

Co-operation in Berkshire, 1860–1913

Malcolm Bee

Co-operation, it has recently been claimed, ‘remains virtually ignored by both business and labour historians and its historiography ... seems to have impinged little on the public or academic consciousness’.¹ Currently, however, the movement is attracting increased interest and historians are now beginning to gain a clearer understanding of the mechanisms by which co-operative principles were disseminated, the changing philosophy of the movement and the cultural, social and economic significance of co-operative society membership.²

To date, studies have tended to focus on co-operation’s northern heartlands, whilst the south has received rather less attention.³ Yet the fact that co-operative societies could form and, on occasion, flourish, in localities where conditions were far from ideal demands explanation; even where the movement did not take firm hold, the reasons underlying its failure invite analysis. By 1911 more than 420,000 co-operators, some 20 per cent of the English total, lived south of the Warwickshire-Oxfordshire border and, although their greatest concentration in absolute terms occurred around London, society membership was widely diffused across the region; there were, for example, 58,703 co-operators in Devon, 47,256 in Kent, 37,871 in Gloucestershire and 26,928 in Hampshire.⁴ Even distant Cornwall was home to almost 7,000. In the present paper, the development of co-operation up to 1913 in the southern county of Berkshire is explored, with the aim of widening the range of evidence from which an informed assessment of the movement’s evolution eventually may be made.

Whilst co-operation’s origins long predate the founding of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society in 1844, this event was undoubtedly a turning point in the movement’s history. Over the next fifteen years more than 130 societies were established, mainly in Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire, joining the few survivors from the pre-Rochdale era.⁵ Then at the end of the 1850s the rate of foundation accelerated and

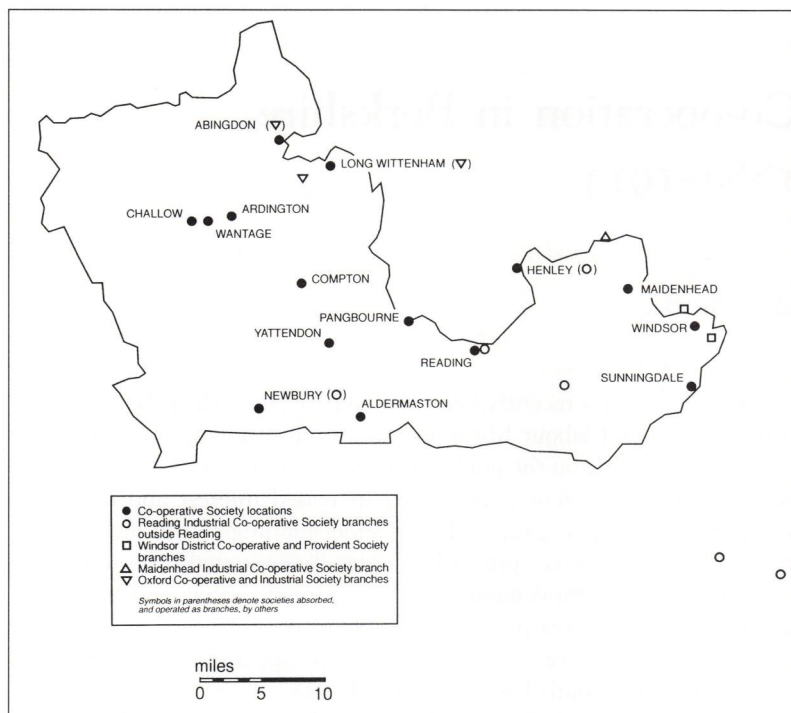


Figure 1: Geographical Distribution of Retail Co-operative Activity in Berkshire, 1860–1913

more than 500 new societies were formed over the next decade. About 60 per cent of the new foundations were outside the north-west, and it was during this phase of expansion that the movement came to Berkshire.

The pattern of Berkshire co-operation is summarised in Figure 1 and Table 1.⁶ By 1911, out of a total of 12,193 society members, 81 per cent belonged to the Reading Industrial with two other urban societies, the Windsor District and the Maidenhead Industrial, contributing a further 9 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. The remainder were accounted for by three small village societies in Sunningdale, Aldermaston and Wittenham, whilst a fourth village society, at Ardington, had a small though unquantified membership.⁷ Their experience, and that of other Berkshire societies which did not survive to 1913, raises a number of questions. What factors determined the timing and location of foundations? Why were some societies more successful than others? What sort of people did co-operation attract as leaders and members, and what motivated their interest? In what ways and to what extent did the

Table 1: Chronology of Berkshire Retail Co-operative Societies 1860-1913

<i>Society</i>	<i>Dates Extant</i>	<i>Peak Membership</i>
Reading Industrial Co-operative	1860-1913+	9,710 (1910)
Maidenhead National Industrial Provident [Branch]	1860-1861	Unknown
Windsor Co-operative and Industrial	1865-c. 1871	626 (1867)
Wantage Co-operative	1866-c. 1868	Unknown
Sunningdale Industrial Provident	1867-1869	Unknown
Long Wittenham Co-operative Industrial and Provident	1869-1912 (absorbed by Oxford)	74 (1889)
Pangbourne and Whitchurch Co-operative Industrial and Provident	1870-1872	30 (1871)
Aldermaston Co-operative Industrial and Provident	1871-1913+	124 (1912)
Maidenhead Mutual Co-operative	1872-1873	Unknown
Abingdon Industrial Co-operative	1873-1881 (absorbed by Oxford)	93 (1876)
Newbury	1884-1884 (absorbed by Reading)	76 (1884)
Challow and Wantage Co-operative	1884-c. 1890	44 (1886)
Yattendon Co-operative and Provident	1887-1905	115 (1904)
Ardington	1889-1913+	Unknown
Windsor District Co-operative and Provident	1893-1913+	1,113 (1913)
Maidenhead Industrial Co-operative	1899-1913+	850 (1905)
Sunningdale and District Co-operative	1899-1913+	152 (1912)
Compton Stores and Trading	1909-1910	23 (1909)

movement affect the lives of Berkshire's working people? These questions are, of course, locally important but they also have a wider relevance, shedding light on the development of co-operation as a national phenomenon.

