</sup> These men shared the leaders' dedication, often devoting great energy over many years to the service of their societies.<sup>69</sup> The majority of members, however, took no part in management and attendance at business meetings was usually small. Oxford's committee complained about 'the apathy at quarterly meetings and the difficulty of obtaining quorums', and the situation was little better at Banbury where attendance was often well below five per cent of the membership.<sup>70</sup> Disinterest was also evident in relation to educational activities; the low level of borrowing from the Banbury Society's library in 1872 did 'not speak much for the spirit of enquiry', and in 1883 Steeple Aston's planned establishment of a reading room had to be abandoned 'through the insubordinate conduct of several of the persons who attended and the general difficulty experienced in keeping order'.<sup>71</sup>

Societies attempted to combat the problem of apathy in several ways. In 1871 Banbury became the first in the country to publish a regular journal, the *Banbury Co-operative Record* 'to educate the members in the principles of co-operation'.<sup>72</sup> Delivered free to all members, the *Record* played a vital part in disseminating news of society events and contained detailed reports of meetings and explanations of the society's accounts, interspersed with short items of general interest. It was greatly admired by other societies and many took up the idea, including Oxford which introduced its own monthly *Record* in 1895. Societies also organised tea meetings, musical evenings and other entertainments, into which co-operative propaganda could unobtrusively be slipped. These events often attracted large audiences; six hundred were present at Oxford Town Hall in 1874 where tea and a concert accompanied a lecture on 'Co-operation Today'.<sup>73</sup> And most branches of the Banbury Society held their own social events which, with attendances sometimes in excess of a hundred, must have made a significant contribution to the cultural life of small rural communities. Indeed, all the larger societies offered a wide variety of social activities. Banbury members, for example, could by the 1880s participate in singing classes, orchestra, debating society, scientific lectures, flower show, children's party and annual excursions to seaside towns like Bournemouth and Llandudno. Admittedly, some events attracted more support than others but, for those who chose to become fully involved, co-operation could become a way of life.<sup>74</sup> Particular efforts

were made to attract female members. In part, these were prompted by practical considerations in that they 'had the sending of the basket to market', they decided whether to buy from the co-operative store or from private traders, but the Women's Guild branches established by Banbury, Chipping Norton and Oxford had the grander object of encouraging women 'to study the principles of co-operation ... and ... join in other movements having for their object social reform'.<sup>75</sup> Their membership was never large; in 1901 Banbury had a hundred and Oxford eighty-six, whilst Chipping Norton was tiny and 'in decline'. Nevertheless, the Guild played a significant part in raising the profile of working-class women, providing one of the relatively few opportunities for them to become involved in community affairs.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the best efforts of societies to promote interest in co-operative philosophy, it remained the case that for most people the principal incentives to membership were the material attractions of a well-stocked co-operative store and the pecuniary benefits of the dividend.<sup>77</sup> Access to the productive and distributive resources of the CWS enabled co-operative societies to supply a far wider variety of goods than most private retailers could offer. Both Banbury and Oxford were strong advocates of the CWS and even small societies, like Steeple Aston, might take up to half their supplies from this source.<sup>78</sup> Stock levels at Banbury and Oxford averaged about 15 per cent of annual sales throughout the period, and the range of commodities was extensive.<sup>79</sup> For example in 1913, Oxford stocked groceries (64 per cent of value of sales), drapery (7 per cent), bread (13 per cent), footwear (5 per cent) coal (4 per cent), tailoring (4 per cent), and furnishing and crockery (2 per cent), and whilst its branch shops did not stock the full range, goods could be supplied on order from the central stores.<sup>80</sup> Village societies, too, held an impressive selection of commodities, operating on somewhat higher stock ratios (around 19 per cent at Steeple Aston and Middleton Stoney). In 1910, for example, Steeple Aston supplied groceries, meat, drapery, footwear, crockery, patent medicines, ironmongery, bread, animal feeds, coal, garden seeds, machines 'of various kinds' and stationery, representing a much greater range than would be found in the typical village shop.<sup>81</sup>