Right up to 1913, the extent of the movement's national co-ordination was limited and the diffusion of co-operative activity depended primarily on the level of local enthusiasm. It has been suggested that in urban-dominated regions initial expansion was likely to be from towns out to

their hinterlands, whilst in areas of dispersed and autonomous settlement, independent co-operative initiative might be taken by communities at an early stage.⁸ In Berkshire, both mechanisms operated, but even together they provide an incomplete explanation, since the degree of interest varied considerably across apparently similar localities. As *The Co-operator* acknowledged in 1861, Berkshire was 'not one of the most progressive counties in England'.⁹ Small conservative communities predominated and the one large town, Reading, was reliant on biscuit manufacture, an industry particularly associated with unskilled and semi-skilled work.¹⁰ This was hardly promising ground for co-operative pioneers, who had to contend with 'a sparse population, wages low, [and] with intellectual grasp not always sufficiently vigorous to take in the principles in which we are deeply interested'.¹¹ It is, then, not surprising that whilst by 1911 co-operative society membership extended to around 30 per cent of families nationally, Berkshire's percentage was only 17.6, and that among those who were members, sales per head were less than 60 per cent of the national average.¹² Even in comparison with close neighbours, Berkshire's record was not very impressive. In Oxfordshire, for example, co-operation attracted 32.8 per cent of families, in Wiltshire 26.6 per cent, in Gloucestershire 24.6 per cent, and in Buckinghamshire 22.9 per cent. Yet, among the movement's Berkshire adherents were many whose enthusiasm was strong and the level of membership was by no means the lowest in the south; only 13.3 per cent of Hampshire families were co-operators while in both Surrey and Sussex the figure was below 7 per cent.

The first Berkshire societies were founded independently by small groups of working men in urban locations. Isolated from other co-operators, they acquired information piecemeal and imperfectly from a variety of sources. In 1860 the Reading Industrial Co-operative Society was established by boiler makers employed at the agricultural engineering works of Barratt Exall and Andrewes, their leader's interest in working-class advancement deriving apparently from the speeches of John Bright.¹³ In the same year, a branch of the London-based National Industrial and Provident Society was formed in Maidenhead. This rather curious organisation, a hybrid co-operative and friendly society, had been founded in 1859 and by late 1860 it had thirty-one branches widely dispersed across England and south Wales.¹⁴ How one of these came to be located in Maidenhead, with no others nearby, is unknown, but a correspondent to the Society's journal claimed that there were 'certainly a few energetic members' there.¹⁵ A shop was opened in the town in 1861, but soon afterwards the whole society collapsed amid capital shortage and internal disagreements. Meanwhile, Reading was gradually building up its membership and extending

its links with co-operators elsewhere. Visiting speakers at social meetings brought news of achievements in the north and reports of its activities began to appear in the pages of *The Co-operator*. Locally, however, it remained alone until 1865 when the Windsor Co-operative and Industrial Society was commenced by 'a few working men' from the town's Liberal Club.¹⁶ At first, their knowledge was poor, but through *The Co-operator* they obtained a parcel of tracts and these, together with subscription to *The Co-operator* and contacts with Reading, gave them both practical information and encouragement to persevere.¹⁷ Indeed, by 1867 Windsor's membership of 626 was considerably greater than Reading's 493 and for a short period Windsor seemed set to become Berkshire's first real co-operative success. The proceeds of compulsory purchase of its shop lease for road widening enabled it to move to larger premises and a branch store was opened at nearby Slough (Buckinghamshire). It even ventured into co-operative production with the manufacture of shoes. However, membership slumped to only 236 in 1869 and by 1871 the society had completely disappeared.

In the decade following Windsor's foundation the pace of activity accelerated. Of the origins of short-lived societies at Wantage, Sunningdale, Pangbourne and a second attempt at Maidenhead, little is known, but the village society at Long Wittenham was essentially the creation of the vicar in 1869 and, two years later, middle-class initiative was also instrumental in taking co-operation to another village, Aldermaston. Here, the instigator was the schoolmaster, supported by 'a large resident landlord'.¹⁸ Then in 1873 a society was formed in the town of Abingdon, the inaugural meeting being attended by 'a number of assistants belonging to the firm of Messrs Clarke and sons, clothiers'.¹⁹ In urban localities, it seems, working men were more able to take the initiative themselves, though even in Abingdon, there was middle-class involvement, for the meeting was presided over by the rector of Little Wittenham, who 'gave a very practical and amusing address'.²⁰ Another speaker was the secretary of the Banbury (Oxfordshire) Co-operative Society, at that time the most dynamic society in the southern region. This marks the beginning of a second phase in the movement's Berkshire diffusion – the direct transmission of knowledge and experience by established co-operators to assist in the creation of societies in new locations.

After Abingdon, there was a lull in formations. In part, this was a reflection of a downward national trend, perhaps linked with the onset of economic depression in 1873, but local factors also operated. None of the societies so far established had done well, with only Reading, Abingdon and the small societies at Wittenham and Aldermaston surviving beyond the early 1870s. Continued progress depended on the

demonstration of co-operation's potential by the larger town societies, yet both Abingdon and Reading were struggling even to survive. Reading was deeply in debt from the excessive granting of credit to members, and, with mounting losses and, on occasion, no dividend at all, membership fell below 300 while sales slumped by half. At Abingdon the membership was stagnant at around 90 and, although the society got through the 1870s, it failed to make any progress. With sales falling sharply, it sought refuge from the Oxford Society, of which it became a branch in 1881, but its position continued to deteriorate and the branch was closed two years later.²¹

By the mid-1880s Reading was beginning to recover, with its membership climbing to 1,585 by 1884. In that year two new societies, at Challow and Newbury, were formed. Of the former very little is known, though, since Challow, a village just outside the town of Wantage, was the home of a substantial engineering works, it seems probable that workers from this formed the nucleus of the membership. The society struggled from the outset, never attracting more than 44 members and by 1889 it was reported to be 'on the verge of dissolution'.²² A further report in the following year stated that 'a few faithful members are still holding on, and hoping for better days', but their hopes were in vain, for the society was dissolved soon afterwards.²³ Newbury originated from a meeting addressed by a representative of the Guild of Co-operators, with 'the employees of ten of the largest firms in the town entering into the matter with earnestness'.²⁴ The Guild had been formed in London in 1878 with the aim of spreading co-operation in southern England by delivering lectures and encouraging the establishment of new societies, but whilst its speaker persuaded seventy-six people to join at Newbury, their initial 'earnestness' was not matched by their subsequent organisational ability. The society failed even to find premises from which to trade and before the close of the year had to appeal to Reading to take it over as a branch.

Towards the end of the 1880s two more village societies were created, at Yattendon and Ardington. Yattendon was founded in 1887 by the architect Alfred Waterhouse who was resident at Yattendon Court. In the village Waterhouse and his wife 'carried out their duties as principal landowners with love and thoroughness. Cottages were restored and new ones built, the church repaired and a vestry and porch added, a temperance reading room was built, and a co-operative shop established'.²⁵ With Waterhouse's Estate Agent as the society secretary, Yattendon's membership grew, though only very slowly. In 1894 it was reported to Co-operative Congress that 'is making no headway, but is receiving the special attention of the district committee'; nevertheless the situation did not improve and in 1905 the society was dissolved.²⁶ Ardington,

established in 1889, was similar to Yattendon in that it too owed its existence to a major local landowner, in this case Lord Wantage. On his Lockinge estate, the largest in the county, Lord Wantage conducted one of the most advanced experiments in model community building, providing not only a high quality physical environment for estate workers but also an elaborate profit sharing scheme in which all were included.²⁷ The co-operative store was housed in impressive premises constructed, like much of the estate, in mock-Tudor style. It was 'spaciously planned and equipped with outbuildings, such as a bakery, a slaughterhouse, cart-sheds etc., around a courtyard, while attractive front gardens were laid out which included a fountain and rockery'.²⁸ Just how many people enjoyed this unique co-operative facility is, however, unknown, since Ardington seems not to have registered as an industrial and provident society and therefore made no annual membership return.

By 1890, despite three decades of co-operation in Berkshire, activity was confined to Reading, with 3,284 members including around 270 in Newbury, with perhaps another 200 co-operators in the villages of Wittingham, Aldermaston, Yattendon and Ardington. A decade earlier an Oxford District inter-society conference had expressed concern at the lack of progress in the region, and whilst acknowledging that 'it would be unwise to force co-operative work upon an unwilling or ignorant people', it urged greater efforts to take the movement to 'those places where already a combination for self-help exists'.²⁹ In particular, it was agreed that 'the attention of ... Reading ... should be called by this conference to the great need of propaganda work in their immediate neighbourhood'.³⁰ But that society remained a reluctant evangelist. According to its own historian, its 'strongest motive seems to have been to make sure of complete success in Reading', a somewhat insular attitude, probably arising from the internal difficulties which periodically afflicted the society right up to 1913.³¹ Consequently, unlike Banbury and Oxford, which played leading roles in the diffusion of co-operation in neighbouring Oxfordshire, Reading was 'disinclined to accept responsibility for outside areas'.³² Unwillingly, it did take in struggling groups of co-operators outside the town but persistent pressure was then put on them to stand alone.³³ It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that when a meeting was held at Windsor in 1893 to propose the creation of a new society there, the chief speakers were not from Reading, but an Eton schoolmaster and, as at Newbury, a representative of the Guild of Co-operators.³⁴ The Windsor District Co-operative and Provident Society made good progress, its membership passing 1,000 in 1905, with two branches and a fine newly built central stores. For a small society, it also made impressive attempts to disseminate co-operative principles, hosting inter-society

conferences, forming a Women's Guild and publishing a regular journal for its members, the *Windsor Co-operative Record*.

Towards end of the century Reading's willingness to take on a leadership role increased. Indeed, by this time its officials were playing a prominent part in the work of the Co-operative Union's Oxford District within which Berkshire lay. When, therefore, members of the Amalgamated Society of Railwaymen made a third attempt at co-operation in Maidenhead in 1899, it was Reading men who addressed the formative meeting. The District, whilst 'anxious' to spread co-operation more widely, advocated the opening of branches by existing societies 'in places where the elements of success are wanting' in preference to the establishment of additional independent enterprises.³⁵ But Reading's leaders were still 'firm in their belief in the advantages of the small, single town society', and that is what was created in Maidenhead.³⁶ In the event, the District was proved right, since the new society's career was 'chequered from start to finish' with poor sales and low dividends, and eventually it had to be rescued by Reading.³⁷

Also in 1899, the Sunningdale and District Co-operative Society was formed. This was to be the last foundation in the county, with the exception of a very brief attempt in the village of Compton in 1909-10. At Sunningdale, Reading's officials were again instrumental. Initially only slow progress was made and in 1901 the District reported that 'it will need an active propaganda ... to pull the society along'.³⁸ However, it appeared by 1911 'to have turned the corner in its long lane of difficulties', and two years later, with the members taking 'a real live interest', they were 'fast regaining the high-water mark in their history'.³⁹

The above account sheds light on the mechanisms by which co-operation spread across Berkshire, but a closely related issue is why some societies survived whilst others did not. In some cases failure can be attributed to particular misfortune, such as the second Maidenhead society whose secretary wrote in 1873 that they had 'given up the business owing to a destructive fire. Everything is lost'.⁴⁰ But recent research has identified a variety of general factors which had a bearing on the probability of success. Purvis, for example, suggests that the best chances occurred in 'middle-ranking industrial settlements', or 'centres in which the social climate most favoured independent exercise of group initiative by workers'.⁴¹ This is consistent with Walton's view that co-operation was most likely to succeed in communities with an established tradition of working-class action, well-paid and regular employment, and a rate of expansion sufficient to require growth in retail services but not so fast as to obscure the local sense of identity.⁴² These factors are certainly all pertinent, but there is nevertheless no general 'model' or set of essential

community features. The present author, in a study of Oxfordshire co-operation, found strong and competent leadership to be the key prerequisite for co-operative survival, with the extent of local support, the degree of private trader opposition and local economic circumstances also playing important roles.⁴³ The Berkshire evidence points to similar conclusions. Thus, Reading's survival was in doubt for many years owing to 'the inevitable blunderings of inexperienced and inexperienced people', and by the late 1870s frequent management changes and bitter internal disputes had brought the society to the brink of dissolution.⁴⁴ Then in 1880 it appointed as secretary W. T. Carter, 'an outstanding personality of co-operation' and a man with a remarkable background.⁴⁵ Born in Colchester, he was taught first at home by his mother before going to a middle-class school and then London University. Subsequently, he became private tutor to the Persian Ambassador and travelling tutor to several English noblemen, before fighting with Garibaldi and then teaching English at a school in Dijon. He returned to England to establish his own school at Worthing (Sussex), where he became secretary of the local co-operative society, eventually full-time, giving up his school. Following this he made a 'vain endeavour' to restore the fortunes of the Shanklin (Isle of Wight) society, after which he turned his attention to Reading.⁴⁶ This society was then 'a sickly puny thing, the despair of its pioneers and the derision of its opponents', and immediately he set about analysing the cause.⁴⁷ His conclusions were spelled out to the members in the pamphlet *Co-operation: Its Difficulties in Reading*. He identified the town's highly competitive retail environment as partly responsible, but the chief problem was a split within the society's management which an apathetic membership had allowed to go unchecked. The pamphlet, later judged to be 'the happy means of saving the Society', marked the beginning of Reading's recovery, a process accelerated by the choice of David Rose as President in 1886 and subsequently as General Manager, with J. E. Johns then becoming President.⁴⁸ Rose, Johns and Carter brought much needed stability to the society's management but, more importantly, their expertise greatly enhanced its reputation and influence both within the co-operative movement and also in the local community. It was they who addressed meetings in locations where new societies were proposed, with Johns also serving for six years as secretary of the Co-operative Union's Oxford District. All three were active in local affairs. Carter became Reading's first co-operative public representative when he was elected to the School Board in 1895, and both Rose and Johns were appointed JPs. Johns also played a leading local role in the friendly society movement, eventually becoming the permanent secretary of the Reading District Oddfellows.