An approximation of the weekly expenditure of each member can be gained by dividing total sales by membership. For Banbury, this figure stood between 10s. and 11s. for most of the 1870s, before following a rising trend in the 1880s to reach a peak of just above 17s. in 1891.<sup>82</sup> It then fell back, but remained between 11s. and 12s. in most subsequent years. Weekly sales per member at Chipping Norton were fairly stable at slightly below 10s. from 1870 until just beyond the turn of the century, and they rose slowly to a little above 12s. in 1913. At Oxford, however,

sales were markedly lower throughout the entire period, ranging between 7s. and 9s., possibly reflecting the less close-knit community in the large county town. Among village societies, Steeple Aston's sales also fluctuated between 7s. and 9s., whilst Middleton Stoney attracted expenditure between 10s. and 12s. per week until the mid-1890s, and 8s. to 10s. thereafter. At Shirburn, too, sales stood at a healthy 10s. to 12s. until the mid-1880s, but after the mid-90s they were significantly smaller, averaging only 6s. 7d. in the decade prior to the society's dissolution. Sales at Shipton, another struggling village society, were even lower, averaging just 5s. 5d. and only once exceeding 8s. over its short lifetime (1872-c.1887).

The above figures represent sales at current prices. To obtain expenditure in real terms they should be adjusted by a price index in which goods are weighted according to the pattern of members' expenditure. Unfortunately, no satisfactory index exists, though the Sauerbeck index of food prices, which fell almost continuously from 100 in 1875 to sixty-two in 1896, before slowly recovering to eighty-one in 1912, suggests a substantial rise in real expenditure in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but a much less buoyant trend thereafter.<sup>83</sup> A second complication arises from the fact that sales figures include purchases by non-members and dividing sales by members alone therefore results in an overestimate. The error would not be large if non-member sales were small but they were a significant proportion of the total, at least in town societies. At Banbury, for instance, non-member sales were a fifth of the total in 1899, and three years later they had risen to a third.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the figures are broadly consistent with the very few surviving records of actual sales to individuals. For example, in 1884, sales to members at Banbury varied across branches from just below 13s. per week to 7s. 9d., whilst non-member trade ranged from 7s. 8d. to 4s.<sup>85</sup> At a time when Banbury artisans were earning a little over £1 per week and local agricultural workers perhaps 12s. to 14s., this represented a substantial proportion of income and implies that almost all a member's weekly needs were met by the co-operative store.<sup>86</sup>

The level of members' sales was an important determinant of the dividends they received. In Oxfordshire, dividends never reached the high levels paid out by some of the large northern societies, where 3s. and more in the pound was not uncommon. In 1876 Banbury was advised by a northern co-operative leader that 'as a rule 2s. per £ is very good dividend ... Market prices will *not* give much more', a point that was reiterated twelve years later when George Hawkins advised the new Witney Society that 'they should not expect more than 1s. 6d. or 2s.; if they had more they might depend it was put on their goods [i.e. achieved

only by charging high prices!'.<sup>87</sup> Perennial disputes between committee members seeking to use the profits to expand co-operative activities and members who were more interested in the dividend characterised many societies. For example, in 1886 the Banbury members rejected their committee's proposed regular dividend of 1s. 6d. with anything over to be put into a reserve fund.<sup>88</sup> Generally, though, Oxfordshire dividends ranged between 1s. 6d. and 2s., suggesting that committees resisted membership pressure. Yet even these modest amounts were of considerable benefit to working people. The substantial non-member sales imply that co-operative prices were not significantly greater than those of private traders, and the return of 7.5 to 10 per cent on expenditure, amounting perhaps to 5 per cent of total income, therefore made an important net contribution to working class finances. The fact that this was paid in lump-sums was additionally advantageous as it represented, in effect, a regular saving which could be used for the acquisition of expensive items, perhaps even the deposit on a house.

Having explored the characteristics and objectives of Oxfordshire co-operators, the question of co-operation's local social context remains. This can be considered in two ways, first, the relationship between co-operators and members of other classes and, second, the position of co-operation within the working class itself.