Although none of the other urban societies attracted officers of the stature of Carter, Johns and Rose, both the Windsor District and the Maidenhead Industrial benefited from enthusiastic leadership. At Windsor a key role was played by Eddie Perkins who gave up his job as a printer to become secretary, but who continued to make use of his journalistic skills by editing the *Windsor Co-operative Record*. At Maidenhead the first President was Charles Rockley, a local official of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, who became Berkshire's first co-operative town councillor in 1901, elected on 'the working man's ticket'.⁴⁹ By contrast, those urban societies without able leadership failed to survive, as happened at Newbury and also Abingdon, where 'co-operative faith was not ... sufficiently strong to remove the mountains of distrust and ... business methods were not sufficiently understood'.⁵⁰

Successful village societies, too, needed strong leadership, though in Berkshire this was almost invariably autocratic and from above. At Ardington, for example, Lord Wantage's views were described as 'bordering on benevolent despotism', whilst Long Wittenham was 'worked without a committee', its management being 'mainly in the hands of a village clergyman'.⁵¹ But whilst such societies had a much greater chance of survival than those without patronage their nature hardly encouraged the members to take an active interest in their affairs. At Wittenham, so firm was the grip of the vicar that the District Secretary despaired of the society's position 'practically outside the co-operative movement'.⁵² And at Ardington, where almost all the capital had been subscribed by the patron, it proved 'difficult to get any real co-operative spirit displayed among the members'.⁵³ Here, paternalism, however well intended, stifled independence for, as the Liberal *Daily News* observed, Lord Wantage

has done for the people ... what the people ought to be able to do for themselves ... collectively and unitedly, and by their own sturdy independent and manly effort ... The people control nothing, have no part whatever in anything like public life, nor any voice in matters directly affecting their own welfare.⁵⁴

Generally in Berkshire, as was demonstrated earlier, the level of interest in co-operation was lower than in most neighbouring counties. Even so, some societies, especially in villages, managed to attract a substantial membership in proportion to the size of their local community. At Aldermaston membership grew from around one third of the number of resident families in 1881 to over 90 per cent in 1911, whilst Yattendon's membership by 1901 actually exceeded the number of village families, suggesting either multiple membership within families or a catchment area extending beyond the immediate community, and

possibly both. Elsewhere, village societies were less successful. Wittenham's membership peaked at 113 in 1887 but thereafter declined sharply. By 1891 it had fallen to 69, even though there were 118 families in the village at the time, and by 1911 it had dropped further to only 52, less than half the family population.⁵⁵ Challow, too, had difficulty in attracting members, though here this could be explained by the fact that 'the headquarters ... are situated away from the homes of the members, who mostly reside at Wantage, and in consequence, trade languishes'.⁵⁶ In urban areas, communities were less close-knit and physically more dispersed, and urban retail environments were also more competitive. Town societies could, therefore, not expect to attract a high proportion of local families. In 1911, for instance, membership equalled 39 per cent of families at Windsor and 24 per cent at Maidenhead, and Reading's leaders repeatedly expressed their disappointment over the lack of interest shewn by the town's inhabitants. As late as 1909 the management committee complained that 'if the workers of Reading throw off apathy and join this Society, they will reap the advantages of mutual self-help'.⁵⁷ Perhaps their exhortations had some effect, since membership which had stood at around 40 per cent of families in 1901, reached above 50 per cent ten years later.⁵⁸ But it was not merely disinclination to join which frustrated Reading's leaders. They were also discouraged by the low level of purchases made by those who were members. Little direct evidence of sales per member survives for any Berkshire society, but approximate figures can be found by dividing total sales by membership. At Reading, this exceeded 8s. per week in only four years between 1860 and 1913 and generally ranged from around 4s. 6d. to 6s. 6d.⁵⁹ 'A great number of the members', Carter lamented in 1880, 'are not so faithful as could be desired in the Co-operative cause, nor so careful as might be expected to promote the advancement of *their own interests*'.⁶⁰ And twenty-two years later, when sales per member averaged 6s. 2d., Johns expressed similar frustration, complaining that 'from the prosperous appearance of the members present [at the quarterly meeting] he adjudged that many of them spent more than 6s. 2d. per week on their families'.⁶¹ Elsewhere, too the level of weekly sales was low – Windsor averaged 6s. 8d. per member with little variation from its foundation in 1899 to 1913, whilst Maidenhead could only average 5s. 4d. Surprisingly perhaps, in view of lower wage levels, village societies tended to do rather better. Over their respective lifespans, weekly sales per member averaged nearly 15s. at Aldermaston, 13s. at Yattendon and 12s. at Wittenham. Possibly village sales figures were inflated by non-member purchases giving rise to overestimates in these crude calculations, but perhaps also the watchful eye of village patrons encouraged a greater degree of loyalty among the members.⁶²

With middle- and upper-class endorsement, village co-operatives escaped much of the opposition with which most town societies had to contend. Particularly in their formative stages urban co-operators faced hostility, arising both from middle-class suspicions concerning their underlying motives and also from private traders resentful of competition.⁶³ Thus, the secretary of the first Windsor society reported that 'opposition met us at the outset, even to being denied a room to meet in to frame laws'.⁶⁴ And when they sent an order for goods to a local wholesaler, they received the reply that 'our customers in Windsor have a great objection to co-operative stores, and as our doing business with you would be certain to do us mischief with our general trade, we must decline sending any goods'.⁶⁵ The Reading boilermakers held their first meeting in a public house, having been refused permission to meet at their place of work, and at Abingdon local bakers refused to bake Sunday dinners for members of the newly-formed society. Reading overcame the opposition, though not without a real struggle in its early days, but the Abingdon and Windsor societies, in much smaller towns where vested interest was more entrenched, failed to survive.

Finally, societies' fortunes were affected by local economic circumstances. In villages, the withdrawal of patronage could have serious consequences, as was feared at Aldermaston in 1894 following the removal of the large landowner 'who since the foundation of the society did everything to forward its interests ... It is just possible that his successor may lack in the co-operative interest'.⁶⁶ In the event Aldermaston not only survived but continued to expand, but other societies may have been less fortunate. For example, the dissolution of Yattendon in 1905 seems puzzling in view of the fact that its membership had reached a peak in the previous year. It might, though, be significant that 1905 was also the year in which its patron, Waterhouse, died. Urban societies operated in a very different economic environment. From its location in a large and expanding town, Reading's potential was greatest, though even here frequent recessions brought problems. For example, a 20 per cent drop in sales between 1891 and 1893 was blamed on 'the depressed condition of local trade', whilst in 1908 falling prices were the cause of another 'exceptional and startling ... decline in trade'.⁶⁷ Smaller societies were even more vulnerable to short-term fluctuations, such as Windsor which in 1907 was 'feeling keenly the prevailing depression', and Sunningdale which was hit in the following year by 'the suspension of a large works in the locality and the consequent removal of many members'.⁶⁸ And, societies in towns like Wantage and Abingdon where the industrial base was fundamentally weak, faced probably the most difficult challenge of all.