In view of the fundamental social change implicit in radical co-operative ideology, it is perhaps surprising that the middle and upper classes were largely supportive. In villages, as has been seen, it was not uncommon for the vicar to play a leading role in establishing a society or branch. As the incumbent at Sibford Gower explained, 'they heard a great deal from pulpit and prayer desk about "brotherhood" and "mutual help", but he recognised in the Co-operative movement a genuine attempt to put such teaching into practice'.<sup>89</sup> At Steeple Aston the shop premises were purchased with a nominal interest loan from the vicar, and at Clifton Hampden the vicar's wife served as secretary. The upper class, too, actively assisted, at least in some places. The Duke of Marlborough instigated the formation of Oxford's Long Hanborough branch, giving the land on which the store was built and announcing that he would present any of his tenants with an eighth of an acre on which to build a cottage as soon as they had saved, through dividend or otherwise, sufficient for a mortgage advance.<sup>90</sup> Middleton Stoney was heavily reliant on Lord Jersey, described by George Hawkins as 'an excellent co-operator', and who on at least one occasion, bailed out the society when it had run into financial difficulties.<sup>91</sup> Such support reflected a genuine concern for the welfare of working people, but it was none the less essentially paternalistic and reflected a perception that co-operation, in practice,

posed no threat to the existing social structure. Thus, speaking at the third anniversary meeting of the Banbury Society in 1869, the town's MP and leading employer, Bernhard Samuelson, confessed his reservation at being present, but so long as the society's objective was the co-operative supply of food 'he ought ... not to hesitate in giving it that amount of countenance ... which his presence might be supposed to confer'.<sup>92</sup> This was not, of course, the society's sole objective, but co-operation's non-confrontational approach to social transformation and its focus on improvement within the existing system was sufficient to allay the fears of the middle and upper classes. Generally their support was accepted, as it conferred both respectability and practical advantage. Banbury was 'always thankful to any gentleman in the higher walks of society who recognised the importance of this movement, and always appreciated any little assistance they felt disposed to render', but many members remained suspicious of the motives underlying such support and were careful to maintain their independence. Co-operation, they emphasised, was essentially 'a working man's question'.<sup>93</sup>

Co-operators were also keen to keep a distance between co-operation and other working-class movements, despite the fact that many members participated individually in the latter. In particular, trade unionism and national political campaigning were often viewed as rivals which could distract working people from the co-operative route to a better society. Admittedly, in the early 1870s there were links between co-operation and the agricultural labourers union, but even then the two competed for the support of rural workers. Thus, at a public meeting to inaugurate Banbury Society's Cropredy branch in June 1873, John Butcher claimed that

the labourers in the Banbury district had subscribed a large amount of money to the labourers' union ... but the whole of it appeared to him to be nearly sunk, and if the working men were just to invest their money in a co-operative undertaking with the same spirit as they invested it in other undertakings, they would get ten times return.<sup>94</sup>

This theme persisted. An Oxford District conference in 1894 resolved that 'co-operation is reasonable socialism', superior to trade unions and other working-class associations, and in the following year a Banbury debating class was informed that 'when the workshops are all co-operative there will be an end to all those disastrous strikes and lock-outs'.<sup>95</sup> A similar message was delivered to Oxford's members in 1912:

They all knew the powers of trade unionism and what it had done for the industrial classes, but co-operation could do more than this,

for it was not merely a fighting agent, as was trade unionism, but a constructive agent.<sup>96</sup>

Co-operation's reluctance to engage formally in national politics can be explained in part by a desire not to offend, given the spectrum of working people's political opinion in this formative period, and also by the wish to retain the sympathy of other classes. But the key factor, again, was a belief that working people could gain more from co-operation than from the ballot box and that political agitation was therefore a potential distraction. Society was in need of transformation, but 'if they waited till Parliament . . . would do it for them, it would never be done'.<sup>97</sup> The argument was well-summarised by the second *Banbury Tract* in which Tom Joyful, co-operator, meets Jack Sprag, working-class politician, in the market place. Sprag looks to government and politics, but Joyful argues that 'the cause of their misery lies deeper than any government measures can reach; and its removal, and the work of its removal, rest solely with the people themselves'.<sup>98</sup> It was only after the end of the century that co-operators nationally developed any real enthusiasm for direct formal political representation, recognising that the social environment had altered, that other working-class movements had made greater headway through political activity, and that influence with governments was necessary to protect their commercial interests. By then, though, it was too late for co-operation to establish itself as a significant independent political force.<sup>99</sup>

Co-operation's reservations concerning national politics initially also extended to involvement in local government. However, partly through realisation that the decisions of local authorities could have a considerable impact on working-class lives, and partly through awareness of societies' and members' often substantial contributions to the rates, co-operation was inevitably drawn into local politics. As early as 1872 the *Banbury Co-operative Record* was calling for the society's representation on the Town Council and Board of Health, though it was not until 1889 that two co-operators stood for election in the town.<sup>100</sup> Even then, the issue was controversial and the decision was opposed within and without the society. The two candidates therefore stood as individuals rather than official society representatives and explicit assurance was given that 'no member is under any obligation whatever to vote for a candidate because he is a member of the Society'.<sup>101</sup> Neither was successful, though one, H. R. Webb, was co-opted onto the council to fill a vacancy arising from the election of aldermen. Webb was not Oxfordshire's first co-operative councillor, for at Chipping Norton a co-operator had been elected in 1886, having issued a joint manifesto with three Liberal candidates who

were also successful. However, the main stimulus to local political involvement came from the 1894 Parish Councils Act.<sup>102</sup> In the subsequent elections several co-operators were elected in the county, including Banbury's branch managers in Middleton Cheney, Adderbury and Deddington. Thereafter, co-operators played a continuing role in local affairs, with some, such as Hawkins in Oxford and Burden in Chipping Norton, becoming leading members of their communities. It was difficult to secure election specifically as a co-operator and some stood as independents, some as Liberals and others as I.L.P. representatives. But, whatever party they sheltered within, their particular interest lay in issues such as education, housing, and smallholding and allotment provision, reflecting co-operators' fundamental concern with social and economic reform.<sup>103</sup>

This survey of Oxfordshire co-operation has explored and, hopefully, answered the questions posed at the outset. One issue, however, remains for consideration. The conventional view of late nineteenth and early twentieth century co-operation, fostered by G. D. H. Cole and Sidney Pollard, is that of a slide into dividend-orientated commercialism, or, at best, implied in different ways by other historians including Trygve Tholfsen, Geoffrey Crossick and Neville Kirk, as a working-class reformist influence within capitalist society.<sup>104</sup> Peter Gurney has recently challenged these interpretations, arguing that during this period co-operation 'opened up a specific range of historical possibilities, some of which were decidedly utopian in reach', and that the eventual outcome of today's consumerism 'was neither given nor inevitable'.<sup>105</sup> Each school of thought might claim support from the Oxfordshire evidence. Certainly, many ordinary members were more interested in dividends than in social transformation and, as societies grew in size and complexity, their leaders became more preoccupied with commercial administration. Certainly, also, the focus on thrift, education and self-help, and the social ascent of leading co-operators is consistent with reformism, conscious or unconscious, from within or from without. However, Oxfordshire co-operation was driven by the desire not merely to 'reform' working people within an existing social system, but also to reshape that system to create a fairer world. Through journals, tracts, conferences, lectures and entertainments, as well as through the sense of common purpose, fellowship and tangible rewards that society membership conveyed, co-operation's influence on the lives and outlook of working people was wide-ranging and powerful. Perhaps utopia was never really within the 'range of historical possibilities' but, to many Oxfordshire co-operators, its image nevertheless formed a continuing inspirational strand.