Analysis of the pattern of Berkshire co-operation leads on to evaluation of its significance. This is a matter of objectives and outcomes – what were the aims of co-operators and what impact did societies have on the lives of their members and in their local communities? The once-held view that co-operation over the course of the nineteenth century slid into a dividend dominated commercialism is no longer tenable. In fact, as Gurney has observed, the movement ‘opened up a specific range of historical possibilities, some of which were decidedly utopian in reach’, and the eventual outcome of today’s consumerism ‘was neither given nor inevitable’.⁶⁹ In Berkshire, as elsewhere, co-operation meant different things to different people, since the lack of central direction permitted a choice of objective across and even within societies. The village societies were least radical in their aims, though even these varied in their interpretation of co-operative philosophy. At one extreme was Long Wittenham of which it was noted that ‘the vicar of the parish (who is president of the society) sees no necessity for doing more than teaching the members the advantage of ready money dealing’.⁷⁰ Repeated attempts by the District Secretary to bring the society into contact with others in the region were resisted, the president seeing ‘no necessity of introducing any propagandist efforts’ and throughout its life Wittenham remained ‘isolated’ and ‘very difficult to approach’.⁷¹ At Yattendon the society was operated less autocratically as a component of Waterhouse’s broader scheme to improve the quality of life in the village. But most ambitious, at least in theory, was Lord Wantage’s advocacy of ‘a large increase of co-operative institutions, factories as well as stores where capable men should have charge of works for grinding and dressing wheat, making butter, purveying meat, milk, eggs etc’.⁷² Whilst co-operative practice at Ardington fell far short of this, it was an aspiration which many working-class co-operators would share, albeit from a fundamentally different standpoint.

Had Berkshire co-operation been confined to a few small rural communities introduced, or perhaps more accurately imposed, from above, its relevance would have been marginal. However, in urban areas, the movement’s character was fundamentally different, for in towns working men of independent spirit and firmly held principles embraced co-operation as the key to radical social reform. Competitive capitalism was denounced as ‘sordid’, ‘brutal’ and ‘demoralising’ in its exploitation of labour. ‘We are the producers, the only producers of wealth’, wrote Carter: ‘wealth is continually passing away from the producers ... We, the producers, are in forced dependence on the possessors of wealth for houses to live in, food to eat, and clothing to wear’. The co-operative solution was a world in which capital was owned jointly by the producers, ‘an

honest attempt to bridge the gulf between capital and labour'. This was 'the workers' only salvation'. But the transformation was not to be achieved by seizure of private capital, or by the 'terrible warfare' implicit in labour disputes between employer and worker. Co-operation offered instead 'a peaceful social revolution' in which the accumulative surplus from co-operative retailing would be directed towards the acquisition of capital. Even conventional political activity was eschewed, partly on the grounds that 'class or sectional legislation in any shape was to be deprecated as being opposed to the principles of the movement', but also because of lack of faith in Parliament's ability to deliver fundamental reform. Co-operation 'would accomplish what statesmen failed to do', the creation of a fairer social system, as the movement gradually expanded across society simply on the strength of its proven success. According to Carter, writing in 1905,

If only working men will ... allow the profit made to go on accumulating year after year, you can judge what a difference it will make in a few years in your social position. Then it may be seen how working men can have houses of their own; how they may acquire capital sufficient to become their own employers; how they may have the means to educate themselves as free men in a great free state ought to be educated; how they may possess the means of enjoying most of the comforts and refinements of civilised life to which in common with their fellow-citizens they are justly entitled.

The substitution of co-operative for competitive capitalism was the utopian ideal, and, of course, practical co-operators recognised that their achievements would necessarily fall short of this. Moreover, as the situation of working people improved within the existing social system with the passage of time, the pressure for radical change diminished. Nevertheless, as Reading's president affirmed in 1904, the movement retained its importance as 'an endeavour to elevate and uplift the working classes', promoting the principles of thrift, citizenship, fraternity and self-improvement.⁷³ Reading co-operators aimed 'to raise the standard of life by moral, social, and intellectual intercourse', and similar objectives were held by the other urban societies. Abingdon, for example, sought to 'to promote the intellectual and moral advancement of its members, by providing means for social intercourse and literary culture', and 'to afford means for practically working at various questions of social reform'.⁷⁴ Indeed, the striking feature of co-operation, when compared with other working-class reform movements, was the paramount importance it placed on the role of the individual in raising the condition of the group as a whole.

The social and economic impact of co-operation was transmitted

through membership and to evaluate this it is necessary to ask who the members were and what benefits society membership conferred. Village societies could draw support from a wide cross-section of their communities. At Aldermaston, for instance, it was claimed that 'nearly all the inhabitants of the village are members' and Yattendon, too, judging from the number of members in relation to the village's size, must have attracted most of the local residents.⁷⁵ Town societies tended to rely, at least in their early years, on particular occupational groups – clothing at Abingdon, railway workers at Maidenhead and engineers at Reading – though Windsor may have been more broadly based, being 'a striking instance of how far co-operation can succeed in towns where there are no manufactories, and where the population is somewhat of a migratory character'.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, most Berkshire societies have left no membership records, but for Reading a valuable source survives in the candidates for membership listed over the period between July 1881 and May 1886 in the minute books.⁷⁷ These are summarised in Tables 2 and 3. Of 1278 applicants, 602 – 47 per cent – were female, and of these 479 were listed simply as 'wife'. Forty-one of the fifty-three whose employment is recorded were dressmakers, laundresses or in domestic service, and a further five were schoolmistresses. Among the men, 14.2 per cent of the total were labourers. Carpenter/joiner was the next largest occupation at 11.4 per cent of the total, ahead of fitter, with 6.5 per cent and clerk with 5.5 per cent. Overall, craft workers contributed 23.5 per cent of the membership, with engineering trades second in importance at 14.8 per cent. Distribution represented 9.8 per cent and transport services, mainly railway, 5.9 per cent. At the other end of the scale, professional men numbered only nine, including two schoolmasters and two policemen. Along with two clergymen and two gentlemen, these seem to be the extent of non-working-class candidates. In Reading, as in most towns, co-operation was 'purely a working man's movement ... managed by working men for working men'.⁷⁸ It is interesting, though, that whilst the town's main industries of biscuit making, brewing and seed supply were all represented in the membership, none contributed a large proportion.⁷⁹ In particular, whilst there were fifteen tin workers, presumably engaged in the production of tin boxes for biscuit packing, biscuit making itself, though Reading's largest industry, provided few co-operators.