## Notes

1. G. D. H. Cole, *A Century of Co-operation* (Manchester, 1944) remains the most frequently quoted text despite its age.
2. P. Hollis, review of P. N. Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Co-operation in Victorian England*, in *Social History*, 3 (1976), p. 403; J. K. Walton, 'Co-operation in Lancashire, 1844-1914', *North West Labour History*, XIX (1994/5), p. 117.
3. M. Purvis, 'The Development of Co-operative Retailing in England and Wales, 1851-1901: a Geographical Study', *Journal of Historical Geography*, XVI (1990), pp. 314-31; P. Gurney, 'Heads, Hands and the Co-operative Utopia: an Essay in Historiography', *North West Labour History*, XIX (1994/5), pp. 3-23; P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester, 1996).
4. B. Lancaster and P. Maguire (eds), *Towards the Co-operative Commonwealth* (Manchester, 1996) contains several short regional essays.
5. Producer, agricultural and coal co-operatives are excluded; these lie outside the scope of this study. A possible failed attempt to combine retail co-operation with the formation of a building society in Oxford in the 1860s is also omitted, for lack of firm evidence.
6. Oxfordshire's percentage was slightly above the national average of 29.7 and compares favourably with the neighbouring southern counties of Wiltshire (26.6), Berkshire (17.5), Hampshire (13.3), Surrey (6.9) and Sussex (6.4). In the south, it was exceeded only by Devon (35.5).
7. Report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for 1911, P[arliamentary] P[apers] 1912/13, LXXXII; Census of England and Wales, 1911, P.P. 1912/13, CXI. Steeple Aston, Carterton and Middleton Stoney were subsequently taken over by Oxford in 1915, 1933 and 1934 respectively. In 1967 the directors of both the Banbury and Chipping Norton societies agreed to merge, only to be rejected by the members. Chipping Norton was absorbed by Oxford in the following year and Banbury merged with Rugby (Warwickshire) in 1970. Oxford itself amalgamated with Swindon (Wiltshire) in 1969 and, with the incorporation of Gloucester in 1991, became the Oxford, Swindon and Gloucester Co-operative Society. This still remains one of the region's major retailers today (1998). The only Oxfordshire retail society formed after 1913 was the Oxford University Co-operative Society, created in 1914 primarily to introduce co-operative principles to undergraduates. It was dissolved in 1922.
8. G. J. Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation* (1908), pp. 312-16; D. Barnie, *The Oxford and District Co-operative Society Limited 1872-1947* (Oxford, n.d.), p. 5; B[anbury] G[uardian], 26 February 1852; B. Trinder, 'Banbury's Poor in 1850', *Cake and Cockhorse*, III, 6 (1966), p. 110.
9. Figures for co-operative society foundations are collated from the Chief Registrar's Reports, various years.
10. W[itney] G[azette], 7 April 1888.
11. O[xford] T[imes], 6 March 1869.
12. W.G., 24 March 1888.

13. M. Purvis, 'Nineteenth-century Co-operative Retailing in England and Wales: a Geographical approach' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford Univ. 1987), esp. ch. 3.
14. Barnie, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
15. *The Co-operator*, 1 March 1866.
16. Barnie, *op. cit.*, p. 5; *The Co-operator*, 1 December 1865, 1 March 1866.
17. Chief Registrar's Report for 1866, P.P. 1867, XXXIX; Chief Registrar's Report for 1867, P.P. 1867/8, XL; O.T. 28 April 1866.
18. Letter to Registrar of Friendly Societies, P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], F[riendly] S[ocieties] 8/19/738.
19. Chief Registrar's Reports, various years.
20. Chief Registrar's Report for 1913, P.P. 1914, LXXVI. Chipping Norton also opened branches from the early 1880s, including one at Moreton-in-Marsh where it absorbed the local society in 1899. By 1909, however, none of these remained and no new branches were created until 1939.
21. Chipping Norton remained solely a coal co-operative until 1868 when it branched out into baking. It did not begin its grocery trade until December 1869. An account of the society's origins and early development is given in *O[xfordshire] W[EEKLY] N[ews]*, 31 October 1877.
22. W. H. Lickorish, *Our Jubilee Story, or Fifty Years of Co-operation in Banbury and the Neighbourhood* (Banbury, 1916), pp. 13-5.
23. *A[bingdon] H[erald]*, 21 June 1873. Co-operative stores were also opened in Wootton and Great Milton by the Oxfordshire district of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union in 1891 - the successor to the N.A.L.U. These were motivated by economic rather than ideological considerations, and they soon failed, Great Milton for example closing after 'a struggling career for two or three months'; *24th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1892* (Manchester, 1892), p. 106. For discussion of co-operative activity within agricultural unions, see P. Horn, 'Agricultural Trade Unionism in Oxfordshire', in *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* ed. J. P. D. Dunbabin (1974), pp. 85-129; P. Horn, *Joseph Arch* (Kineton, 1971); H. L. Samuel, *Memoirs* (1945).
24. Purvis, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
26. Walton, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-2.
27. For Banbury's radical character see B. Trinder, *Victorian Banbury* (Chichester, 1982), and J. R. Hodgkins, *Over the Hills to Glory* (Southend, 1978).
28. The Fringford Society does not appear in any of the Registrar's Reports, and the only record of its existence seems to be a comment in *A.H.*, 1 March 1869 that 'it is doing satisfactorily. A considerable business is done in coal as well as in provisions'. A society at Chastleton is listed in a table in *15th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1883* (Manchester, 1883), but the membership total was left blank. It seems that this society was still-born, since no other references have been found.
29. Chief Registrar's Report for 1880, P.P. 1881, LXXXIV.
30. *Guide to the Co-operative Congress of 1882, and to the City of Oxford* (Oxford, 1882), p. 170; *29th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1897* (Manchester, 1897), p. 104.