In his 1880 appraisal of the Reading Society, Carter estimated that 'among our 1,300 members there are not one in five who have but the most confused idea of the great aims and possibilities of co-operation. The *highest* and *only* purpose that co-operation has seems, in their minds to be that it is set on foot for the purpose of creating *dividends only*'.⁸⁰

**Table 2: Occupations of Male Applicants for Membership
of Reading Industrial Co-operative Society 1881-6
(Excluding Branches)**

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>
carpenter/joiner	77	Engine Driver	9
other woodworker	13	Other Railway	15
Baker	20	Coach/Carman	11
Tailor	19	Other Transport	5
Shoemaker	9		
Saddler	5	Retailer	30
Printer	4	Dealer/Agent	17
Other Craft	12	Hotel/Innkeeper	14
		Traveller	5
Painter	16		
Bricklayer	14	Messenger/Postman	7
Other Building	5	Servant/Groom	6
		Barber	2
Fitter	44		
Turner/machinist	18	Gardener	15
Smith	13	Seedsman	5
Foreman	7	Agricultural Worker	5
Other engineering	18	Farmer	3
Tinworker	15	Labourer	96
Biscuit Maker	7		
Brewery Worker	7	Professional	9
Other Manufacture	11	Clergyman	2
		Gentleman	2
Clerk	37		
Porter	8	Other/Indecipherable	25
Warehouseman	6	No Occupation	8

Source: R.I.C.S. Minute Books.

This assessment could confidently be extended to other societies and over the entire period of this study. Generally, Berkshire dividends were low. The Maidenhead Industrial rarely paid more than a shilling in the pound, whilst a comparative table of dividends for 1904 reproduced in the *Reading Co-operative Record* shewed Reading's 1s. 8d. falling just below

Table 3: Occupations of Female Applicants for Membership of Reading Industrial Co-operative Society 1881-6 (Excluding Branches)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>
Dressmaker	20	Wife	479
Laundress	11	Widow	29
		Spinster	7
Domestic Servant	8	Other/Indecipherable	11
Schoolmistress	5	No Occupation	32

Source: R.I.C.S. Minute Books

the average for twelve southern urban societies, but considerably below the 2s. 10d. of nine from the north.⁸¹ Reading's highest ever dividend, 2s. 2d., had been declared five years before.

The dividend may have been the most attractive incentive to society membership, but even this does not necessarily imply complete disinterest in co-operation's higher aims. Indeed, Gurney has argued that 'the dividend itself was an "ideal"', a demonstration that 'profit-making was unnecessary or even immoral'.⁸² And, by facilitating saving, the dividend enabled working people to amass funds for the purchase of expensive items, or even perhaps for investment in improved housing. Reading certainly encouraged this, building houses for rent and, in 1888, introducing a housing loan scheme as means of utilising surplus funds. By 1913 the society owned thirty-four cottages and had extended nearly £50,000 on loans and mortgages to members.

In Berkshire, membership interest in co-operation's more radical aspirations was limited. Paternalistic village societies did not, of course, identify with fundamental social reform, but the leaders of town societies must have been disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm shown by the mass of members. Those at Reading, for instance, rejected the only scheme the society considered for co-operative production (apart from baking), the taking of a farm in 1885. And neither did they feel inclined towards direct political activity. When, for example, it was proposed to form a local electoral representation committee in association with other working-class organisations in the town in 1899, 'only three assented to the resolution, the result being received with laughter'.⁸³ Generally, the consolidation of co-operative 'culture' in the years leading to 1918 which Gurney perceives at national level, was not evident in Berkshire.⁸⁴ Possibly this reflected local economic and social circumstances which,

according to Yeo, were challenging all 'voluntary' organisations from the 1890s, but it was also a consequence of the dominance in the county of the Reading society, and the fact that by the time Reading had resolved its internal difficulties the main focus for working-class advancement had shifted to personal improvement and self-education.⁸⁵ In these spheres, Reading demonstrated on-going commitment. In particular, the society was renowned for its pioneering work in the field of working-class education. From the early 1890s the society had been closely involved with Reading University College in the provision of lectures and evening classes for its members, and in 1901 the *Co-operative News* had described it as being 'notable among our southern organisations for its educational work'.⁸⁶ A particular feature of this was the regular excursion organised to places of interest in the town, including the water, gas and electricity works and the abbey ruins, and sometimes further afield in the surrounding countryside. These were reported, along with other educational activities in the society's journal, the *Reading Co-operative Record*, edited by the enthusiastic 'ESROM' (E. R. T. Morse) and circulated to all members.⁸⁷ More significantly, in 1904, largely owing to the efforts of Henry Sanderson who chaired the society's education committee, Reading was instrumental in the creation of the country's first branch of the Workers' Educational Association.⁸⁸ Admittedly, the attendance at educational functions often fell short of organisers' expectations, but together with the concerts, Women's Guild meetings and other social events, and perhaps even the dividend itself, they signalled to the members an ethical code of responsibility and mutuality whilst giving them a sense of their own value within the community. And even for those who did not see membership in such 'improving' terms, the society offered opportunities for entertainment, friendship and conviviality which could significantly enhance the quality of working-class life. The same assessment holds, albeit on a lesser scale, for the other urban societies, Maidenhead and Windsor.⁸⁹

It remains to consider the extent to which Berkshire's experience was typical of southern England. The membership figures quoted at the outset of this study indicate a level of interest above some but lower than most. On the movement's own admission, Berkshire was a difficult county for the implantation of co-operative ideology. The only other southern county which has been examined in detail is Oxfordshire and the key difference there was the presence of strong urban societies eager to spread co-operative philosophy and practice to surrounding areas. Oxfordshire by 1913 had three successful town societies at Chipping Norton, Oxford and Banbury. All of these accepted a local leadership role, especially Oxford in its willingness to rescue ailing societies and Banbury with its mission of taking co-operation to the villages via a unique string of rural

branches.⁹⁰ And for much of the period up to 1913 Oxford and, even more so, Banbury were enthusiastic in their embrace of co-operation's higher aims. In contrast, Berkshire co-operation was dominated by Reading, a society for many years distracted by internal difficulties and so reluctant to take on a wider role. Consequently, successful worker-led co-operation was largely absent from the county's rural communities, whilst it came only late to other towns. Yet there were similarities between Berkshire and Oxfordshire. In both, urban working-class independence co-existed rather warily with rural middle- and upper-class paternalism, and both counties experienced similar difficulties from opposition, lack of understanding and apathy. But the most significant common factor was the presence of a core of idealists for whom co-operation offered a radical alternative to competitive capitalism, a superior social framework in which all people would coexist in harmony and receive the full value of their labour. These were augmented by a larger body who, though not seeking such far reaching change, nevertheless viewed the movement as a key mechanism for raising the self-esteem and status of working people. It would be interesting to discover how widely these characteristics extended to other parts of the country away from the main centres of co-operative activity, for even in Berkshire, where co-operation became a way of life for only a small minority, it was still much more than merely a way of shopping.

Notes

1. M. Winstanley, review of P. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870–1930*, in *Economic History Review*, L (1997), p. 841.
2. See particularly S. Yeo (ed.), *New Views of Co-operation* (1988); 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, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870–1930* (Manchester, 1996).
3. B. Lancaster and P. Maguire (eds), *Towards the Co-operative Commonwealth* (Manchester, 1996) contains several short regional essays. The only detailed southern study to date is M. Bee, 'Co-operation in Oxfordshire 1860–1913', *Southern History*, 20–21 (1998–1999), pp. 189–215.
4. Report of Registrar of Friendly Societies for 1911, B[ritish] P[arliamentary] P[apers] (1912/13), vol. LXXXII. Figures denote membership of societies based within each county. London's absolute dominance is highly misleading and arose only from its huge population. Relative to the number of families, London had a lower proportion of co-operators than all English counties other than Herefordshire and Rutland.
5. Figures for society foundations are collated from Chief Registrar's Reports,

- various years. For co-operative activity prior to Rochdale, see R. Thornes, 'Change and Continuity in the Development of Co-operation, 1827-1844', in Yeo, *New Views of Co-operation*, pp. 27-51.
6. Producer and agricultural co-operatives are excluded, these being outside the scope of this study. Attempts to establish societies at Great Hasely in 1889/90 and Didcot in 1891/2 are also excluded, since these did not proceed beyond the preliminary meeting stage.
 7. Chief Registrar's Report for 1911, BPP (1912/13), vol. LXXXII. Of these societies, only Reading survived beyond the inter-war years. Ardington disbanded in 1920 when the business was divided into three separate units, butchers, bakers and grocers, each let to private tenants, and Sunningdale became part of the Woking (Surrey) Society in 1921. Maidenhead, its business hard-hit by the post-war slump, merged with Reading in 1927, and two years later Reading also took over Windsor - which latterly 'had faced a very uphill fight in successfully running the society and combating the organised forces [i.e. large scale multiple grocers] arraigned against them'. *Windsor Wheatshaf*, Dec. 1929. Aldermaston continued until 1935 when it was absorbed by the Basingstoke (Hampshire) Society. Reading itself remained independent until 1965 when it became a component of the national Co-operative Retail Society group.
 8. M. Purvis, 'Nineteenth-century Co-operative Retailing in England and Wales: a Geographical Approach' (unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1987), esp. ch. 3.
 9. *The Co-operator*, 15 Oct. 1861.
 10. The workforce of the town's principal biscuit manufacturer, Huntley and Palmer, grew from 2,500 in the early 1870s to more than 5,400 by the turn of the century. With the industry employing between a fifth and a quarter of the town's working-class population at this time, Reading was noted for its 'unusually high proportion of unskilled workers on low wages'. T. A. B. Corley, *Quaker Enterprise in Biscuits: Huntley and Palmers of Reading, 1822-1972* (1972), pp. 177, 304.
 11. *C[oo-operative N]ews*, 4 Jan. 1879.
 12. Number of families taken from 1911 census returns, by registration district, BPP (1912/13), vol. CXI. Co-operative society membership and sales taken from Chief Registrar's Report for 1911, BPP (1912/13), vol. LXXXII, adjusted to omit Co-operative Wholesale Society and recognisably non-retail societies in London. The calculations are approximate, as some societies had out-of-county branches and owing to multiple membership within families.
 13. A. Lockwood, *Co-operation in the Thames Valley* (Reading, 1949), p. 17.
 14. Before any of the trading surplus was distributed in dividend, 5% was to be deducted to fund members' assurance accounts from which they could claim medical attendance and cash benefits in sickness or old age. The society's brief history can be pieced together from issues of its journal, the *National Co-operative Leader*.
 15. *Ibid.*, 4 Jan. 1861.
 16. *The Co-operator*, 15 Oct. 1865; Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
 17. *Ibid.*, 15 Nov. 1865.

18. 26th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1894 (Manchester, 1894), p. 116.
19. Reading Mercury, 8 Feb. 1873.
20. Abingdon Herald, 15 Feb. 1873.
21. Some members remained with the society, however, and a new branch store was opened in the town around 1912.
22. 21st Annual Co-operative Congress, 1889 (Manchester, 1889), p. 80.
23. 22nd Annual Co-operative Congress, 1890 (Manchester, 1890), p. 88.
24. CN, 21 June 1884.
25. C. Cunningham and P. Waterhouse, *Alfred Waterhouse 1830-1905: Biography of a Practice* (Oxford, 1992), p. 104.
26. 26th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1894 (Manchester, 1894), p. 117.
27. A study of Lord Wantage's social philosophy and the working of his estate is available in M. A. Havinden, *Estate Villages* (Reading, 1966).
28. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
29. CN, 4 Jan. 1879.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
33. Thus, when in 1876 co-operators at Henley (Oxfordshire) asked Reading to form a branch there, Reading refused, advising them to form their own society. They did so, but when five years later they appealed to Reading to take them over, they were again refused with the result that the society was wound up. Eventually, after a further fourteen years, Reading did establish a branch in the town. Pressure was also put on the Newbury branch and two Surrey branches at Guildford and Gomshall; the latter split from Reading in 1891. When, in 1903, a request for a branch at Wokingham was made, Reading again advised the formation of a separate society, and was only persuaded to open a branch by a deputation from the Co-operative Union's Southern Section.
34. CN, 21 Oct. 1893.
35. 30th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1898 (Manchester, 1898), p. 116; 35th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1903 (Manchester, 1903), p. 315.
36. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 76. Its difficulties were compounded by heavy fixed costs incurred by the opening of a branch at Marlow (Bucks) in 1911. This was soon afterwards transferred to the High Wycombe Society.
38. 33rd Annual Co-operative Congress, 1901 (Manchester, 1901), p. 165.
39. 43rd Annual Co-operative Congress, 1911 (Manchester, 1911), p. 375; 45th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1913 (Manchester, 1913), p. 419.
40. Letter from society secretary to Registrar of Friendly Societies, April 1873, P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], FS8/31/1530.
41. Purvis, *loc. cit.*, p. 329.
42. J. K. Walton, 'Co-operation in Lancashire, 1844-1914', *North West Labour History*, XIX (1994/5), pp. 121-2.
43. Bee, *loc. cit.*
44. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 28. Unfortunately, Carter's association with Reading ended acrimoniously in 1903 when he resigned following disagreements with other

committee members. The details are unknown since, although an internal enquiry was held, its report was not published. *R[eadings] C[o-operative] R[ecord]* May and August. 1903.

46. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
47. RCR, Dec. 1899.
48. *Ibid.* Feb. 1901. Johns was born in Bavaria, though his grandfather was Welsh. He settled in Reading at the age of 19 and was naturalised in 1885. Rose came to Reading in 1864, working first as a musician and then as a clerk for the Great Western Railway. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 31, claims that 'for thirty-seven years the story of the society is to a large degree the life of David Rose'.
49. *Maidenhead Argus*, 9 Nov. 1901.
50. *Oxford Wheatshaf*, May 1912.
51. 22nd Annual Co-operative Congress, 1890 (Manchester, 1890), p. 88; 27th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1895 (Manchester, 1895), pp. 126-7.
52. 28th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1896 (Manchester, 1896), p. 102.
53. 27th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1895 (Manchester, 1895), p. 126.
54. *Daily News*, 25 Sept. 1891.
55. The variation may be a reflection of differences in the degree of deference towards the patron, or the extent of his influence. Independently-minded working people, who would have been strongly attracted to co-operation in the towns, might have been unwilling to participate in a scheme controlled by the squire or vicar. For a parallel with village attitudes to friendly society paternalism, see M. Bee, 'Providence with Patronage: The Royal Berkshire Friendly Society 1872-1972', *Southern History*, XVI (1994), pp. 100-21).
56. 20th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1888 (Manchester, 1888), p. 75. As suggested earlier in the text, this society was probably associated with the engineering works in the village; much of the workforce was domiciled in the adjacent town.
57. Reading Industrial Co-operative Society, Half Yearly Report to 25 Dec. 1909; *C[o-operative] R[etail] S[ociety] A[rchives]*, Reading.
58. These figures are inflated by multiple family membership; in 1907 Johns stated that 'in many cases they had husband and wife in the same household members of the Society'. *Reading Standard*, 16 Feb. 1907.
59. Figures calculated from Registrar's returns.
60. Reading Industrial Co-operative Society, 81st Quarterly Report to 24 Dec. 1880.
61. RCR, Mar. 1902.
62. Berkshire agricultural labourers' average weekly wage stood at 14s. in 1872, 12s. in 1882, 10s. 6d. in 1892, 11s. 6d. in 1898 and 13s. 2d. in 1910. Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present* (5th edn, 1936, p. 525.)
63. Although urban societies might proclaim, like Reading that 'they welcomed rich and poor, and had neither politics nor creed', a tendency towards Liberalism and non-conformity among prominent members could earn the disapproval of certain sections of the community. RCR, Mar. 1899.
64. *The Co-operator*, 15 Oct. 1886.
65. *Ibid.*

66. 26th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1894 (Manchester, 1894), p. 116.
67. 25th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1895 (Manchester, 1895), p. 104; Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
68. CN, 5 Jan. 1907. 40th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1908 (Manchester, 1908), p. 304.
69. P. Gurney, 'Heads, Hands and the Co-operative Utopia: an Essay in Historiography', *North West Labour History*, XIX (1994/5), p. 19. For a detailed exposition of this thesis, see Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, *passim*.
70. 20th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1888 (Manchester, 1888), p. 75.
71. *Ibid.* 27th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1895 (Manchester, 1895), p. 127.
72. Lord Wantage, *A Few Theories Carried into Practice*, quoted in Havinden, *op. cit.*, p. 85. It is, though, difficult to reconcile this with the *Daily News* accusation (25 Sept. 1891) that employees of the Lockinge estate were 'managed and governed and controlled without the least voice in their public and collective affairs'. To Wantage, co-operation seems to have been essentially a means of increasing efficiency through the incentive of profit-sharing. His 'ideal' social system, as created in the estate villages, was, though, diametrically opposite to that envisaged by working-class co-operative leaders.
73. RCR, Mar. 1899, May 1900, Mar. and May 1903, Jan. and May 1904. W. T. Carter, *Reading Tract 1: To Working Men from Working Men* (Manchester, 1885). Reading Industrial Co-operative Society, Half Yearly Report to 25 Dec. 1909.
74. RCR, May 1904 Rules of Abingdon Industrial Co-operative Society, PRO, FS8/32/1607.
75. 20th Annual Co-operative Congress, 1888 (Manchester, 1888), p. 75.
76. CN, 16 Apr. 1904.
77. CRSA. Applicants to the Newbury and Surrey branches are excluded from the tables.
78. RCR, Mar. 1899.
79. Though some of those listed under other categories may have been employed in these industries.
80. W. T. Carter, *Co-operation: Its Difficulties in Reading* (1880, reprinted in RCR, Feb. 1901). This was a common complaint. The leaders of the first Windsor society had, for example, expressed similar frustrations in 1866 when they wrote that 'many of our members ... don't understand what real Co-operation is, beyond being a trading community; and all that some of them look for, is a dividend at the end of every quarter', *Co-operator*, 1 Sept. 1866. To combat this, a regular order was placed for three dozen copies of *The Co-operator* and a thousand co-operative tracts were distributed to members. A reading room and library were also planned, though whether these came to fruition before the society's collapse is uncertain.
81. RCR, Oct. 1905.
82. Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, p. 10.
83. RCR, Dec. 1899.
84. Gurney, *op. cit.* This does not imply that radical co-operative ideology was entirely absent from Berkshire; clearly, as the text demonstrates, that was

not the case. But it does raise questions concerning the timing and precise nature of the movement's challenge outside its heartlands.

85. S. Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (1976) explores the 'crisis' experienced by a range of community organisations in Reading in the period 1890–1930. For the Reading Co-operative Society, see especially ch. 10, pp. 253–89. But despite Yeo's somewhat pessimistic assessment, reformism should not, at least in the context of co-operation, be seen as a second best solution to the problems facing working people. It was, rather, a logical evolution of strategy in response to altered conditions.
86. Quoted in RCR, Oct. 1901.
87. As RCR editor, Morse played a major role in promoting co-operative principles locally. He was also active the Clerk's Union (he was employed as a commercial clerk), the Ancient Order of Foresters and The Reading Philanthropic Institution. For a biography, see Yeo, *op. cit.*, p. 374.
88. For an account of Reading's educational work and its association with the WEA, see B. J. Morley, 'Reading Co-operative Society and the founding of the first branch of the Workers' Educational Association' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Westminster 1996).
89. Educational and social activities were open to, and enjoyed by, both men and women and as time went on, the focus of the Women's Guilds shifted from flower arranging and sewing to social issues such as women's wages and school clinics; Lockwood, *op. cit.* p. 107. Even so, society activities and management remained male-dominated, despite the often high proportion of female members.
90. Bee, 'Oxfordshire ...'. For Banbury's exceptional contribution to the dissemination of co-operation, see M. Bee, 'Unity, Industry, Plenty: The Banbury Co-operative Society, 1866–1970', *Midland History*, XXIII (1998), pp. 136–52.