31. 20th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1888 (Manchester, 1888), p. 75.
32. 26th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1894 (Manchester, 1894), p. 117.
33. 46th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1914 (Manchester, 1914), p. 430. A similar point has been made in explanation of the decline of agricultural trade unionism. See, for example, R. Groves, *Sharpen the Sickle* (2nd edn, London, 1981), p. 67.
34. B[anbury] C[o-operative] R[ecord], September 1873.
35. *The Co-operator*, 30 July 1870. For a summary of Butcher's career see *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 1, eds J. Bellamy and J. Saville (1972), pp. 63–4. For a detailed account of his work in Leicestershire, see B. Lancaster, 'Towards the Socialist Commonwealth? Co-operation in Leicester in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Midland History*, XII (1987), pp. 48–66.
36. B[anbury] W[heatsheaf], August 1905; *ibid.*, December 1906; O[xford] W[heat-sheaf], October 1912.
37. For a summary of Hawkins' career see Bellamy and Saville, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–7, and Barnie, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
38. *Guide to the Co-operative Congress of 1882*, p. 149.
39. Dissolution document, PRO FS 8/31/1530, and 1891 census. The six included Henry Coombes, who had served as secretary since the society's foundation in 1872, and his wife Elizabeth, the village postmistress.
40. Names from rule book, PRO FS 8/20/758. Occupations from 1871 census returns.
41. O.T., 4 December 1869; B.C.R., October 1876.
42. Oxford Co-operative Society Nomination Book, Oxford and Swindon Co-operative Society Archives, Oxford.
43. 43rd Annual Co-operative Congress, 1911 (Manchester, 1911), p. 375; B.C.R., August 1895.
44. A.H., 21 June 1873; *Banbury Tract Number Three* (n.d., c. 1870).
45. W.G., 21 April 1888; A.H., 10 May 1873.
46. O.W., September 1912.
47. W.G., 21 April 1888.
48. A.H., 10 May 1873.
49. O.W., September 1912.
50. A.H., 10 May 1873.
51. B.G., 27 December 1866.
52. B.G., 27 December 1866.
53. 33rd Annual Co-operative Congress, 1901 (Manchester, 1901), p. 20; B.W., April 1901. For Banbury's productive enterprises, see Malcolm Bee, 'Unity, Industry, Plenty: The Banbury Co-operative Society, 1866–1970', *Midland History*, XXIII (1998), forthcoming.
54. At Chipping Norton, a bonus was paid to society employees for the first six months of 1873, but thereafter it was discontinued by the committee which 'failed to see the justice of placing their servants in a different position to themselves ... if the facilities each one had of becoming members ... was [sic] not enough to induce them to exert their entire energy in the furtherance of the movement, neither would they be so induced by the allowance of *Bonus on Labour*'. O.W.N., 31 October 1877. This issue generated much controversy nationally in the 1870s, see Cole, *op. cit.*, ch. 9.

55. B.C.R., March 1872.
56. O.T., 1 September 1869.
57. O.T., 19 June 1869. In instituting a 2.5% fund, the society was following the example set in 1853 by the Rochdale Pioneers.
58. O.W.N., 31 October 1877; A. Ledger, *A History of One Hundred Years of Co-operation in Oxford* (Oxford, 1972), p. 17.
59. For a discussion of co-operation and education and the 1882 Oxford Congress, see Cole, *op. cit.*, ch. 13, and Barnie, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
60. L. Goldman, *Dons and Workers Oxford Adult Education since 1850* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 42–3. Acland subsequently turned his attention to politics, becoming Liberal MP for Rotherham in 1885.
61. *Guide to the Co-operative Congress of 1882*, pp. 142–3; *15th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1883* (Manchester, 1883), p. 38.
62. *30th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1898* (Manchester, 1898), p. 116.
63. B.C.R., April 1875.
64. B.C.R., January 1875.
65. O.W., February 1912.
66. Oxford Co-operative Society, Half Yearly Report July 1913–January 1914, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, Oxford.
67. O.T., 16 January 1869; Barnie, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
68. Ledger, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
69. Women played a significant role in educational affairs and, particularly, in organising Women's Guild activities. Society management was, though, overwhelmingly male-dominated. At Oxford, for example, it was not until 1916 that a woman was elected to the general committee, and as late as 1972 it was admitted that 'women have never been strongly represented on the Board'. Ledger, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 4; B.C.R., various dates, for example January 1879, June 1881, May 1888, June 1896.
71. B.C.R., May 1872; *15th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1883* (Manchester, 1883), p. 38.
72. B.C.R., October 1871.
73. Ledger, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
74. Whilst annual excursions attracted up to 500 members and employees, the average attendance at the first year's debating season in 1886 (which included debates on 'labour and capital' and 'the social evils arising from intoxicants') averaged only twenty-two.
75. O.T., 3 December 1870; B.C.R., October 1897.
76. By the turn of the century, Women's Guild members in the county were attending lectures and conferences on issues such as public health, employment conditions and representation on public bodies. In 1908 the Banbury Women's Guild's President was elected to serve on the borough Education Committee. B.W., June 1908.
77. Even the attraction of the dividend may not have been merely monetary, for as Gurney, 'Heads, Hands and the Co-operative Utopia ...', pp. 14–5, argues, 'the dividend itself was an "ideal"', a demonstration to members that 'profit making was unnecessary or even immoral'.

78. P. Redfern, *The Story of the CWS* (Manchester, c. 1913), p. 90; *Co-operative News*, 6 November 1875.
79. Calculated from Chief Registrar's Reports, various years.
80. Oxford Co-operative Society, Half Yearly Report for July 1913 to January 1914, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.
81. Steeple Aston Co-operative Society, Report and Accounts for December 1910, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.
82. Calculated from Chief Registrar's Reports, various years.
83. B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 725–6.
84. B.C.R., November 1889; B.C.R., February 1892. A third complication arises from dual family membership, the growth of which was cited by Oxford in explanation of declining sales per member over the five years up to 1914. O.W., March 1914.
85. Calculated from B.C.R., February 1884.
86. Local wage figures taken from B.C.R., April 1875.
87. B.C.R., April 1876; W.G., 7 April 1888.
88. B.C.R., February 1886.
89. B.W., June 1902.
90. O.W., December 1912.
91. O.T., 4 September 1897; 23rd Annual Co-operative Congress, 1891 (Manchester, 1891), p. 91.
92. O.T., 19 June 1869.
93. O.T., 1 January 1870.
94. B.G., 19 June 1873.
95. B.C.R., June 1894; B.C.R., December 1895. For an exploration of the relationship between co-operation and socialism, see Gurney, *Co-operative Culture* . . . , ch. 7.
96. O.W., February 1912.
97. B.C.R., October 1871.
98. *Banbury Tract Number Two* (n.d., c. 1870).
99. For co-operation's involvement in national politics, see Cole, *op. cit.*, ch. 19 and S. Pollard, 'The Foundation of the Co-operative Party', *Essays in Labour History 1866–1923*, eds A. Briggs and J. Saville (1971), pp. 185–210.
100. B.C.R., February 1872; B.C.R., September 1889. But note that before the passing of the 1884 Reform Act, most co-operators were without the franchise. In 1873, only 200 out of over 1,100 members of the Banbury Society had the vote. B.C.R., October 1873. On the evidence of members claiming dividend, the branches contributed around half the total membership at this time, so even within Banbury town, many of the members were not enfranchised.
101. B.C.R., November 1889.
102. For a discussion of working men elected to the new parish councils, see R. Heath, 'The Rural Revolution', *Contemporary Review*, February 1895.
103. A detailed account of the involvement of Banbury Society members in local government is contained in Hodgkins, *op. cit.*, ch. 2.
104. Cole, *op. cit.*; S. Pollard, 'Nineteenth Century Co-operation: from Community Building to Shopkeeping', *Essays in Labour History*, eds A. Briggs and J. Saville (1960), pp. 74–112; G. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian*

Society (1978); T. Tholfsen, *Working-Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (1976); N. Kirk, *The Growth of Working-Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (1985).

105. Gurney, 'Heads, Hands and the Co-operative Utopia ...', p. 19.